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VIET CONG TERROR TACTICS IN SOUTH VIET-NAM

"The hard-core professional terrorists who dress and look like everybody else are the biggest problem facing us now. The Viet Cong are effective not because the people prefer them, but because of terrorism."

—Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge

In South Viet-Nam the Viet Cong are using systematic and unrelenting terrorism as a principal tactic for winning political power. Its application takes many forms:

- Grenades lobbed into cars stopped for traffic lights;
- Poisoned darts and needles used in dark theaters;
- Doors, drawers, and automobile engines boobytrapped;
- Poisoned or contaminated bamboo and metal slivers (punji) planted just under the surface in the rice paddies where barefoot paddy workers—men, women, and children—will step on them;
- Grenades set in the night with trip-wires across the common paths where peasants and schoolchildren walk in the morning;
- Village leaders shot or beheaded;
- Village men and boys kidnaped and forced into Viet Cong military service;
- Children taught to roll grenades into restaurants and cafes;
- Villages harassed night after night with sporadic gunfire and loudspeaker taunts and threats;
- Newspapermen assassinated;
- Schools and health stations bombed;
- Busloads of civilians blown up by electrically controlled mines.

HANOI'S DECLARATION OF WAR

On March 13, 1959, in Hanoi, the Central Committee of the Lao Dong (Communist) Party, brought its aggression against the South into the open. The time had come to begin the task of "liberating the South," it declared, and to "struggle heroically and perseveringly to smash the Southern regime."

South Viet-Nam was to be smashed by destroying its non-Communist government apparatus and non-Communist leadership—first at the village level, then at the district and provincial levels. Hanoi thus ordered publicly an open assault on South Viet-Nam. Actually, the attack had begun much earlier. It was to be based consistently on the calculated use of terror.

From the late 1950's to the present, the development of the National Liberation Front (NLF), the Communist-dominated front organization in South Viet-Nam (see Viet-Nam Information Note #3, "Communist-Directed Forces in South Viet-Nam"), has been characterized by the growing use of violence against Vietnamese civilians. Early acts of terrorism were mainly local and sporadic—largely assassinations and kidnappings intended to eliminate opposition in the local leadership. In December 1962 the NLF issued orders for increased use of terror.

TARGETS OF TERROR

The primary goal of Communist terror is to break the spirit of the individual villager. It is violence in his own village—an assassination, execution, or kidnaping—that best teaches the peasant to fear the Viet Cong.

The priority targets of terror are village government officials, social or natural leaders in the villages, and Americans, in that order. A survey of attacks against village officials in the period January to October 1964 indicated that in almost every case the 429 village and hamlet officials assassinated and the 1,482 officials kidnaped were native to the villages in which they were serving, and generally had been chosen with the consent of the villagers. They were not, as some have it, exclusively Saigon appointees sent in from outside.

The assassination pattern appears to be directed toward the very best and very worst officials—the highly popular and effective, and the most corrupt and oppressive. By striking down officials who are notoriously corrupt, the





South Vietnamese villagers weep as they identify a young victim of the Viet-Cong mortar and rocket barrage on Ap Do village.

Viet Cong are able to play the role of champions of the people. By systematically wiping out the popular leaders who work effectively to improve the lives of the villagers, the Viet Cong hope to leave the masses leaderless and demoralized.

A tragic example is the murder of Tu Chung, editor of Chinh Luan ("Political Discussions"), one of the most respected newspapers in South Viet-Nam.

Chinh Luan is an independent newspaper. It does not hesitate to criticize the Government of Viet-Nam or the United States—or the Communists. Dang Van Sung, Editor-in-Chief, has said of his newspaper:

"Our main object is to inform. The second is to provide enlightened opinion. I want to . . . stand on the people's side *vis à vis* the government—to tell the people what the government is thinking and tell the government what the people are thinking."

For their fearless honesty, Dr. Sung and Tu Chung were placed on the Viet Cong assassination list. In June 1965 a Viet Cong letter accused both men of "serving American bosses" and threatened them with assassination. It was signed by Vo Cong Minh, "Commander of Detachment 628, Liberation Armed Forces of

Saigon-Gia area." The letter was turned over to the police.

In December 1965 the Communists sent their "last warning" to Dr. Sung and Tu Chung, saying the Viet Cong planned to dispose of these "scabby sheep."

Chinh Luan published this letter, along with an editorial replying that the paper sought to serve only one master—truth—as was shown by the fact that the paper had been criticized by all sides. But only the Communists, the editorial declared, went beyond criticism to threaten death. While the paper could fight the Communists ideologically or politically, it had no defense against terror. The editorial concluded:

"We love the life that God has breathed into our bodies, as all men love life. But we will look straight into the gun barrel held by the murderer who comes against us and we will say: 'You can kill us, but our spirit will live on.'"

On December 30, 1965, as Editor Tu Chung stepped from his car in front of his home, two Viet Cong terrorists fired four bullets into his body at close range and killed him instantly.

By such tactics the Viet Cong hope in the end to make effective leadership—except their own—impossible at any level in South Viet-Nam.

VIET CONG TERROR CELLS

The basic weapon in this campaign of terror, and the basic unit of all Viet Cong guerrilla elements, is the three-man cell. There are three types of cells:

- Guerrilla cells for general sabotage and clandestine military operations;
- Special activities cells for assassinations and terror activities generally not involving large amounts of high explosives;
- Sapper cells for specialized work with high explosives.

From the members of such cells are drawn the terrorists for risky city grenade attacks and other suicide missions.

However, there are differing attitudes toward terrorism in NLF ranks. Many NLF members—particularly those recruited locally—have found the use of terror repugnant and unessential to the political struggle. The demoralizing effect on their own ranks of brutality is believed to be an important factor in the high defection rate of the Viet Cong as well as the low level of popular support. In the first quarter of 1967 the defection rate was at a level approaching 40,000 a year.

Another internal problem for the terrorist cells is a lack of technical skills, such as the ability to manufacture and use complex explosive devices. Such skills and mature leadership are often supplied by Viet Cong Provincial or Zone Headquarters.

Most terrorists are young, and the most risky assignments of all go to teenagers, unless the project is large and difficult enough to require mature leadership. Some of the boys sent to throw grenades into city crowds are as young as 13.

VILLAGE HARASSMENT A FAVORITE TACTIC OF THE VIET CONG

Harassing villages probably has been the most common form of terror used by the Viet Cong. The most common form of harassment is small-arms fire. This tactic seldom receives much attention in the press or in official reporting because of its apparent inconsequential results.

Periodically guerrillas will approach a village and fire into it half-a-dozen random rifle shots. This alerts the defenders who can never be sure that a full-scale attack is not under way. Word is radioed to the nearby military headquarters whose commander is then obliged to decide whether the action is harassing fire or an attack, and if an attack, whether an ambush is its real purpose or whether it is a feint designed to draw his unit away from the scene of an actual attack elsewhere. Any guess he makes is apt to be the wrong one.

The correct military decision, usually, is to do nothing for the moment and await developments. This causes villagers to doubt that the unit will aid the village if it actually is attacked.

The harassing fire may continue sporadically for weeks, generally accompanied by nocturnal megaphone taunts, threats, and appeals. Sometimes after a few weeks of softening up, a full-scale attack is launched.

Harassing fire is cheap and can be employed even by inexperienced guerrillas. It creates a great sense of anxiety within the village, keeps villagers awake at night, impairing their farming and normal daytime activities. And it builds confidence within guerrilla ranks.

TERROR CAN BE SELF-DEFEATING

In the long run, the Viet Cong appear to be hurt by their own terrorism. Most evidence suggests that the gains won through terror in the early stages of the rebellion are increasingly erased by the mounting bitterness of the victimized people.

In every measurable expression of public opinion to date, the South Vietnamese people have overwhelmingly voiced opposition to Viet Cong rule. In spite of their natural desire for peace, the great majority indicate readiness to continue the war until the Communist threat is ended.

Defiance of the Viet Cong has been demonstrated more and more openly during the last year, notably during the 1966 elections for the Constituent Assembly and the 1967 elections for village and hamlet officials. The Viet Cong threatened punishment to all who participated and actually executed some participants. Despite threats and terror, however, more than 80 percent of the eligible voters went to the polls. This figure is about 20 percent higher than the turnout in most American elections.

The Columbia Broadcasting System on March 21, 1967, devoted a special hour-long television program to an independent public opinion survey conducted in South Viet-Nam for CBS by Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey. Nine out of 10 South Vietnamese, according to this survey, believe they are better off with the existing South Vietnamese Government; 3 percent believe it does not matter who is in charge; 7 percent expressed no opinion; and none believed they would be better off with the Viet Cong.

There can be little doubt that the absence of support for the Viet Cong among the South Vietnamese today results in large part from the people's reaction to a decade of calculated terror. Terror was what respondents most disliked about the Viet Cong in the CBS survey of Vietnamese public opinion early this year and late last year.

In its summary of the Opinion Research Corporation study, the CBS report stated:

"The survey shows that contrary to a widely held belief outside South Vietnam, its people are not so exhausted and numbed by the war that they no longer care which side wins. They do care very much. They want peace, but not at any price."

CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF VIET CONG TERROR

	ASSASSINATED	KIDNAPED
1958	200	250
1959	200	350
1960	1,500	700
1961	500	1,000
1962	1,700	9,500
1963	2,000	7,000
1964	1,800	9,500
1965	1,800	8,500
1966	1,500	3,000
(Through Oct. 25)	11,200	39,750

Note: None of the above figures is considered entirely accurate. However, inasmuch as the most common error made by local authorities is failure to report many specific acts of terror, the true figure would be higher than those shown here.



The bodies of 2 boys and a man lie in a Saigon street following a Viet-Cong grenade attack that killed 7 persons and wounded 47.

SOME CASES OF TERRORISM

There are two main types of acts of terror: selective and nonselective.

Selective terror occurs when specific individuals or members of a particular group are chosen by the Viet Cong to be their victims. If a village headman is taken out on a hillside and shot, for example, this is a selective killing. Or a priority is placed by the Viet Cong on terrorizing Catholic priests, and attack on such a group would also be considered selective terror.

Nonselective terror is used indiscriminately by the Viet Cong to disrupt civil life, demoralize the people, destroy transport and communications, and generally to create chaos. Anyone may fall victim to nonselective terror—passengers on a crowded bus blasted to bits by a mine in a public road, children on a common pathway who kick a trip-wire attached to a grenade, casualties of bombing in a marketplace or a restaurant.

The patterns of terror occasionally shift. In recent months the Viet Cong have made a concerted effort to disrupt the work of the Revolutionary Development teams in South Viet-Nam by selectively attacking work camps and reconstructed villages.

In 16 weeks, from February to June, 81 Revolutionary Development workers were killed, 99 wounded, and 13 abducted. In the same period the Viet Cong killed 31 Hoi Chanh workers, wounded 22, and abducted 10. The Hoi Chanh are those who have responded to the Government appeal to defect from the Viet Cong. More than anything else, the Viet Cong appears to fear successful reform programs.

Following are some typical cases illustrative of Viet Cong terror since 1960.

September 24, 1960—A band of armed Viet Cong burned down a school in An Lac Village, Tri Tan District, An Giang Province.

September 28, 1960—Father Hoang Ngoc Minh, much-loved priest of Kontum Parish, was riding from Tan Canh to Kondela. A Viet Cong roadblock halted his car. The guerrillas drove bamboo spears into Father Minh's body before a submachine gun killed him.

March 22, 1961—A truck carrying 20 girls was dynamited on the Saigon-Vung Tau road. The girls were returning from Saigon where they had taken part in a Trung Sisters Day celebration. After the explosion the Viet Cong opened fire on the passengers. Two of the girls were killed and 10 wounded.

May 15, 1961—Twelve Catholic nuns from La Providence Order, traveled on Highway One toward Saigon. Their bus was stopped by Viet Cong who ransacked their luggage. Sister Theophile protested and was shot dead on the spot. The vehicle was sprayed with bullets, seriously wounding Sister Phan Thi No. The ambush took place at Tram Van Hamlet, Thanh Phuoc Village, Go Dau Ha District, Tay Ninh Province.

September 20, 1961—One thousand main force Viet Cong soldiers stormed the capital of Phuoc Thanh Province, sacked and burned the government buildings, beheaded virtually the entire administrative staff. They held the capital for 24 hours before withdrawing.

January 1, 1962—A Vietnamese labor leader, Le Van Thieu, 63, was hacked to death by Viet Cong wielding machetes on the rubber plantation where he worked near Bien Hoa.

January 2, 1962—Two Vietnamese technicians working in the Government's anti-malaria program, Phan Van Hai and Nguyen Van Thach, were killed by Viet Cong with machetes, 12 miles south of Saigon.

February 20, 1962—Viet Cong threw four hand grenades into a crowded village theater near Can Tho, killing 24 women and children. A total of 108 persons were killed.

April 8, 1962—The Viet Cong murdered two wounded American prisoners of war near the village of An Chau in central Viet-Nam. Each, with hands tied, was shot in the face.

October 20, 1962—A teenage Viet Cong hurled a grenade into a holiday crowd in downtown Saigon, killing six persons, including two children, and injuring 38.

April 3, 1963—Viet Cong terrorists threw two grenades into a private school near Long Xuyen, An Giang Province, killing a teacher and two other adults. Students were performing their annual variety show at the time.

September 12, 1963—Miss Vo Thi Lo, 26, a school teacher in An Phuoc Village, Kien Hoa Province, was found near the village with her throat cut. She had been kidnaped by the Viet Cong 3 days earlier.

October 16, 1963—Viet Cong terrorists exploded electrical mines under two civilian buses in Kien Hoa and Quang Tin Provinces, killing 18 Vietnamese and wounding 23.

February 16, 1964—Three Americans were killed and 32 injured, most of them women and children, when the Viet Cong bombed the Kinh Do movie theater in Saigon.

July 14, 1964—Pham Thao, chairman of the Catholic Action Committee in Quang Ngai, was "executed" by the Viet Cong when he returned to his native village of Pho Loi in Quang Ngai.

March 30, 1965—A 200-pound bomb exploded outside the U. S. Embassy in Saigon, killed 18 Vietnamese and 2 Americans, and wounded 100 Vietnamese and 45 Americans.

June 25, 1965—Terrorists dynamited the My Canh restaurant in Saigon, killing 27 Vietnamese, 12 Americans, two Filipinos, one Frenchman, one German; more than 80 persons were injured.

October 4, 1965—A Viet Cong bomb exploded at the Cong Hoa National Sports Stadium, killing 11 Vietnamese, including four children, and wounding 42 other persons. A second bomb misfired.

December 12, 1965—Two Viet Cong terrorist platoons killed 23 unarmed Vietnamese canal construction workers asleep in a Buddhist pagoda in Tan Huong Village, Dinh Tuong Province, and wounded seven others.

January 17, 1966—Viet Cong in Kien Tuong detonated a mine under a highway bus, killing 26 Vietnamese civilians, seven of them children. Eight other persons were injured and three listed as missing.

February 14, 1966—Fifty-four Vietnamese civilians, including four children, were killed and 18 wounded by three Viet Cong mines buried in a road in Phu Yen Province.

The first explosion, which left a 3-meter crater in the road and threw the large bus into a canal, killed 27 farmers on their way to work near Tuy Hoa. Eleven others were injured.

A three-wheel bus, loaded with men, women, and children, touched off the second mine which killed 20 and wounded seven. Another three-wheel bus set off the third mine, which killed seven.

March 18, 1966—Fifteen Vietnamese civilians were killed and four injured in the explosion of a Viet Cong mine on a country road 8 kilometers west of Tuy Hoa, capital of Phu Yen Province.

April 7, 1966—Twenty-five prisoners of the Viet Cong, mostly civilians and including three women—all of them chained and padlocked—were shot by their Communist captors just minutes before Vietnamese Government troops arrived.

May 22, 1966—Viet Cong terrorists slaughtered 18 men, one woman, and four children late at night while attacking a compound of canal workers in the Mekong Delta Province of An Giang. The defenseless families were shot in their beds.



This South Vietnamese woman and her wounded daughter huddled alongside are given first aid after the bus they were traveling in was blasted in Kien Tuong Province on May 3, 1964, by a Viet-Cong mine.

November 8, 1966—In Chau Doc Province, a 53-year-old woman was tortured and shot to death by the Viet Cong in Tinh Bien District.

November 16, 1966—The hamlet chief of Hai Xuan, Binh Phuoc District, Long An Province, was assassinated by Viet Cong with carbine fire while he was returning to the hamlet on foot.

December 5, 1966—In Nam Hoa District, Thua Thien Province, the mother of a hamlet chief was shot by the Viet Cong.

December 7, 1966—In the heart of Saigon, Deputy Tran Van Van of the National Constituent Assembly, Government of South Viet-Nam, was assassinated by the Viet Cong.

December 27, 1966—An assassination attempt was made on another National Constituent Assemblyman, Dr. Phan Quang Dan. Dr. Dan narrowly escaped death when his car exploded near Gia Dinh Province Headquarters. The Viet Cong planted a plastic mine beneath the vehicle and detonated it as Dr. Dan opened the front door of the car. Although he escaped with minor leg wounds, a female passerby was killed and five other civilians were wounded.

January 7, 1967—A Viet Cong-detonated mine destroyed a school and health station in Hong Ngu District, Kien Phong Province.

January 8, 1967—In an Xuyen Province the Viet Cong threw a grenade into the house of a hamlet chief in Tai Van District, killing one of his children and injuring three other civilians.

January 22, 1967—A group of Viet Cong entered a hamlet of Hoai An District, Binh Dinh Province, and assassinated the chief.

February 6, 1967—The Viet Cong came into Lieu Tri Hamlet, Binh Nguyen Village, Thang

Binh District of Quang Tin Province and abducted a school teacher and an inter-family chief. The schoolteacher was murdered.

March 16, 1967—Before dawn a Viet Cong platoon entered Thoi Son Hamlet in Hoc Mon District. They awakened all the residents and threatened them if they participated in the forthcoming April elections. Four days later a candidate for the Trung My Tay Village people's council was murdered as he opened the front door of his home. An M-26 grenade, positioned near the door, was detonated as he stepped out. A woman in the house was wounded.

March 17, 1967—Two Viet Cong terrorists armed with submachine guns broke into the home of a Chau Than District policeman. They murdered the policeman and eight civilian occupants of the home, five of whom were children.

April 15, 1967—The village of Soui Chan in Long Khan Province was overrun in a midnight attack. The relief force found six dead civilians. Of these, five were Revolutionary Development team workers. They had been tied to poles and shot through the head. The sixth person was burned beyond recognition. Village elections had been scheduled for the following day.

May 24, 1967—An 18-year-old youth stepped on a Viet Cong grenade trap and was killed in An Dinh Hamlet, Tinh Bien District.

May 25, 1967—A 31-year-old woman was wounded when she stepped on a grenade trap

near her home in Long Duc Village, Chau Thanh District. On the following 2 days two other women, one in Xuan Hiep Village and the other in Binh Phuoc Village, Minh Duc District, were similarly wounded.

May 27, 1967—Viet Cong entered Kim Chau Hamlet in Nam Hoa District and took away the former hamlet chief.

May 29, 1967—Viet Cong squad infiltrated Dong Thien Hamlet in Huong Thuy District and murdered one inter-family chief and a former inter-family chief.

May 30, 1967—Viet Cong attacked Loc Mai Village in Phu Loc District and kidnaped six civilians.

May 30, 1967—Six Viet Cong at 1:00 a. m. entered Duong Lao New Life Hamlet in Hieu Duc District. They ordered refugees to leave their new homes so they could be destroyed. When the refugees refused to leave, the Viet Cong shot two civilians; one survived.

May 31, 1967—Three Viet Cong grenades were thrown into a civilian house while a wedding party was in progress, killing five and wounding seven, in Go Tre Village, Go Cong Province.

June 1, 1967—At 2:30 a. m. a Viet Cong force attacked sleeping Revolutionary Development workers with grenades and automatic weapons. Three Revolutionary Development workers were killed and three were wounded.

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VIET-NAM INFORMATION NOTES

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PRESENTLY AVAILABLE ...

1. Basic Data on South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8195) summarizes general information on the land, people, history, government, and economy of the country.
2. The Search for Peace in Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8196) reviews the efforts of individuals, governments, and international bodies to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict in Viet-Nam. The policy of the Government of North Viet-Nam with regard to a peaceful settlement is included.
3. Communist-Directed Forces in South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8197) seeks to answer such questions as: What is the Viet Cong? Who are its leaders? How is it related to party and government organs of North Viet-Nam? What are the Communists' objectives? Their strengths? Their weaknesses?
4. Free World Assistance for South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8213) describes the scope of the international aid program for the Republic of Viet-Nam. It gives facts and figures about the contributions of 36 participating nations (U.S. aid is not included—a separate Note is to be devoted to that subject).
5. Political Development in South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8231) discusses South Viet-Nam's steady progress toward an elected government and representative institutions at all levels of government.
6. Why We Fight in Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8245) describes the origin of the conflict and the principal reasons for U. S. involvement.

COMING SOON ...

Several other Viet-Nam Information Notes will be available in the near future. Anticipated subjects include "The Legal Basis of the U.S. Commitment"; "National Reconciliation in South Viet-Nam"; "The Military Struggle"; and "Communist Aggression Against South Viet-Nam." The Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, on request, will place individuals on its mailing list to receive Selected United States Government Publications—a free, bi-weekly announcement of new publications, including subsequent numbers of this series.