

Reflection on some terms used by the Vietnamese Communists

10/72

A key paragraph of the latest communist proposal for ending the war in VN reads: "From the enforcement of the ceasefire to the installation of the government formed after free and democratic general elections, the two present administrations in South VN will remain in existence with their respective domestic and external functions. These two administrations shall immediately hold consultations with a view to the exercise of the South Vietnamese people's right to self-determination, achieving national concord, ensuring the democratic liberties of the South Vietnamese people, and forming an administration of national concord, which shall have the task of promoting the South Vietnamese parties' implementation of the signed agreements and organizing general elections in South Viet-Nam."

In this paragraph, four different institutions are under discussion:

1. The "government" (chinh phu) formed after the elections;
2. The two present administrations (the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet-Nam)
3. The administration of national concord.

The three last institutions are called "administrations" while the first is called "government". The same distinction is observed in the Vietnamese version of the Hanoi text. The Vietnamese term used for "administration" is "chinh quyen". Thus there is a difference between the institution emerging from the election, which is called "government" (chinh phu) and the three other institutions which are called "administrations" (chinh quyen). The Government of the RVN, the PRG and the institution which will result from consultations between these two, all these three institutions are called "administrations" (chinh quyen) by the communists, the third institution being called an "administration of national concord" (chinh quyen hoa hop dan toc).

Thus, in the spirit of the Hanoi statement, the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, which incidentally, Hanoi referred to as an administrative structure, is called an "administration" (chinh quyen) in the same way the government of the Republic of Viet-Nam is called or referred to in the Hanoi statement.

The communists do make distinction between "government" (chinh phu) and "administration" (chinh quyen), but while the meaning of "chinh phu" (government) is easy to define, that of "chinh quyen" is more difficult to determine. The English expression "administration" is not an exact equivalent of the Vietnamese expression "chinh quyen". Broken down, this sino-vietnamese expression suggests the idea of political business (chinh) and power (quyen), the characteristic of a body politic holding power in a country. The NLFSVN was described in a VC pamphlet as holding the responsibility of a revolutionary "chinh quyen" at the time when a "chinh phu" (government) has not yet emerged. A paragraph of a VC training book titled "Four Revolutionary Policies of South Viet-Nam" published in 1967 reads as follows:

"In the condition when a national, democratic government (chinh phu) of people's union has not yet emerged, the NLFSVN not only assumes the responsibility of rallying and making appeal to all revolutionary and patriotic forces of the people but also takes charge of the work of a revolutionary administration (chinh quyen cach mang) in all internal and external matters."

In brief, before, the formation of a government (chinh phu), the NLFSVN played the role of an administration (chinh quyen). But the problem is more complicated than it appears. While the communists have set up a government in the South called the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet-Nam, the Hanoi statement refers to it as an administration when it says "... the two present administrations in South Viet-Nam will remain in existence with their respective domestic and external functions."

As for the institution which will result from the consultations between the "two present administrations", it is called the "administration of national concord" (see the paragraph of the Hanoi statement quoted at the beginning of this paper). Elsewhere in the Hanoi statement, this institution is called "an administrative structure". Point 4 of Hanoi's 9-point proposal stipulates: "... It is necessary to realize national reconciliation and national concord, insure the people's rights to freedom and democracy and organize an administrative structure under the name of the Council of National Reconciliation and Concord consisting of three equal segments to supervise and urge the PRGRSV and the RVN Government to carry out the signed agreements and organize general elections."

The Vietnamese for "administrative structure" is, in Hanoi's own language, "co cau chinh quyen". This phrase is composed of two components "co cau" and "chinh quyen". The first component "co cau" means a created organ and is therefore acceptably called a "structure" in English, but the second component "chinh quyen" is more difficult to render in English as discussed above.

While the English phrase "administrative structure" conveys the idea of an institution which concerns itself with administrative business, the Vietnamese phrase "co cau chinh quyen" conveys the idea of a body having both political and administrative power. A more accurate rendition of the English phrase "administrative structure" would be "co cau hanh chanh". However, there is no exact English equivalent for the Vietnamese phrase "co cau chinh quyen".

An examination of both English and Vietnamese versions of Point 4 of Hanoi's 9-point proposal shows that there may be many more linguistic problems, problems which will not be solved until Vietnamese is nationally standardized and universally recognized as a diplomatic language. A few examples:

- Political faction: Xu Huong chinh tri (The US will not make any pledge with any political faction...) The Vietnamese phrase means, more accurately, political tendency, which is a more abstract notion than the English phrase.

- Supervise and urge: Don doc (... the Council of National Reconciliation and Concord consisting of three equal segments to supervise and urge the PRGSVN and the RVN Government...). The Vietnamese phrase "Don doc" does not convey the explicit idea of supervising and urging. It describes the action of prodding for the purpose of accelerating the work being done, and is usually applied to the action of a superior authority over the work of a subordinate echelon. Therefore, the idea of supervision is at best implied only in the Vietnamese phrase.

- Demobilize: Phuc vien (...to demobilize the men in excess of the reduced numerical strength.) The Vietnamese phrase "Phuc vien" is a new term currently used by the communists, especially in North Viet-Nam, and is not understood by the large majority of the Vietnamese in the South. The traditional term widely understood by Vietnamese of both zones is "Giai ngu".

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