

COSVN Leaders

COSVN was headed from 1962 to '64 by one of the most shadowy yet most powerful Party figures south of the 17th parallel. To this day no one is certain whether his name is Nguyen Van Cuc, Mui Ut, Mui Cuc, Nguyen Van Muoi or (as is most likely) none of these. Cuc has been described as a man in his fifties, born both in South and North Viet-Nam and having spent most of his political career in the South. According to a document captured in November 1956, Cuc was then a member of the Nam-Bo Regional Committee and Secretary of the Saigon-Cholon Party Committee. One well-informed source has stated that he was among those southern branch Party cadres secretly elected to Central Committee in 1960 and in February 1967 became a secret member of the Politburo.⁴

Late in 1964, command of COSVN was assumed by Nguyen Cai Thanh, one of the two North Vietnamese four-star generals (Giap being the other), member of the Politburo, and member of the NVN National Defense Council. At this time Nguyen Van Cuc probably became Deputy Party Secretary at COSVN. When Thanh died (officially) on July 6, 1967, Cuc probably headed COSVN until Pham Hung arrived, presumably in October 1967, to replace Thanh.⁵ As [fifth]-ranking member of the Politburo (Thanh ranked eighth) and First Deputy Premier of the NVN, Hung brought considerable Party rank with him. According to Colonel Tran Van Duc (see footnote 3), Pham Hung holds all of the top positions in the South, Party Secretary, Commander of the PLAF, and Chief Political Officer of the PLAF. It is, however, likely that he shares this authority with other commands in the northern half of South Viet-Nam. This relationship will be discussed later.

Nguyen Van Cuc is reportedly Hung's main Party deputy, and Lt. Gen. Traa Van Tra is his principal military deputy. Tra is an alternate member of the Central Committee and a Deputy Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Army. He was born in 1918 in Quang Ngai province in central Viet-Nam. From 1945 until 1954, when he was regrouped to the North, Tra was active in Communist military

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operations in the South Viet-Nam and held various commands in Interzone VI. He was transferred South in 1963 and has been at COSVN ever since, principally as Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee. He is also the latest "Tran Nam Trung" who, the NLF claims, is Chairman of the NLF Military Affairs Committee and a Deputy Chairman of the NLF Presidium. There have been at least two and possibly more "Tran Nam Trung's".

The original "Tran Nam Trung" was believed to be Maj. Gen. Tran Luong, a member of the Central Committee and member of the old Interzone V Party Committee until he was regrouped to the North in 1954.⁶ He was sent South again in 1961 and played a leading role in the re-establishment of COSVN. From 1962 until 1963, when Tran Van Tra arrived, Luong held the "Tran Nam Trung" position of Chairman of the COSVN Military Affairs Committee and of the NLF Military Affairs Committee. Since Tra became "Tran Nam Trung", Luong reportedly has concentrated on financial and economic affairs at COSVN.

On the political side, a leading role at COSVN has been played by Nguyen Van Dang, better known by his alias Hai Van, a Deputy Party Secretary, since 1962, who has had special responsibility for Party organization, propaganda and security affairs. Under the alias Phan Xuan Tsai he has also been a member of the NLF Presidium and Chairman of the NLF's Liberation Federation of Trade Unions. Lt. Col. Le Xuan Chuyen (see footnote 3) rated Dang (or Van) one of the most powerful members of COSVN. He has apparently been active in the South since 1945 and never regrouped.

One of the few overt Party (as the PRP) members in the South has been Vo Toan, best known by the alias Vo Chi Cong. Toan (or Cong), was formerly a Deputy Party Secretary at COSVN where he specialized in proselyting activities. He was believed to be among those cadres who were secretly elected to the Central Committee in 1960 and were chosen to help reactivate COSVN in 1961. (See footnote 4) As Vo Chi Cong, he has officially represented the PRP in the NLF Presidium of which he has been a Vice Chairman.⁸ He was reportedly Party Secretary of Military Region (MR) V until August 1966 when he returned to the North for medical treatment. He was last mentioned by NLF news media in November 1966. According to one report he was seen in Phu Yen province (SVN) in 1968.

Maj. General Tran Do, an alternate member of the Central Committee, was Deputy Political Officer of the PLAF at COSVN. ~~He was reportedly killed on February 11, 1968 during the Tet attack on Saigon.~~ According to a recent capture document, Do was replaced by Le-Ghan, former Political Officer of the Ninth Division.

Nguyen Van Xe, has been a COSVN finance and economics specialist, but in 1967 was reported to be in Hanoi for medical treatment. He has been temporarily replaced by Nguyen Van Buong, a former Party Secretary of MR 3 (SVN), who was

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a. In September 1968 "Tran Nam TRUNG" was mentioned by Radio Liberation as representing the PRP at a meeting of the NLF Presidium.

b. Several sources have indicated that Tran Do is still alive. *Overheard*

reported in 1967 to be in charge of COSVN rear (logistical) services. He, along with Nguyen Van Cuc, Vo Chi Cong, and Le Van Kiet (or Nguyen Van Kiet), was (according to one source) secretly elected to the Central Committee during the Third Party Congress in September 1960. (See footnote 4). These four were also chosen to help reactivate COSVN in 1961, Le Van Kiet later, according to some reports, became Chief of the Special Zone or MR 4 (Saigon-Gia Dinh) Party Committee. Tran Van Quang was another cadre who helped reactive COSVN. He was the LAF Executive Officer before returning to the North sometime after 1964 and later commanded MR IV in the North. According to some sources he also held the "Tran Nam Trung" position, but it is not clear when, if at all.

Four North Vietnamese Army generals have recently been reported holding other positions in or subordinate to COSVN. They are: Le Duc Anh, COSVN Chief of Staff; Le Trong Tan, PLAF Executive Officer; To Ky, Commander of Military Region (MR) 1 (north and east of Saigon); and Dong Van Cong, Commander of MR 3 (the southern half of the Mekong Delta). Another NVA general, Maj. Gen. Ha Ke Tan, an alternate member of the Central Committee, has been reported as being a member of the COSVN Military Affairs Committee, but it is not certain whether or not he is still in the South.

The B-3 Front
Military Region V (and the Tri-Thien-Hue Military Region)

The B-3 Front
 The extent to which COSVN controls the northern half of South Viet-Nam, the former Trung-Bo area now MR V and the Tri-Thien-Hue MR, is by no means clear, but evidence indicates that this area enjoys a certain autonomy, and to some extent - perhaps to a large extent - comes directly under the North Vietnamese Army High Command, principally for geographic reasons. COSVN probably exercises a certain degree of political control and certainly maintains close liaison with the area's political-military command structure to ensure uniformity of policy and procedures.

According to one authority: "Recent documents have been captured directed by COSVN to all of the Regions of South Viet-Nam, and a recent directive from Military Region 5 Headquarters was prefaced 'policy ... as prescribed by the Central Political Staff Department [of the NVA High Command] and R [COSVN]'; attached to the document was a dissemination copy of a COSVN directive on the same subject being sent to all subordinate units. Colonel Dac summarized the Military Region 5 position by stating that 'it reports directly to North Viet-Nam and maintains relations with COSVN.'" The present relationship would now seem, in some ways, to be similar to the pre-1961 Trung-Bo and Nam-Bo Party Committees arrangement. Complete COSVN control of all of South Viet-Nam probably proved to be infeasible in the face of the U.S. military build-up.

The case of the Tri-Thien-Hue MR, which is comprised of South Viet-Nam's two northernmost provinces, Quang Tri and Thua Thien, is somewhat different. Formerly a part of MR V, these two provinces were organized as a separate "Tri-Thien-Hue" Military Region in June 1966. There is now evidence that this region was, in effect, joined to Military Region IV which includes the southern "panhandle" part of North Viet-Nam. There was at least historical