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# VIET-NAM INFORMATION NOTES

OFFICE OF MEDIA SERVICES, BUREAU OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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## COMMUNIST-DIRECTED FORCES IN SOUTH VIET-NAM

Several hundred thousand people in South Viet-Nam, collectively known as the Viet Cong (Vietnamese for "Vietnamese Communist"), are engaged in a violent effort to overthrow the government of that country. Alongside them are many identified units of the regular North Vietnamese Army, ordered south by Hanoi by the thousands every month.

What was the situation which gave rise to the development of the Viet Cong? Who are its leaders? How do they operate? This paper seeks to answer these and related questions.

### THE VIET MINH

From the close of World War II to 1954, Communist-led local forces known as the Viet Minh (Revolutionary League for the Independence of Viet-Nam) fought to expel France from Viet-Nam and other parts of Indochina. The Viet Minh, like the present National Liberation Front (NLF), was a front organization including non-Communists. Real power, however, always remained with the Communists.

Ho Chi Minh, present ruler of North Viet-Nam, organized and directed the Viet Minh movement. This veteran Communist was born in 1890 in North Viet-Nam. In 1921 he was a founding member of the French Communist Party. Fluent in French, English, Russian, and Chinese, he later spent years as an agent of the Communist International (Comintern). From a base in China, Ho organized the Viet Minh movement toward the close of World War II.

Japanese troops in Indochina surrendered to Chinese, British, and American forces at the end of World War II, and shortly thereafter French authorities resumed control. The Viet Minh and non-Communist nationalists in collaboration with the Viet Minh fought the French for 9 years. As the Viet Minh gradually succeeded, Ho was instrumental in eliminating non-Communist nationalist leaders and potential opponents from the Viet Minh. Finally, after the defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu, France conceded independence to Indochina at the Geneva settlement of 1954.

The Geneva agreements divided the Vietnamese portion of Indochina at the 17th parallel. A frankly Communist government, led by Ho Chi Minh, assumed control at Hanoi. Under the armistice provisions some 900,000 Vietnamese fled the North and sought the safety of the South. Roughly 100,000 of the Viet Minh

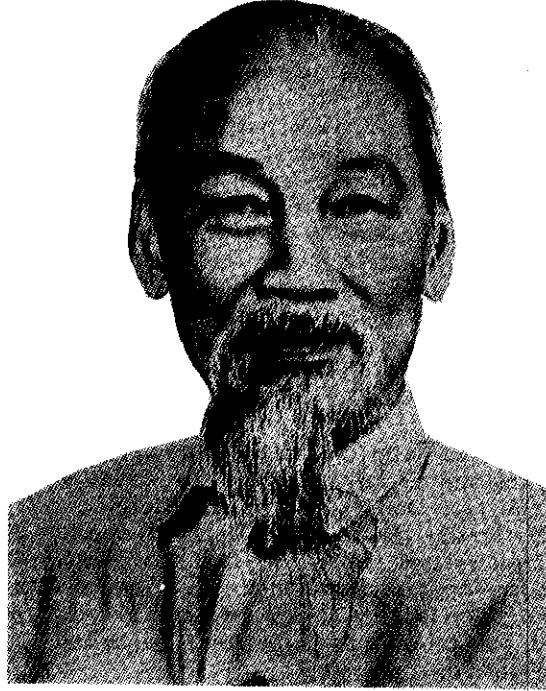
moved from the South to the North, while an undetermined but large number remained behind.

### THE TWO REGIMES: 1954-60

In South Viet-Nam, non-Communist groups worked to build an effective government. Much of the countryside, however, remained under local Viet Minh control.

Ngo Dinh Diem was the leading figure in South Viet-Nam until his death in 1963. Briefly as Prime Minister under Bao Dai, then as President after a 1955 referendum deposed Bao Dai, Diem sought to create a viable national government. His first problems were:

- to eliminate vestiges of both French and Viet Minh control;
- to provide for the 900,000 refugees from the North;
- to cut the strength of three independent armed groups which were fighting for control near Saigon: the Binh Xuyen (gangsters who controlled the Saigon police), the Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao (two extremist religious sects).



Ho Chi Minh



Save for reducing the Viet Minh threat, most of this program was completed by 1958.

In North Viet-Nam, the Communists consolidated control by police-state methods. Almost all of the North Vietnamese area was under Viet Minh control at the time of the Geneva settlement. As the French withdrew and refugees fled south, Ho Chi Minh's government smothered all opposition. There was a broad-scale forced collectivization in 1956, during which an estimated 50,000 to 200,000 people were killed and a large number imprisoned. Once well entrenched in the North, Hanoi sought to expand its power by taking over the South. Its chief political instrument was the Lao Dong Party, the Communist Party of both North and South Viet-Nam until 1961.

## ORGANIZING FOR SUBVERSION: 1955-62

### The Viet-Nam Fatherland Front

A front organization known as the Viet-Nam Fatherland Front was established in 1955, replacing the Commission for Supervision of the South, with headquarters in Hanoi and with unification with the South one of its objectives. The Front program lashed out against the "handful of traitors who have sold out to American imperialism," and stated "American imperialism is the chief enemy." The Fatherland Front never won significant influence in South Viet-Nam, nor did the first several hundred Communists who went North in 1954 and were not infiltrated back into South Viet-Nam.

### The Central Office for South Viet-Nam (COSVN)

Hanoi's field headquarters in South Viet-Nam has the title of the Central Office for South Viet-Nam (COSVN). This strategic site was overrun by U.S. troops in the early part of 1967, and large supplies of documents and military materiel were captured. The documents included detailed instructions from Hanoi, since COSVN provides the direct link with top Hanoi leaders.

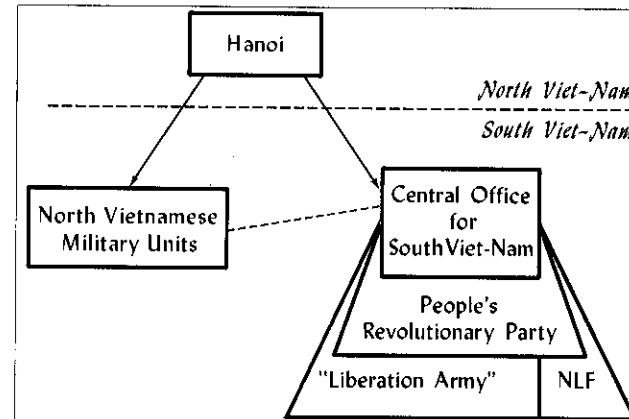
One particularly significant document was the text of an address by North Vietnamese General Nguyen Van Vinh, Chairman of the Lao Dong Party's Reunification Department and the parallel Reunification Commission in the North Vietnamese Government. General Vinh, who is also a Deputy Chief of Staff, came down from Hanoi to COSVN headquarters in April 1966 to deliver his instructions in person.

Another key document was a letter of instructions from Le Duan, the First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi.

Although COSVN leaders evacuated their headquarters to another location as American troops approached, there is considerable information available from captured documents and prisoner interrogations about its ranking members.

The COSVN Party Secretary as of late 1967 was believed to be a covert high-ranking party functionary named Nguyen Van Muoi, also known as Muoi Ut and Muoi Cuc. COSVN goes to great efforts to keep secret the real names and functions of its members, and most officials have aliases. A notable example is the Viet Cong military commander, Tran Nam Trung, listed on National Liberation Front charts as an NLF Presidium member and Chairman of the NLF's Military Affairs Committee. Tran Nam Trung does not exist as an individual; the name goes with the job, and a number of individuals, usually North Vietnamese Army (NVA) general officers, have variously occupied that position/name.

A majority of the Communist high-level military leaders in South Viet-Nam are NVA generals. Two prominent Viet Cong deputy commanders are NVA generals Tran Van Tra and Tran Do, who are both alternate members of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee. Lt. Gen. Tran Van Tra, a Deputy Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Army, serves as Deputy Commander of the "Liberation Army" and has been in South Viet-Nam since 1960 or 1961. Maj. Gen. Tran Do serves as Deputy Political Officer, and has been in the South since 1963 or early 1964. Another high-ranking Communist military personality is NVA Lt. Gen. Hoang Van Thai, the commander of Communist forces in the Military Region 5 area of South Viet-Nam. Thai is a Deputy Minister of Defense in North Viet-Nam and a full member of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee.



Organization of Communist-Directed Forces

### The National Liberation Front (NLF)

At the close of 1960, authorities in Hanoi decided to concentrate their efforts on a new front organization to be based in the South, and to be known as the National Liberation Front (NLF). The NLF's program was forecast in a resolution of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong (Communist) Party third congress in September, stating that one of the strategic tasks of the Vietnamese revolution was "to



*Lt. General Hoang Van Thai*



*Lt. General Tran Van Tra*



*Maj. General Tran Do*

liberate South Viet-Nam from the ruling yoke of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen."

In describing the forthcoming National Liberation Front, the Lao Dong Party resolution stated: "The front must carry out its work in a very flexible manner in order to rally all forces that can be rallied, win over all forces that can be won over, neutralize all forces that should be neutralized, and draw the broad masses into the general struggle against the U.S.-Diem clique for the liberation of the South and the peaceful reunification of the fatherland."

Hanoi felt it could count on support from a variety of groups in the South. Most important were those entrenched Communists from the Viet Minh who had not gone north after the Geneva agreements. As Communists, they owed special loyalty to Ho Chi Minh. Some of them still controlled some rural areas which resisted government authority. Others had merely gone underground.

Other potential recruits were rural peasants who feared that the new regime in Saigon would bring increased taxes, increased rents, and a few benefits. Some members of the shattered Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao groups wished to continue their fight against Diem. Finally, some people who at first had welcomed the increasingly authoritarian Diem regime were turning against it.

The National Liberation Front was carefully designed to appeal to members of all these groups.

#### The People's Revolutionary Party (PRP)

Learning from the failure of the Viet-Nam Fatherland Front, Hanoi kept tight controls on the National Liberation Front by building it around trusted Communist Party members. At the heart was to be the so-called People's Rev-

olutionary Party (PRP), a new name for the Communist Party in South Viet-Nam.

In November 1961 a secret central committee resolution of the Lao Dong Party provided for a new People's Revolutionary Party in the South, stating: "First of all, it must be clearly understood that this is only a name change . . . the party segment in South Viet-Nam is a segment of the Lao Dong party under the leadership of the party central committee, headed by Chairman Ho."

Public announcement of the formation of the PRP was made in early 1962 by the NLF to give the false impression that the PRP had been formed within South Viet-Nam. The southern branch of the Lao Dong Party quietly faded as its members shifted to the PRP.

#### Chain of Command

The chain of command from Hanoi to the two types of Communist-directed forces in South Viet-Nam is shown on page 2. The chart also shows how COSVN controls the People's Revolutionary Party, the National Liberation Front, and the "Liberation Army." In general, the PRP provides political direction and enforces control; members of the "Liberation Army" conduct terror and military operations; and the NLF serves as a propaganda unit. Appropriately, all significant political and military positions down to platoon leaders and district NLF cadre are occupied by PRP members. Political and military directives flow in a vertical fashion from the PRP and "Liberation Army." The NLF, although nominally the parent organization, has no command structure of its own.

Chairman Nguyen Huu Tho, born in 1910, studied law in France and practiced in Saigon. His anti-French activities started in 1947, when he reportedly was captured by the Viet Minh and then joined them. Arrested twice by the French,

he was later imprisoned by the South Vietnamese for more than 6 years. Following his release in December 1961, he joined the NLF as chairman in early 1962.

Secretary General Huynh Tan Phat, born in 1913, also uses the name Tam Chi. With an architect's training, he was a member of the Viet Minh early in the postwar period and was arrested twice by the French. In late 1955 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Fatherland Front (Hanoi-organized precursor of the NLF). An associate has reported him to be a member of the Communist Party.

#### THE PATTERN OF SUBVERSION: 1961-62

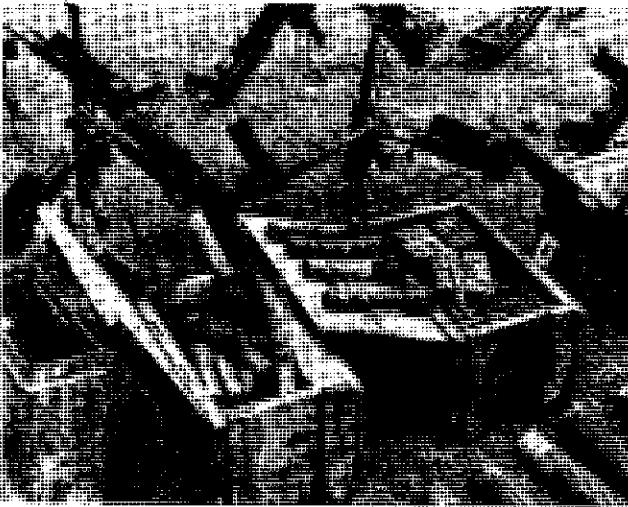
With the People's Revolutionary Party tightly in control, the National Liberation Front continued to be reinforced with cadres from the North. Most of the early infiltrators were natives of South Viet-Nam who had gone to the North after the Geneva agreements for intensive training in Communist methods. In the 3-year period from 1959 through 1961, roughly 10,000 men infiltrated into the South. In 1962 North Viet-Nam sent an additional 13,000 men across the border.

As these large reinforcements arrived, the violence in South Viet-Nam increased.

Prime targets were, and continue to be, the leaders of local government: village headmen and elders, school teachers, and medical personnel. Between October 1957 and December 1967 more than 15,800 civilians had been assassinated by the Viet Cong and more than 44,300 civilians had been kidnaped. In 1967 alone, more than 3,800 civilians were killed.

#### ORGANIZED WARFARE: 1963-66

The early Viet Cong effort laid great stress on guerrilla activities, largely in the rural areas. Occasional terror bombings were per-



Captured Viet Cong Weapons

petrated in the cities (e.g., the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1965). Later, as more and more regulars of the North Vietnamese Army were sent south to support the guerrillas, organized units were increasingly committed to conventional military engagements, and on a growing scale.

The Diem government survived several attempted coups by other anti-Viet Cong groups, but finally fell with Diem's assassination in November 1963.

Subsequent governments in Saigon have been replaced, but throughout this unstable political period no important political figure shifted allegiance to the Viet Cong or its NLF and PRP components. Thus, while terror has enabled the Viet Cong to disrupt the life of the nation, the Communists have failed to attract new loyalties to their cause.

Indeed, the Communist atrocities perpetrated during the Tet (lunar new year) offensive in January 1968 have probably turned more people against the Viet Cong.

Viet Cong personnel losses have been severe, but have in large part been offset by a constant stream of troop reinforcements from the North and forced recruiting in the South. Losses of arms have been offset by massive supply from the North, while food supplies are drawn chiefly from Viet Cong controlled areas.

#### COMMUNIST METHODS

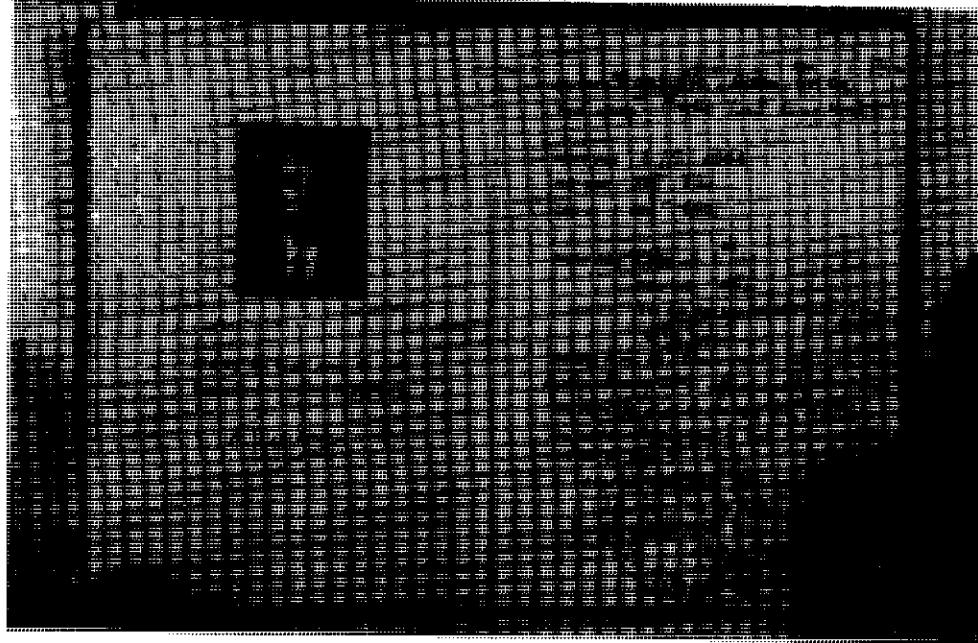
The regular troops from North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong operate differently in the South.

The northern military units are occupying and operating on foreign soil. Before infiltrating south, most of the military are prepared at the Xuan Mai training camp, where the curriculum includes a special course called "Hate America."

The main force units--the regular military units of the Viet Cong--on the other hand, are drawn from the South Vietnamese population, but their members, too, often fight far from their native villages and districts.

The majority of the Viet Cong guerrillas operate in areas familiar to them. Many of the Viet Cong do not have purely military functions, but serve instead as local cadres in areas under Viet Cong control; occasionally they assume paramilitary functions.

While the regular North Vietnamese military and Viet Cong main force units draw supplies from the North as an expeditionary force, the Viet Cong guerrillas are more likely to depend on supplies generated in the South. They, too, however, depend on North Viet-Nam for much of their war materiel. Comprehensive information on how the regular military units coordinate with the Viet Cong is not avail-



*North Vietnamese Passport used by Official of National Liberation Front (NLF)*

able, but it appears likely that much of the coordination is done on an ad hoc basis at the local level.

There has also been a significant shift in weapons used by the Communist forces. During the early years of the war, Viet Cong guerrillas were armed with weapons acquired during World War II and the anti-French struggle, or weapons obtained in battles with U.S. and South Vietnamese (ARVN) troops. As the war increased in tempo, Hanoi's allies increased their military supplies to Communist forces in North and South Viet-Nam. As a result, Viet Cong and NVA forces are equipped with excellent weaponry.

#### COMMUNIST OBJECTIVES

The first objective announced by the National Liberation Front was the overthrow of the Saigon government.

The Front's 10-point program was broadcast in English by Hanoi in February 1961. It also stressed unification with the North and expulsion of all foreign influences. The United States was attacked throughout the program; for example, the preamble to the 10 points said: "The American imperialists, who in the past helped the French colonialists to massacre our people, have now plotted to permanently partition our country, to enslave the southern part through a disguised colonial regime, and turn it into a military base in preparation for an aggressive war in Southeast Asia." Members of the national government were referred to as "lackeys" and "henchmen" of American imperialists.

Almost a year later the People's Revolutionary Party announced its own 10-point program, covering the same ground with terms such as, "We will eliminate U. S. cultural enslavement and depravity." As in the NLF program, the first point for the PRP was the overthrow of the Saigon government.

These announced goals of Communist strategy, though devised 6 years ago, have not been changed substantially in the interim and continue to be reiterated by the PRP, the NLF, and Hanoi. The latest (August 1967) political program announced by the NLF rewords and repeats the above objectives.

The tactical goals of the Communist-controlled forces in South Viet-Nam can be discerned from the way the North Vietnamese military units and the Viet Cong operate. The short-run objectives seem to be:

- continued control of various base areas in South Viet-Nam, with physical expansion of these areas if possible;
- maintenance of supply lines for equipment and personnel from the North;
- destruction by assassination, kidnaping, and other means of individuals and groups resisting Communist authority;
- dividing the pro-government force through political activity;
- enhancing the domestic political image of the NLF by making it appear to be a domestic political force, independent of Hanoi;
- strengthening the NLF image abroad and weakening relations between the South Vietnamese Government and other countries.

## COMMUNIST STRENGTHS

The Communist forces are engaged in a classic attempt to overthrow a government by violence, directed by Hanoi and assisted by other Communist governments, particularly that of Red China.

Reinforcement and supply of the Communist forces in South Viet-Nam are conducted through parts of neighboring Laos (where Pathet Lao Communists backed by North Vietnamese regulars control the key border area) and apparently, to a lesser degree, through Cambodia. Supply routes also cross the demilitarized zone at the 17th parallel, where North Viet-Nam has refused to accept International Control Commission inspection. Of late, North Viet-Nam has increasingly been using the demilitarized zone as a route for its troops into the South. The use of these sanctuary areas is of substantial benefit to the Communist units. Major weight should also be given to the overall political and military direction, extensive arms support, and cadre structure and training provided by Hanoi, even to such details as supplying North Vietnamese passports to most of the NLF agents who travel abroad.

Within the controlled areas, Viet Cong elements exercise governmental functions. They are able to exact taxes from the villagers and draft local inhabitants to fulfill military and paramilitary functions. Propaganda is carried on a clandestine Viet Cong radio station.

## COMMUNIST WEAKNESSES

Inability to achieve rapid victory is a major weakness of the Communist assault in South Viet-Nam.

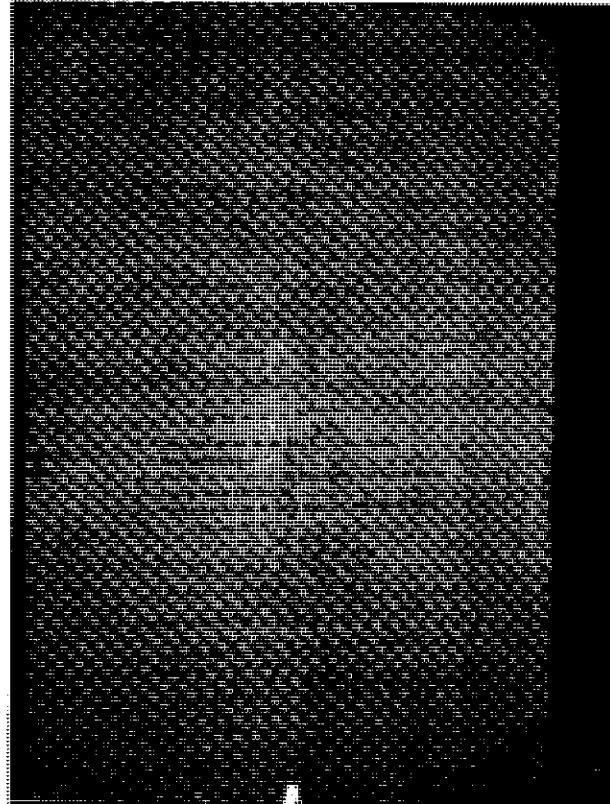
The people of South Viet-Nam are war-weary. While the bulk of the war against the French was fought north of the 17th parallel (now the South Vietnamese border), that war left large scars in the South. Total Vietnamese deaths during 9 years of war against the French were roughly as large as British deaths during World War II. The resumption of violence by the Viet Cong and later by the organized troops of the North Vietnamese Army came at a time when most South Vietnamese wanted peace.

Despite continuous reinforcement from the North, the Communists in the South cannot gain a military victory over South Vietnamese forces, which are assisted by American, Korean, Australian, New Zealand, Thai, and Philippine units. Meanwhile, the Viet Cong presence exposes much of the population in the countryside to war risks as the central government tries to expel the Communist elements, and a considerable refugee problem has been created.

Viet Cong performance has not matched Communist promises.

After promising to abolish taxes and rents, and to divide up larger estates, the Viet Cong

themselves became the tax collectors. In the rural areas, some of which they have controlled for as long as 20 years, the Viet Cong presence has brought few constructive results. Viet Cong base areas remain in a primitive state, with few of the benefits of modern technology. Instead, the peasants in these areas have lived through a generation



*A page from Communist Party record of Sgt. Nguyen Hoang Long, 338th North Vietnamese Division, killed in action.*

of war only to find, to an increasing degree, that the Communists in authority over them are strangers from the North.

The conditions in regions under Communist control are beginning to differ significantly from those in similar regions under government control.

In the last few years the Saigon government has greatly increased the attention it gives to what it calls "revolutionary development," improvement of living conditions in the countryside. This program receives a great deal of assistance from the United States as well as from other countries, but for the most part the projects are directed and carried out by local leaders. The introduction of such elementary services as education, potable water, public buildings, electricity, and health clinics in a growing number of communities contrasts markedly with the unaltered backwardness of villages held by the Viet Cong.

The accent on terror and the primitive rural base of the Communists have circumscribed their impact on urban populations. Viet Cong use of terror in the cities contrasts unfavorably with the methods of the Vietnamese government, making the Viet Cong an unattractive alternative. Despite their propaganda, to urban people the Viet Cong have appeared more as bandits and thugs than as humane leaders interested in their welfare. This impression has probably been enhanced as a result of the NVA/VC offensive in urban areas in violation of the Tet (lunar new year) cease-fire in late January 1968. This action resulted in wide-scale casualties among civilians and property damage and destruction.

Similarly, the brutality of the Viet Cong is demonstrating to more and more Vietnamese what a Viet Cong government would mean. The old slogan of unification with the North appears to have lost much of its appeal in South Viet-Nam, not only for the refugees who have fled the North, but also for the native

southerners who have seen Communist terror first-hand in the South.

Twelve years of post-colonial government have provided the South Vietnamese with increasing experience in some of the positive attributes of independence. Reaction to Communist methods has contributed to growth of democratic aspiration. The populace has used the ballot box, despite Viet Cong threats. It has chosen its own provincial governments and, in the fall of 1967, its own President, Vice President, and bicameral legislature, braving Viet Cong attempts to prevent successful elections.

Despite these trends, the PRP, the Front, and the rest of the Viet Cong, as well as the North Vietnamese government, continue to predict victory for their forces. However, the claim of a quick success, made as late as 1965, has largely been replaced by declarations of Communist intentions to carry on "protracted warfare" as the prospects for military victory have become more remote.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE PUBLICATION 8197

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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.
7. Viet-Cong Terror Tactics in South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8259) describes the deliberate campaign of terror by which the Viet-Cong hope to break the resistance of South Viet-Nam.
8. National Reconciliation in South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8260) describes the Chieu-Hoi, or Open Arms, program of the Government of South Viet-Nam.
9. Prisoners of War (Dept. of State pub. 8275) explains the special status of prisoners of war under the Geneva convention, allied treatment of prisoners and efforts to discuss with North Viet-Nam and the Communist National Liberation Front repatriation, exchange, and other matters pertinent to prisoners of war.
10. Legal Basis for U.S. Military Aid to South Viet-Nam (Dept. of State pub. 8285) discusses the well-established points of law and fact which are the legal basis for the U.S. military commitment in South Viet-Nam.
11. Opinions of Asian and Pacific Leaders (Dept. of State pub. 8363). The leaders of the countries most immediately concerned about the future of Viet-Nam express their views on: the U.S. commitment, the nature of the war, North Vietnamese and Chinese involvement, peace efforts, and regional goals beyond the war.

Several other Viet-Nam Information Notes will be available in the near future. 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, biweekly announcement of new publications, including subsequent numbers of this series.