

SPECIAL STUDY ON PRG TAKE-OVER IN VIETNAM

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VIETNAM: COMMUNIST ADMINISTRATION IMPOSED RAPIDLY

The Communists have moved with remarkable speed and efficiency to consolidate their hold over the newly conquered territories of South Vietnam. The imposition of Communist rule evidently has been neither as harsh as rumored nor as lenient as promised although, as in the 1972 offensive, the pattern has varied from region to region.

The swift administrative takeover was facilitated by:

- the relatively bloodless military sweep south;
- the past experience of the Communists, who, particularly since 1972, have put considerable emphasis on administrative tasks;
- the existence of a party structure which, although varying in strength, could be transformed into an administrative structure;
- the availability of political officers and specialized personnel from the North to staff key positions.

In some areas military administrative committees have been set up as a transitional government. Where the Viet Cong infrastructure was stronger, "people's revolutionary committees" have been "introduced" at once. These committees likely have a heavy military-security cast, not only because of their immediate tasks but also because most VC cadre have also had military concerns. Past practice suggests that the new administrations are likely to be headed by the leadership of the local Communist Committee and to

report through party channels. We have not detected any separate line of "PRG" communication to the local level; below the national level, PRG committees seem indistinguishable from the party organization.

There is a shortage of local Communist personnel in the South, and the new administrations have ordered GVN officials to return to their posts. Northerners are being sent to help, even though the party has long complained about the shortage of competent personnel in the North. The Communists probably will continue to use ex-GVN officials as well as others who are willing to accommodate themselves, albeit under close supervision of party cadres holding the key positions backed by garrisons of NVA-VC troops. This may be sufficient to assure negative control, but future problems may be greater. Even in the North, the leadership still finds it difficult to change ingrained habits and to get the populace to work collectively for the state rather than for their individual or family good.

Logic and past Communist behavior suggest that there will be a considerable effort to win support as well as simple compliance from the populace. At the same time, we expect selective use of force against individuals who fail to show a will to "reform" and to the extent necessary for intimidation. There will be trials and executions as well as unauthorized reprisals, but confinement, economic deprivations, and compulsory "re-education" are likely to be more common punishments.

It is impossible to predict from present evidence the rate at which Hanoi will move toward unification of Vietnam under one sovereignty and whether the "Revolutionary Government" will metamorphose through some preliminary stage involving some nominal coalition broader than the PRG leadership. Externally, DRV and PRG representatives are cautious, not revealing their hand; internally, the pattern of administrative action varies, but Hanoi is not hesitating to depict the PRG as a functioning entity on the local level. The interim pattern may be to retain the PRG nationally and internationally as an essentially hollow body while Hanoi deals, as it does now, directly with the regional components of the northern and central section and with COSVN for the portion south of the highlands.

Directives Issued. In December 1974, as COSVN prepared to exploit anticipated gains in the coming dry-season campaign, detailed instructions were issued on such subjects

as setting up military administrative committees. The directive on committees laid out their composition (military plus local party) and their responsibilities for order, defense, welfare, propaganda, etc. We have seen no guidance in this period on dealing with former GVN officials.

In the wake of the unexpectedly rapid territorial gains, new instructions were issued publicly.

--A March 26 broadcast outlined procedures for seizing control of the "puppet apparatus," setting up mass organizations, ensuring security and "smashing" all "enemy schemes," encouraging business as usual, and promoting defections and cooperation from ex-civil servants and ARVN personnel.

--The April 1 ten-point PRG policy statement reflected this position, and other broadcasts from Hanoi relayed NVA directives on the tasks of "our troops" in the newly "liberated" areas.

Concern about indiscipline is evident and persisting, and a number of broadcasts have demanded absolute obedience to the administrative authority. For example, a ten-point code of conduct broadcast on March 28 ruled out unauthorized searches and arrests and warned that "severe discipline" would be applied against cadres or soldiers who violate the codes of conduct. One particular worry is possible infection of the troops by the "enemy's reactionary, enslaving culture."

Some additional unpublished instructions have become known. An RVN agent report on a local party briefing indicated that village cooperatives were to be established and that NVA officers would be assigned to each district and village to coordinate military activities. Another such report from the pretakeover period mentioned the need to identify GVN officials, specialized personnel, and "progressive elements who might cooperate to motivate the populace to kill GVN officials, to develop progressive religious leaders to replace reactionary ones, and to prepare administrative machinery.

The same practice can be expected following the takeover in Saigon: some directives will be broadcast, as in the case of the requirement that GVN military personnel

turn in weapons and register; others will be disseminated without publicity to officials and cadre.

Military Administrations. The bulk of local administrations are probably military governments like the Military Management Committee in Saigon under the top NVA general in the South, Tran Van Tra.

--A major general (also a northerner) has been named administrative head in Hue, and officers have been identified in the same capacity elsewhere.

--Propaganda implied that a civil administration had been set up in Danang at an early stage, but a Chinese Communist correspondent wrote on April 22 about the activities of the city's "military committee" and stated that a people's revolutionary administration was under preparation; on April 25, Hanoi identified the Danang leaders as Ho Nghinh, longtime party (and NLF) leader in the area, and Major General Nguyen Chanh, heretofore active on the party's regional committee and a vice defense minister of the PRG.

In some areas, probably where the local VC organization was strong enough and the problems sufficiently manageable, both political and military administrations are functioning. This is the case in Tuy Noa, according to one eyewitness, where ex-Viet Minh cadre have resurfaced. While security and reestablishment of order are the primary tasks, most of the administrations will probably be under military control even though the establishment of civil administrations is the future goal.

Security and Restoring Order the First Priority. The first order of business has been to restore order and flush out any real or potential resistance. In riot-torn Danang, the Communists restored order by dividing the city into districts and then publicly executing in each a number of looters, some ARVN personnel (who also may have been looting), and police. A curfew was imposed and is still in effect. In Danang and elsewhere armed self-defense contingents were mobilized to help keep order and prevent looting. In addition, the Communists quickly began to move the refugee population back to their villages to lessen urban disruption and food and health problems.

The newly conquered peoples are being classified according to their former position and economic status;

identity cards are being issued, and travel is ostensibly controlled--all with varying degrees of efficiency. Another classic control method has been reported in several instances: families are grouped together in small units, with one responsible for liaison with the authorities, and mutual supervision is encouraged.

Treatment of Former GVN Officials and Military Personnel.

ARVN personnel officers and GVN officials have been ordered to report to the Communist authorities with their weapons and records. We do not have sufficient evidence to judge whether the Communists have been as lenient with "repentant" elements as they have promised, but we do have reports of ex-GVN civilian officials remaining on the job and few reports of violence against any other than police officials. ARVN draftees are registered, and at least the young have generally been allowed to return home. However, ARVN officers and GVN officials have either been detained in camps or, in the case of the latter, have remained on the job while undergoing "reindoctrination." These sessions will be used for gathering information as well as for further evaluation of their loyalties.

Although there has been one unverified report of an indiscriminate mass execution of GVN officials, in Ban Me Thuot the primary target for reprisals seems to be the National Police and GVN security agents, as was the case in the 1972 offensive. A number of eyewitness reports from several locations (though principally Danang) relate that police personnel have been searched out and executed on the spot or after a brief denunciation in public. Most of these reports come from the early, confused period when Viet Cong cadre had surfaced but before NVA troops arrived. Reports that police personnel have been arrested suggest, however, that execution is not a hard and fast rule. Treatment probably varies with the degree of the local VC cadres' familiarity with the police and the desire for revenge, as proved to be the case in the 1972 offensive.

Propaganda Activities and Front Groups. After a modicum of order has been restored, propaganda teams have gone to work quickly to root out manifestations of GVN authority and "culture" and to propagate their own ideology and directives through movies, plays, meetings, and loud-speaker broadcasts.

Among the first groups which the Communists have proselytized are the teachers, who, through various methods of persuasion and intimidation, have returned to the classrooms

with new teaching materials" or at least without any of the old "tainted" texts. Judging from Communist propaganda, a high priority is set on reopening the schools, and supervision of the teachers will be continued, in part, through "patriotic" teachers associations. Danang schools reportedly opened on April 16 and those in Hue on the 19th.

Early references to third-force groupings, as in Hue, have disappeared. From the outset, the elimination of "reactionary" political parties and organizations had been decreed, and such GVN-sanctioned groups as the Confederation of Vietnamese Workers (CTV) have been abolished. According to several reports, local CTV leaders have been jailed.

To replace such groups, local chapters of mass organizations for various functional groups (women, laborers, peasants, students, and teachers) are being set up as another means of control and of mobilizing popular participation. Communist propagandists appear reticent about naming many of the persons involved in these front groups. The overall umbrella organization, the National Liberation Front (NLF), is also being expanded and "introduced" to the local populations.

The Communists have also used leading Buddhists and, on occasion, Catholics to address gatherings and urge their followers to support the new order. Support from the business community has been claimed in Tuy Hoa, where one eyewitness reported a non-violent, rapid assumption of control by the Communists: Liberation Radio described a meeting there of over 200 industrialists and tradesmen who were informed of new (unspecified) guidelines for their operation; 59 reportedly "volunteered" 13 million piasters to the new administration, a practice likely to be repeated elsewhere.

Hanoi and the PRG--Now Renamed "Revolutionary Government." The goal of reunification of Vietnam has been reaffirmed but without indication of a timetable or any intermediary steps. At this stage, some ambiguity is probably deliberate. Even without early reunification, the distinctions between DRV and PRG will tend to become blurred, and many joint endeavors will be undertaken.

It seems clear that North Vietnamese military personnel (NVA political officers in particular) are staffing many positions in conjunction with leaders of local Viet Cong forces. The vast majority of the conquering forces are

northern, and it was the leaders of these forces whom COSVN directed, last December, to take top positions in the interim military regimes.

Additionally, Hanoi is reported to have sent northern administrative cadre and technical specialists south. One plausible estimate, from a Soviet source in Hanoi, is that up to 20 percent of the staffs of some DRV government bodies are being sent to newly controlled areas, including large numbers of police and medical personnel. This process has been largely unpublicized, although in one case Liberation Radio reported that northern agricultural experts accompanied shipments of animal stock.

There is a considerable propaganda effort to build up the internal image of the PRG. PRG officials are reported to be participating in rallies in the new territories to "introduce" the administrations or to mobilize support for newly formed mass organizations; PRG Departments are said to be involved in food distribution, health concerns, and education.

At the same time, North-South links are not obscured. There have been expressions of thanks for help from the North, numerous references to Ho Chi Minh's portrait beside the PRG flag, and such reports as the reopening of telecommunications between Hanoi and Quang Tri after 20 years to exchange messages between people and troops in both areas.

Thus far, the leadership in Hanoi seems to utilize whichever identification--DRV or PRG--that seems to serve the purpose at hand. One recent visitor to Danang received his travel permit in Hanoi through the DRV rather than the PRG, which had been the channel on a previous visit to PRG headquarters. On the other hand, the claims to GVN aircraft and other military equipment exfiltrated to neighboring countries have been made in the name of the PRG, as successor regime to the GVN (though Hanoi has joined in putting pressure on the Thai Government on this issue).

Hanoi and the PRG have more or less interchangeably appealed to sympathetic governments and international organizations for food, medicine, and other emergency goods. Such appeals serve to strengthen the PRG's diplomatic stature even while soliciting needed help. Assistance is now flowing into southern ports directly, with the arrival of Cuban, Chinese, and Soviet ships in Danang.