Unification

The goal of unification, one Vietnam under the Party's banner, became an objective as soon as it became a problem at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Not liberation of the South, nor a revolution in the society there, but unification alone was the Party's undeviating purpose until it was achieved nearly twenty years later. The Party never hid this fact, as even a casual inspection of its pronouncements and leaders' speeches through the years clearly demonstrates.

In considering the Vietnamese idea of unification, it is necessary to distinguish between ethnic identification and national unity. The Party's drive for unification was not in the modern political meaning of, say, Italy or Germany in the nineteenth century or, in another sense, the American Civil War, but was a premodern expression of ethnic identity.

At some point, or perhaps from the very start, unification passed from mere Party policy to holy crusade, from goal to obsession. Consider this typical passionate assertion from Ho Chi Minh: "Each day the Fatherland remains disunited, each day you (of the South) suffer, food is without taste, sleep brings no rest. I solemnly promise you, through your determination, the determination of all our people, the Southern land will return to the bosom of the Fatherland."[1]

The question of how exactly to deal with the South had long plagued the Party. Failure to assign priority to the region in the early 1950s resulted in the Party's inability to seize the opportunity offered by French withdrawal. Later in the decade, uncertainty as to how to

proceed continued, although the picture painted by some historians—the Party passively waiting for the South to collapse—is inaccurate. The Party had a clear objective, unification, and a strategy that was dynamic even if unsuccessful.

The Party's Sixth Plenum (July 1954) restated the situation: Vietnam was one and must be united. The revolution was proceeding in two stages: building socialism in the North, liberation in the South. All Vietnamese, the plenum declared, were duty-bound to aid the cause in the South, although the South should be as self-contained and self-supporting as possible so as not to drain away vital northern resources. The plenum underscored the importance of monopoly Party leadership to prevent rise of a breakaway bourgeois revolutionary force.

Strategy to achieve unification varied during the next ten years, but the fundamental concept remained constant. While perhaps familiar to many readers, this strategy is worth reviewing briefly.[2] Many terms are used to describe it; *revolutionary war* is the one employed here. Its essence is *dau tranh* ("struggle") of two types. The first is *dau tranh vu trang* ("armed struggle"), and it involves various military actions by main-force and guerrilla units.[3] It primarily means practice of three-stage guerrilla war, but also violence normally not associated with regular armed forces, such as kidnapping and assassination. The second element is *dau tranh chinh tri* ("political struggle"). It is composed of the three *van* programs: *dan van* ("action among the people"), *dich van* ("action among the enemy"), and *binh van* ("action among the military"). Collectively these three *van* programs plus the violence programs of armed *dau tranh* constituted the revolutionary war. Every act, every statement by every Communist Vietnamese, every decision from Central Committee to village came within the scope and framework of *van–dau tranh*. The doctrinal cement that held all this together is called *khoi nghia* (" general uprising").

Of the many variations of armed *dau tranh*, or communist-style warfare, two are of major concern to us. The first is what PAVN Commander in Chief General Vo Nguyen Giap calls regular-force strategy or big-unit warfare, which in turn can be of many types but chiefly consists of the "independent fighting method" (the 1968 Tet offensive, for example) or the "coordinated fighting method" (the 1965–66 campaign or the Easter 1972 high-technology-warfare campaign).[4] The second variation is protracted conflict, the so-called fifty-

year-war thesis. It pays major attention to and maximizes the contribution of political *dau tranh*, while regular-force strategy puts more premium on armed *dau tranh*. Twice over the years, each of these two doctrines dominated strategic considerations.

The two forms of *dau tranh* are seen as hammer and anvil or as the two prongs of a pincer. It is not possible, under revolutionary war theory, to be victorious using only armed *dau tranh* or only political *dau tranh*. Victory comes in properly combining them. Herein lay the source of great doctrinal dispute. How much of the resources, particularly manpower, should go to the armed *dau tranh* pincer, how much to the political? Which is the anvil, which the hammer? The disputants took positions along a continuum, armed struggle at one end and political struggle at the other: how far up or down the scale was proper?

Much Party policy making and activity for two decades can be fitted into the framework of the doctrinal search. In fact, the history of Vietnam from 1954 to 1975 is encompassed in the long sweep of the doctrinal stages designed to yield unification. There were four of these, admittedly an arbitrary division but necessary here for the sake of brevity.

THE COURSE OF THE WAR

The first of these four periods in the search for unification ran from the 1954 Geneva Conference to the Party's Fifteenth Plenum in late 1959. Unification was sought, in effect, by means of French diplomacy abroad and political struggle in the South. The sense of the 1954 Sixth Plenum contained the hope, as opposed to the expectation, that the French and other participants in the conference would "implement" the agreement and bring about unification. Meantime, political struggle pressure would be applied in the South to help topple the shaky Ngo Dinh Diem government. Whether the French could unify Vietnam (or wanted to) is questionable, but in any event it did not happen.

The second period was the revolutionary guerrilla war phase, from 1959 until late 1964, when unification was sought by means of a mix of armed struggle, in the form of revolutionary guerrilla war, and political struggle, through the instrument of the National Liberation Front. The expectation was that the two prongs could create sufficient social

pathology, anarchy, and simple chaos to bring down the Diem government and lead eventually to a government amenable to unification. The strategy did indeed tear up the South Vietnamese society. It also was militarily effective. By 1964 the Party controlled two-thirds of the country's 2,500 villages. The balance of armed-political struggle shifted to the military end of the continuum. The People's Liberation Armed Force (PLAF) began to strike Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units directly, seeking to eliminate ARVN reserve battalions one by one. By February 1965, few were left. Once an army's reserve battalions are gone—and it must still defend its fixed installations—it is at the mercy of the enemy, for the enemy can mass its forces and reduce one fixed installation after another. Defeat comes piecemeal.

February 1965 thus became the moment of decision for the United States—either to do nothing and see Communist victory, perhaps within weeks, or to begin full-scale combat with troops and air power to stop the Communist drive. When the latter fateful choice was made, it became a new war and brought the Party face to face with a new enemy.

The third phase employed the regular-force strategy and is informally called the big-unit phase. Unification would be achieved by slugging it out, the PLAF and PAVN (with the PAVN reluctantly assuming an ever-greater burden of combat) versus the ARVN, increasingly aided by the United States and other allied forces. Warfare became more conventional. It was a time of weapons conversion as both sides faced the fact that technology, within a decade, had virtually revolutionized the conduct of war. PAVN generals took over, stripping the PLAF of its best men for PAVN replacements.

This change of strategy was not a reaction to U.S. entry; rather, it predated it.[3] The switch from revolutionary guerrilla war to regular-force strategy war was a manifestation of the Politburo doctrinal dispute between, on the one side, General Giap, Le Duan, and the big-unit war advocates and, on the other, Truong Chinh and his protracted-conflict exponents. Despite PLAF success, Politburo doubts had grown as to whether revolutionary guerrilla war ever could actually deliver victory. That it could create massive social pathology there was no argument, but social disintegration of the South was not necessarily the same thing as unification. Hence the belief grew that more orthodox forces were required to deliver the final blow. Further, there was growing Politburo suspicion about the reliability of the apparatus in the South. The

Politburo felt uncomfortable with a system granting so much autonomy to unreliable southerners. When the end came—and it was seen as coming soon—the Party meant to have on the scene a completely loyal military force to ensure that the war was not won, and the peace lost, through some last-minute settlement that would (as in 1954) betray the cause of unification.

The tempo of warfare rose steadily, then climaxed with the 1968 Tet offensive, which extracted such a toll from PLAF units that it became physically impossible any longer to pursue regular-force strategy. But the campaign had produced an impressive victory in the name of political struggle: it had brought down the president of the United States by way of Lyndon Johnson's decision not to seek reelection. General Giap and Le Duan, who had masterminded the campaign out of faith in armed struggle, experienced bitter defeat while ironically proving what their doctrinal opponents had insisted all along, that victory could only be won through proper use of political struggle tactics. The latter continued to be vindicated, for the fact is that the American army never lost a single important battle during its eight years in Vietnam. The nature of the war was such, however, that winning battles did not deliver victory; it only blunted the armed struggle prong.

The fourth and final period, the talk-fight period, ran from 1968 to the end of the war in the spring of 1975. It was a complex mix of armed and political struggle and involved these actions:

* Renewed military activity in the South on a selective basis. Protracted conflict, after several years of disuse, again was expounded to cadres: victory would come if the enemy could be outlasted, outwaited, outendured. The southern buildup would continue.[8]

* Seeking of external support and aid from socialist and other nations and encouraging antiwar movements in the United States and around the world.

* Staging military offensives in Vietnam geared to U.S. politics. All three major campaigns of the war were in advance of U.S. presidential elections: the Tet offensive in the spring of 1968, the Easter offensive in the spring of 1972, and (as originally planned) the offensive of spring 1976.

* And, most importantly, maneuvering in Paris at the talks.

The Party (and DRV) attitude toward negotiations followed a straight unbroken line from the start of the war. Negotiation is a technique, not a method of conflict resolution; it is to be viewed solely on a tactical-strategic continuum.[7] It could be (and was) used to advance the cause, to disrupt the enemy's internal scene, to mislead enemy leaders, to divide the enemy camp. DRV/Party negotiators never regarded negotiation as a process of compromise, of give-and-take dealing. Nor was there ever any sense of obligation to an agreement once reached. The Paris Agreement—actually a cease fire arrangement, not a political settlement—bound the Vietnamese Communists to conditions that, if they had been fulfilled, would have destroyed the Party in the South and ruined all chance of unification.[8] But commitment to the agreement never was the intention, as candid postwar writings by top Party officials admit, much to the embarrassment of their foreign apoligists.[9]

Increased pressures—internal difficulties as well as the renewed and intensified U.S. bombing campaign—combined in late 1972 to force a change in Politburo doctrinal balance. This permitted DRV negotiators in Paris to separate military from political aspects in a settlement and to drop the requirement that the political future of South Vietnam be mapped out before a cease-fire was effected. Once that separation was made, the rest of the negotiations followed naturally. An agreement was announced on January 24, 1973. Essentially, it was a cease-fire arrangement that permitted withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Vietnam. Since the goal of unification had not been abandoned, it was clear from the start of the cease-fire that the North did not intend to leave South Vietnam alone. Supplies continued to flow to the South, along with personnel. The political struggle continued unabated. Preparations were made for another all-out military campaign sometime in 1976. Meantime, attention turned to improving the Party's internal condition.

THE PARTY IN THE SOUTH

The Party apparat in the South originally was an integral part first of the ICP and then of the Dang Lao Dong. It assumed a somewhat separate status after 1954 as the Southern Branch, and then in January 1962 the branch officially ws converted into the People's Revolutionary Party (Dang Nhan Dan Cach Mang), or PRP. After victory the PRP quietly

died, officially so with the creation of the Vietnam Communist Party in December 1976.

A brief recapitulation of the Party's top leadership in the South is useful at this point. In the early years leadership was fragmented and amorphous because of the struggle with the Trotskyists and no single figure emerged. In the late 1930s Nguyen Van Tao developed into an important figure; present also were Duong Bach Mai, Nguyen Van Nguyen, Nguyen Van Kinh, and Nguyen Thi Minh Khai; all are important, but their exact status has never been established. Their casualty rate was high; only Tao and Kinh survived (the former, much later, to become a member of the National Assembly Reunification Committee and the later DRV ambassador to Moscow). Mai and Nguyen are believed to have been killed in the 1930s. For a period Miss Khai emerged as the leading official in the South, acting as Nam Bo Central Committee secretary general, but was arrested in 1940 and died in prison during World War II. Her place was taken by Nguyen Van Tran until the formation of the DRV, when he went North and became active in governmental economic and later foreign affairs. Le Duan and then Le Duc Tho were ranking officials in the South during the Viet Minh War. In the immediate postwar period there was no clearly first-ranked Party official in the South. In 1959 (possibly as early as 1957) Huynh Van Tam appeared as Nam Bo Central Committee secretary general until he was exiled abroad in a diplomatic assignment in 1961 and his place taken by Tran Nam Trung. If Tran Nam Trung is a position, not an individual (as some analysts believe), then the leadership may have been in the hands of Nguyen Van Linh (alias Nguyen Van Cuc, Muoi Cuc, Muoi Ut) or possibly Pham Van Dang (alias Nguyen Van Dang, Pham Xuan Thai, Hai Van). In any event, Tran Nam Trung was replaced by Linh (as Cuc) in 1964. Later, when Party affairs were upgraded, General Nguyen Chi Thanh was dispatched to the South to take control. When he was killed (or died) in 1967 he was replaced by Pham Hung, who remained the leading Party official in the South throughout the remainder of the war and into the postwar period.

In ICP days (up to 1950), the division in Vietnam was three-way—Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China—not North-South. ICP Interzone Five, or Trung Bo, extended from Tonkin as far south as Ninh Thuan province; south of it was Interzone Six, Cochin China or Nam Bo, including all of the Mekong Delta. The central committee of each

interzone reported directly to the Party Secretariat. When the Lao Dong Party was created in 1951, the two interzones remained but were placed under the newly created Southern Branch Central Committee, or the Truong Uong Cuc Mien Nam (Central Office for South Vietnam, sometimes translated as Central Bureau or Directorate), a six-man committee headed by Le Duan and including Le Duc Tho.

After the Viet Minh War the Central Office was abolished and the Southern Branch became a truncated interzone (essentially what once had been Interzone Six). This was the time of regroupment, when more than 80,000 Party members and others went North, with a consequent drop in Southern Branch Party membership.[10] Until the arrival of northerners in strength in 1965, the Southern Branch consisted of those few original members who remained (probably around 15,000), plus regroupees as they began to return after 1959[11] and selected northern cadres on administrative and training duties. The twenty-one-person Southern Branch Central Committee essentially was a liaison group performing such special administrative duties as were necessary because of problems due to geography and security.

After the Fifteenth Plenum (1959) and the Third Party Congress (1960), much changed in the South. Basic strategy to achieve unification was altered. A new united front, the National Liberation Front (NLF), was organized in December 1960. A new Central Office—and Central Committee structure—was created to assume overall authority of Party affairs in the South. In January 1962 the PRP was formed.

The PRP called itself the Marxist-Leninist Party of South Vietnam, the principal member of the National Liberation Front, the vanguard of the struggle against Diem, the soul of the NLF, the engine of the revolution. It claimed to be communist but dissembled on its connection with the Lao Dong, usually describing it as a fraternal relationship. In fact, it was a straightforward continuation of the Southern Branch. It used the same liaison net and channels of communication, employed the same chain of command.

In 1963 a new Party element was created in Hanoi called the Committee for Supervision of the South. Its duties included administration of PRP affairs. It was headed by Le Duc Tho and included Nguyen Van Vinh, chairman of the DRV National Assembly Reunification Committee.

Chairman of the PRP Central Committee was Vo Chi Cong.[12] Huynh

Van Tam was secretary general. Later Tam went to Algeria as the NLF representative, and his place was taken by Tran Nam Trung.[13] The Central Office at this time was being run by Nguyen Van Linh, who, as noted earlier, had acted as secretary of the Southern Branch prior to 1964. When the war enlarged and higher Party rank was required, Linh was superseded by a Politburo member, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, and Linh became his principal deputy. When Thanh died (or was killed in an air raid) in mid-1967, he was replaced by Pham Hung. Linh stayed on as one of Hung's three ranking deputies. The other two were General Tran Van Tra (alias Tu Chi) as the principal deputy for military affairs (and later representative on the Joint Military Commission established under the Paris Agreement and still later chief of the Military Management Committee that ran the postwar military occupation of South Vietnam), and Pham Van Dang, the principal political deputy acting as the liaison agent with the NLF and other mass organizations in the South. Linh, as the third principal deputy, handled Party affairs.

The relationship of the PRP hierarchy to the Central Office has never been fully established by analysts, although it was clear that after 1965 many Party functions were assumed by the Central Office. It is possible that the chairmanship of the PRP passed from Vo Chi Cong to Tran Nam Trung even as the position diminished in importance. It also appears that Huynh Tan Phat may have headed the PRP or even been the ranking Party official in the South for a brief period, between the tenures of Tran Nam Trung and Nguyen Chi Thanh.

Important Party figures in the South during the war years included:

* Pham Hung, the Politburo figure so long missing from the Hanoi scene. He was Party secretary in the South in the later years of the war; he also served as PLAF political commissar.

* Nguyen Van Linh (various aliases), the Party's chief official in the South in the initial years of the war. Born in the South (1913) of northern parents, Linh was raised in the Mekong Delta. He began his revolutionary career in the mid-1930s; supposedly he was a protégé of Le Duan in the Viet Minh War period.

* Tran Nam Trung (whatever his true name), the early PRP secretary general and Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) defense

minister. Someone bearing this name emerged after victory and was treated publicly in a way indicating that he was a high-ranking Party figure.

* Vo Chi Cong (b. 1912, Quang Nam province) the durable old Anastas Mikoyan of the Party. He was the initial PRP Central Committee chairman and later the ranking Party official in the Zone Five (southern central South Vietnam) Party organization.

* Pham Van Dang (various aliases) (b. 1917, Vinh Long province), one of the early founders of the NLF; chief organizer for the Party and front organizations, including the all-important Workers Liberation Association.

* Nguyen Van Ho (b. 1917), a southerner who managed the Party's financial and fiscal affairs in the South during the war; postwar secretary of the Party organization in Ho Chi Minh City (as Saigon was renamed). He was apparently an important Party figure.

* Huynh Tan Phat (b. 1912, My Tho province), initially the chief Party theoretician in the South. He was Party chief for the Saigon–Gia Dinh Special Zone, secretary general of the NLF, president of the PRG, and later chairman of the postwar PRG Council of Ministers. As Party official, he has apparently faded somewhat in importance in recent years.

* Nguyen Huu Tho (b. 1910, Cholon), chairman of the NLF and later the PRG (and still later one of the two national vice presidents elected by the June 1976 National Assembly). Best known of the southerners, he was regarded more as a political front than as a person of authority.

* Three generals also emerged from obscurity after victory: Tran Van Tra (noted above); Le Can Chan, PLAF deputy chief of staff (for operations); and Dong Van Cong, PLAF deputy chief of staff (political commissar).

* Finally, Truong Cong Thuan, Pham Van Co, Hoang Son, and Tran Van Binh are other PRP figures about whom little is known.[17]

The apparat built in the South repeated northern experience and paralleled northern organization, the familiar troika.

The first was the social-based mass organization, a collection of

various functional social movements, mainly the various liberation associations (farmers, women, youth, workers, students, and cultural), which greatly facilitated cadre efforts to mobilize the villagers and harness and control their energies. These social organizations were a fishnet dropped over the villager, totally enmeshing him. This resulted in a system that monitored all village activity, produced increased food yields, rooted out hostile villagers, and provided village militia and recruits for the PLAF. It also offered certain psychic satisfactions, such as a sense of participation in village decision making.

The second was the quasi-governmental apparatus. The administrative element was the revolutionary committee (or rev-com), collectively known as the revolutionary administration. It existed mainly at the village and district levels and was responsible for management of the liberation associations. It was the instrument with which the Party governed. Far above it was the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which was not a government, but a cabinet with a small staff. There was no governmental structure between the several dozen persons making up the PRG and the sprawling rev-coms of the liberated area. The two entities existed virtually independently of each other, with the Party contributing whatever liaison was necessary.

The third element was the Party structure, for most of the war called the People's Revolutionary Party. Organizationally, it was similar to the structure in the North. Geographically, the South was divided into three sections: Trung Bo Interzone Five, the northern part of South Vietnam; Nam Bo Interzone, the area to the south including the Mekong Delta; and the Saigon–Gia Dinh Special Zone.

PRP Chairman Vo Chi Cong and Secretary General Tran Nam Trung largely divided overall supervision between them in the early days, Cong being responsible for organization building, recruitment, the proselyting program, and agitprop and indoctrinational work, and Trung handling military affairs of the PLAF and liaison with the PAVN. Gradually, as the PAVN took on the burden of combat, Pham Hung and the Central Office apparatus assumed direction of military affairs. Throughout the war the PAVN chain of command was directly to Hanoi and did not go through the PRP system or even have much to do with it beyond nominal liaison.

The Party Central Office in the South was divided into the standard sections: organization, economic-financial, agitprop, front organization

relations, intelligence-counterintelligence, communications, control, and so on. The echelon below the Central Committee was the province central committee (*tinh bo*) or city central committee (*thanh bo*), managed by a three-man secretariat (chairman, secretary, assistant secretary) interested chiefly in assuring coherent activity below it. The district level—the district central committee (*quan*) or town or portion of a city (*khu pho*)—was the main Party operating element in the South and, until 1964, the lowest operating level. It was responsible for all Party activity in its area and had considerable latitude in its operations. After 1964, the apparatus was extended to the village (*xa*) or street zone (*khu pho*), and this became the first echelon of Party work at the agency level, that is, in villages, schools, rubber plantations, factories, and the like. Under it were three to a dozen branches, *chi bo*, although day-to-day leadership usually was in the hands of a single full-time Party leader. The basic Party unit, the *chi bo*, was composed of one to seven three-man cells. It was the Party's "link with the masses."

A Vietnamese seeking membership in the PRP had to be sponsored by two Party members. Unlike the Party in the North, a potential member could be nonproletarian; bylaws stipulated that he be a "worker, middle-class peasant, *petite bourgeoise*, student, intellectual, Montagnard, or [an ARVN] deserter." Actually, the chief requirement was that the individual actively support the cause and possess a good record in this respect. His sponsors were responsible for both his indoctrination and his behavior during the probationary period, which lasted from four to six months depending on his social class.

The task of the Party in the South was threefold: to ensure the security of the cause, to help fund it, and to develop a broad and effective base of support for it. The first of these, what loosely could be called internal security, sought to eliminate all potentially hostile elements from the village. This was both a negative and positive effort—inducing support, where possible, through social organization; commanding it ruthlessly, if necessary, when persuasive methods failed.

The second activity—finance—was based on the assumption that the effort in the South should be as self-supporting as possible. Cadres came to the village, not in the spirit of what the Party would do for the villagers, but what the villagers could do for the revolution. Some of the effort involved squeezing from the village what was considered "economic surplus," but usually it centered on cadre efforts to increase

agricultural production so that the cause would benefit without undue suffering by the villagers.

The third and major Party activity was in the domain between internal security and economic support. It was what the Party called "building uniform revolutionary thought and feeling among the masses." Out of the organization imposed on the village came mobilization. With the proper efforts by the Party, out of the mobilization would come motivation. Combined, this became the trinity: organization, mobilization, motivation. If there was a secret weapon in the Vietnam War, this was it.

WARTIME PARTY IN THE NORTH

The war years in the North were remarkably uneventful considering the enormity of the situation faced and the tremendous strain placed on the society. Party history from 1960 to 1975, in fact, is largely a record of events that did *not* happen. The war was not lost. There were no internal upheavals; no bloody struggle for power followed Ho Chi Minh's death; no Party purges were required. Neither participant in the Sino-Soviet dispute attempted to force a showdown in Hanoi. No Party congresses were held; even few plenary sessions of the Central Committee reported. This is not to say the war years were placid—it was a highly dynamic period—but there was a marked lack of that development scholars call the historical conjuncture, which makes up so much of written history.

The Party clearly was the leader in the war effort. To the Party goes credit for victory. It was able, in ten years of all-out struggle, to hone communism to perfection, both as creed and mechanism. The creed became national salvation, saving the country through proper application of Marxism-Leninism. The mechanism was the control of events, established by a compact leadership and maintained by a corps of experienced revolutionaries.

Credit for victory within the Party goes to the leadership, that is, to the Politburo and the operational code it developed. There are two elements to be kept in mind in judging the leadership. First, rule was, by design, a system of collective leadership. Second, each member of the Politburo drew his political power from a constituency within the society. Collective leadership was established at the time of Ho Chi Minh's death, in

September 1969. In practice it created the unwritten rule that while a decision that was highly objectionable to some number could be taken, no decision could be a total anathema to any Politburo member. Le Duan became the first among equals (or possibly even the eminent member), but he did not, nor could he, impose decisions that rode roughshod over the wishes of his colleagues. The arrangement was not exactly republican, but it did represent constituency power bases within the society. General Giap, for example, had the armed forces as his constituency, Le Duan the Party, Premier Pham Van Dong the bureaucracy, Tran Quoc Hoan the secret police, Truong Chinh the mass movements such as the Fatherland Front, and so on. Each ran his constituency, but it, at the same time, dictated the leader's actions; each constituency in effect became a political arena.

This arrangement worked where it did not work elsewhere—consider the failure of the troika experiment in Moscow in the same era—for several peculiar reasons. First was the influence of the "old boy" network. The men of the Politburo had known and worked with each other for most of their lives, and all by now were past the half-century mark. There is enormous unity in such long associations, even those marked by ancient arguments and long-standing philosophical or operational differences of opinion; Confucians call it the unity of opposites. Second, there were no strong personalities among the eleven (originally thirteen) Politburo members. Ho Chi Minh was the only supreme egotist; some would say he had eliminated all the other strong egos over the years. Thus, there was not the usual precondition for a power struggle—two or three ambitious, strongly self-oriented contenders. Third, there was, in effect, the discouragement of the situation. The war pressed in, making any sort of power grab, which might trigger an internecine fight, extremely dangerous even if personally successful. Finally, no opportunity was created by the change of leadership. It is in time of political transition, when power moves from one individual to another or from one generation to the next, that the dangerous moment comes, particularly in a totalitarian society. In the case of the Lao Dong Party there was no transition. Save for the two claimed by death, the leadership of 1950 was also the leadership of 1975. Ho's death which could have precipitated such a dangerous moment, was cleverly handled by the Politburo eleven. They decided, unanimously, not to replace him, to go on exactly as before. Ho would remain, in spirit if not in body, the only personality.

As a cult, he proved more useful dead than alive. Such effort to forestall power grabs was tried many times elsewhere and failed, but it worked for the Dang Lao Dong.

At the Politburo level during the war, three major issues arose that can loosely be termed factional disputes, although it was more a case of agreeing to disagree.

The first was over proper strategy to achieve unification. This was discussed above: agreement that victory would come through combination of armed and political struggle, but what combination?

The second involved allocation of resources between the war in the South and nation building in the North; it largely concerned manpower. Actual decisions on allocation took on surge, or pendulum, characteristics. Heavy shipments down the Ho Chi Minh trail for several months would be followed by a period of relatively sparse supply, then by another intensive buildup. There was a low correlation to offensives in the South. Clearly, allocation of supplies was a manifestation of the collective leadership principle in action.

The third issue was over the proper handling of internal sociopolitical problems—war weariness, mismanagement of industrial production, self-aggrandizement by Party cadres, corruption, juvenile delinquency—summed up as the so-called problem of the quality of socialist life. Should the uplifting of society be attempted by emulation campaigns, moral exhortation, stimulating revolutionary ethics—that is, essentially Maoist means? Or should it be done by pragmatic appeals and incentives and by removing some of the strains on the society through lessened demands of war?

None of the three ever was satisfactorily solved during the war, but an agreement that all Politburo members could accept was maintained and the disputes thus kept within limits.

During the war years the Party continued to criticize the quality of Party members and cadres in what became something of an institutionalized harangue; the most frequent criticisms were for poor Party organization, poor internal Party discipline, and lack of revolutionary fighting spirit. While continual weeding out of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of members continued, there were no massive purges in the sense that term usually connotes, no ridding the Party of the treacherous or the disloyal by means of the usual firing squad. Figures on Party strength varied. In April 1965 the Party said it numbered 800,000 (4.4

percent of the population), while in April of the following year Ho Chi Minh told a visitor the figure was 760,000. By 1970, with a population estimated at 21.2 million, Party strength was estimated at 1 million; in 1975, with a population of nearly 25 million, at 1.2 million.

During the war years, as support demands increased and social problems multiplied, the Party moved deeper into the day-to-day state management of affairs. This was particularly true in the communes and in economic-fiscal management. To counter adverse effects of the war, Party controls in the economic and social sectors were increased through a series of Party directives issued in the mid-1960s. More and more activity in local government and in the armed forces passed to direct Party control. Security measures, the struggle against the ever-present counterrevolutionary, very nearly became a Party monopoly. National Assembly activity continued, including periodic elections. Candidates were nominated and campaigned through the Fatherland Front apparatus but were not, of course, competitive or partisan. Political activity was regarded as a means of mobilizing the population (and soaking up political energies), not as a means of expressing the public will. All in all, the system hung together remarkably—enduring the air strikes, suffering ghastly casualties in the South, managing through enormous economic deprivation—credit for which, again, goes largely to the Party.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

External relations during the war years were generally curtailed and involved or turned on the search for outside military and economic aid. This meant dealing almost entirely with the USSR, the PRC, and Eastern Europe.

The Party continued to walk the line carefully in the Sino-Soviet dispute. The earlier tilt toward Peking became more balanced as the war progressed. Attacks on the USSR, which had followed Khrushchev's ouster, stopped; there followed additional USSR military aid, including the vital surface-to-air missiles. If forced to choose in the dispute—as when the DRV sided with the USSR on the nuclear proliferation issue—a carefully designed balancing gesture followed within a few months.

The USSR made no serious commitments until about 1965. Premier Kosygin visited Hanoi in February 1965 and apparently concluded that

communist movement, but times changed, and eventually it was embraced only by the Lao Dong Party and a few other ultraviolent communist elements in the Mideast and Africa. The Party tried and found guilty both of its socialist allies, guilty of the sin of coexistence and, by omission, international proletarianism.

This ideological desertion was augmented, in the Party's view, by a more fundamental distaste for both Soviet and Chinese behavior, that neither ally ever helped the Vietnam cause to the degree it deserved. Aid was offered only after repeated appeals and then was insufficient and granted grudgingly. Worst of all, it was given for the wrong reason—as a ploy in the Sino-Soviet dispute, not because of genuine desire to help achieve unification.

In the last years of the war, as the Chinese became increasingly anxious (or appeared so) over USSR moves in Asia, it became plain that Peking was not at all sure it wanted complete U.S. withdrawal from mainland Asia, possibly did not want a clear-cut and decisive Vietnamese Communist victory. The result was that Sino-Vietnamese relations plunged to their lowest level ever. At the same time there was marked improvement in Soviet-Vietnamese relations.

During the war years the Party and the DRV were active both in Cambodia and Laos. Party cadres built the Khmer Rouge into a first-rate fighting force, beginning in about 1970, and saw it win power five years later. In Laos, for nearly a decade, the Party virtually ran the Pathet Lao struggle against the rightists and neutralists and saw it, too, take control of the country in 1975.

VICTORY

Suddenly and unexpectedly, in the first months of 1975, Vietnamese communism's golden victory of unification was achieved. South Vietnam fell less to Party moral or military superiority than to simple chaos and confusion. Grand strategy had called for 1976 to be the year of the last hurrah. The military situation as 1975 dawned was judged to have great ultimate promise but at the moment was a standoff. A localized offensive in Phuoc Long province in January led to a greater victory than anticipated—capture of the entire province. Two months later, a second local victory yielded all of the highland province Ban Me Thuot.

Its capture turned out to be the final blow to organized South Vietnamese resistance. The unraveling began and never stopped until PAVN troops, atop Soviet-built tanks, crashed through the gates of Doc Lap Palace in the center of Saigon. The ARVN, which had fought so well earlier under far worse conditions, hardly fought at all. Chaos in decision-making at the corps level, exacerbated by countermanding orders from Saigon, soon made it impossible for the ARVN to fight at all.

On April 30, the long war ended. The Party had achieved the chimera-like goal it had been pursuing with single-minded zeal since that initial gesture outside of the Versailles Conference hall in 1921. Vietnam was unified, under a Communist banner.

The cost was high. General Giap had admitted earlier to 600,000 casualties (at the time, 1968, the Pentagon estimate was 800,000), and it is safe to fix PAVN and PLAF total dead at one million. This was in a country whose population ranged, during the war, from sixteen million to twenty-five million. Nearly one out of every seventeen male North Vietnamese adults died in the war in the South. (A proportionate figure for the United States would have been fifteen million dead, the actual figure being about 49,000). Material loss in the North, through air strikes and bombings, probably was around $400 million (U.S.), again in a country with an annual GNP of about $1.7 billion. In addition, having put virtually all of its resources (and all it could garner abroad) into the war rather than into nation building, there was the vast economic loss of fifteen years of noninvestment. It left North Vietnam with the most stagnant, poverty-ridden, and backward economy of any country in Asia. The psychic loss—imposition of the most intrusive praetorian society anywhere on earth—is incalculable. These were only the costs to the North. In lives and material, the toll extracted from the South probably was double.

Doubtless the Party's wartime leaders felt the price paid was well worth the accomplishment of unification and will go to their graves never questioning the correctness of the course on which they set Vietnam three decades earlier. But history must judge it a Cadmean victory.

the war was about won by the Communists. He promised rather lavish aid, both military and economic. Then victory receded, and the USSR, obliged to meet her commitments, found herself funding an apparently never-ending war with such expensive weapons as SAM-2s, aircraft tracking systems, and MIG-21 fighter planes. The USSR attitude always appeared somewhat cool, probably because of Moscow's general view that local wars in Asia never seemed to serve her interests. But despite occasional nervousness, USSR aid during the war was extensive and at all times more than the minimum requirement.

The early PRC reaction to the war was the fear that the United States would use Vietnam as a springboard to attack China. It was important, therefore, that the United States not win. Beyond this, the war was viewed as an embarrassment to the USSR. Apparently the PRC was cool to the general idea of unification, preferring eventual emergence of two people's republics in Vietnam, but never was it willing to do those things needed to secure this arrangement. PRC military and economic aid was lavish, and some 40,000 People's Liberation Army troops served in Vietnam (antiaircraft gunners, railway and warehousing troops). Sino-Vietnamese relations during the 1960s generally were harmonious, although there were some bad moments: the summer of 1969, when for a few weeks it appeared a Sino-Soviet war might break out; the Cultural Revolution period, when the Chinese sharply criticized the Vietnamese conduct of war (especially the mid-1965 period, with publication of Lin Piao's *Long Live the People's War*, and again during the 1968 Tet offensive); at various times when USSR freight trains loaded with weapons and ammunition could not cross China because Peking had lost control in the provinces; and, finally, with the Chinese "ping pong diplomacy" gesture to the United States.

It is questionable whether relations with the two allies at any time could be termed close, but even if they were, that condition ended with what the Vietnamese considered the defection, first of the USSR and then the PRC, to the United States in the form of live-and-let-live policy variously termed peaceful coexistence, détente, ping-pong diplomacy, and so on. For the Party, dedicated to bedrock fundamentalism, this was unforgivable heresy. The Party's view was, and is, that the capitalist world must be destroyed and that this can be done only if a unified international proletariat conducts all-out revolutionary war. At one time in history this had been orthodox belief throughout the worldwide