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# THE PRG: VIET CONG-STYLE GOVERNMENT

SEA 7010/72

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## Communist Need for a Shadow Government

Another dimension was added to the already complex Communist infrastructure in the South when the Viet Cong's Liberation Radio announced in June 1969 the formation of the so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG). It was obvious at the outset that the PRG was designed to serve a number of motives. Firstly, it represented the culmination of the NFLSV's effort to create an alternative apparatus to the Thieu Government. It will be noted in this respect that prior to the announcement, the VC had publicized the establishment of local "revolutionary" administrations in hamlets, villages, districts and provinces claimed to be under Communist control. Secondly, the PRG was devised as a means of rallying the support of wavering elements within the NFLSV who had been disillusioned by long years of hardship. It was hoped that with the war stalemated, the appearance of a so-called provisional revolutionary government would convince these wavering elements that Communist victory was near at hand. Thirdly, it was apparently hoped that the establishment of the PRG, apart from enhancing Communist prestige internally and externally, would provide the NFLSV with a legitimate basis for the Front's demand for equal status with the Saigon Government in any negotiated political arrangement. This motive has been quite evident in the Viet Cong's persistent call for the establishment of a coalition government—one that would include the NFLSV as a principal participant but would exclude the present South Vietnamese leadership. In a more definitive tone, the VC have lately asserted that the solution to the Vietnam conflict must proceed from the realization "that there exist in South Vietnam two administrations [the legitimate Government and the PRG], two armies [the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and the VC], and other political forces".

## Preparations for the Formation of the PRG

The formation of the PRG was not a sudden happening; it involved a long and meticulous Communist preparation. As early as 1964,

attempts were made to organize "government-style rural administrative committees" in the South Vietnamese countryside following a succession of VC military victories. No doubt, the move was inspired by the success of the Communist strategy towards the end of the Indo-China war with France. Prior to the conclusion of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, the Viet Minh also moved to consolidate its control of the countryside by organizing Liberation Committees designed to seize power from the French. Thus, when the French started evacuating the country the Viet Minh already had the basic Communist apparatus to perform the functions of government.

However, as military activities intensified in the South by mid-1966, the effort to establish "government-style rural administrative councils and committees" was completely abandoned. A captured COSVN directive issued in August 1966 admitted that "in practice, there is no such government-style administration in higher echelons, so it is very difficult for the administrative councils and committees to operate. If we know how to operate the sections and associations, it is not necessary to set up the administrative councils and committees, and the organization of the basic revolutionary machinery will not be complicated". The document further directed local Communist groups "to ignore the administrative councils and committees already set up, then dissolve them when they finish their terms."

A year and a half later, as the VC achieved some military victories during their Tet offensive, COSVN reversed its policy, this time asserting that local government bodies were necessary not only to consolidate the territorial gains, but also to help in preparing future revolutionary campaigns. A captured document stated that another reason for establishing a network of local councils was eventually to "establish a coalition government at the top". It recognized the fact that state power cannot be established without building up its base in the hamlet and village levels.

In keeping with the new COSVN policy, local Communist groups were instructed to organize village congresses which would elect People's Liberation Councils (PLC) composed of 15 to 35 members. The PLC in turn would set up Village Liberation Committees (VLC) composed of five to seven members, who would be responsible for running the affairs of the village. Their specific areas of responsibility include general and military affairs, security, economic and financial

affairs, information and culture, education, public health and social welfare. The VLC would also appoint hamlet administrators.

A major attempt to implement the new COSVN directive was believed to have been started in April 1968. From May until the end of that year, Vietnamese Communist media, including Radio Hanoi, made numerous broadcasts claiming that increasing numbers of these local administrative bodies had been organized in various areas, and that "great social and economic advances had been achieved" by many of them.

Following the formation of the village government-style bodies, the organizational set-up was soon expanded to include district, provincial and regional liberation councils and committees.

At about the same time that these local administrative bodies were being organized, COSVN was busy laying the groundwork for the formation of yet another front, the VANDPF, conceived to be a co-instigator of the NFLSV in establishing the PRG. In April 1968 the VANDPF was formed, its Central Committee elected and its programme of action—which was substantially identical with that of the NFLSV—publicized.

All attempts were again made to portray the VANDPF as an indigenous South Vietnamese movement and as an independent organization, distinct and separate from the NFLSV. The VANDPF, according to its programme, "advocates contacts and debates with the NFLSV in order to co-operate with it in regaining national independence, restoring peace, building the country and bringing a free and happy life to the entire people". It went on to suggest that such contacts would lead to an enlarged democratic national coalition government composed of representatives of all strata, nationalities, religious and political groups, progressive political parties and patriotic notables. For its part the NFLSV declared its readiness to co-operate with the VANDPF and publicized the latter's attitude towards the formation of a coalition government.

In the following months, the fiction that the VANDPF was a separate organization from the NFLSV and was therefore non-Communist, was given publicity by all VC and Hanoi media. This was apparently intended not only to win support for the VANDPF from those sectors of the population who had started to get a clearer understanding of the NFLSV's ideological orientation but, more importantly, also to pave

the way for the formation of a "government" that would have all the trappings of a "genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people".

All these machinations assumed concrete form on 23 May 1969 when a consultative conference between the delegations representing the Central Committees of the NFLSV and VANDPF was held. During that conference, according to a delayed VC Liberation Radio report made on 10 June, there was "complete unanimity of views" between the two delegations on the need to form a Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam "to push up the South Vietnamese people's struggle for national salvation toward complete victory." On the same day that the report about the conference was publicized, Liberation Radio also announced that the PRG had in fact been formed at a "Congress of National Delegates of South Vietnam" convened from 6 to 8 June "in a locality in the liberated area".

## **The PRG Constitution**

The documents produced by the founding congress make up what the VC call the "Basic Resolution of the Congress of National Delegates of South Vietnam". This "Basic Resolution", in effect, serves as the constitution of the PRG.

The introductory part of the "Basic Resolution", resembling the preamble of any typical constitution, contains a polemical justification for the formation of the PRG and its role in the "inevitably victorious resistance against US imperialism". Quite significantly, it does not contain any vitriolic remarks about the Thieu Government which is usually given ample space in other NFLSV documents. Apparently, the intention is to keep open the possibility of reconciliation with some of the Government leaders and thereby boost the PRG's political image.

The substantive part of the "Basic Resolution" asserts that the PRG is the government of South Vietnam. However, in another portion of the document, it is indicated that the PRG is not expected to take actual political power in South Vietnam itself, but will somewhat supplant the NFLSV as the core around which a provisional coalition government would be organized. It says that the PRG is "an organization possessing the most concentrated power and representing the will and aspirations of all the South Vietnamese people to vigorously lead the resistance toward victory and create conditions for the formation of a provisional coalition government in order to organize free general elec-

tions, elect the National Assembly, promulgate the constitution, and designate the South Vietnam official government".

## **PRG Policies and General Responsibilities**

The "Basic Resolution" outlines in general terms the PRG's domestic and foreign policies, which are couched in language calculated to gain the widest possible domestic and international support, but which unmistakably are repetitions—both in form and in substance—of the NFLSV's own policies.

The documents says that the PRG's domestic policy "is aimed at uniting all people irrespective of social strata, religion, nationality, political tendencies, or their past provided that they approve peace, independence and neutrality". Towards this end, the PRG commits itself "to protect the national sovereignty, to insure democratic freedoms, to respect the freedom of faith, to achieve equality among nationalities, to implement agrarian policies, to develop production and industrial and commercial activities, to accelerate the educational, medical, cultural, and social tasks in order to constantly improve the material and spiritual life of the people . . ."

In the international field, the PRG professes to implement a "peaceful and neutral foreign policy". It purports to seek diplomatic relations with all countries "regardless of political and social regimes, in accordance with the five principles of peaceful co-existence".\* As in the NFLSV programme, the "Basic Resolution" specifically mentions Cambodia and Laos as the two countries with which the PRG intends to develop "good neighbour" relations. At least by implication, this specific reference shows the PRG's subservience to Hanoi, which had tried hard to get the then Cambodian Head of State Norodom Sihanouk and the Laotian leaders into tolerating the presence and the activities of Vietnamese Communist troops in their sanctuary areas in

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\* This is a reference to the principles jointly enunciated by Premier Chou En-lai of the People's Republic of China and the late Prime Minister Nehru of India in a declaration issued on 28 June 1954. The five principles comprise mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence.

Cambodia and Laos. Apparently, it was hoped that the PRG, having been portrayed as an indigenous southern movement, would achieve some success in placating the Cambodian and Laotian leaders, who had publicly denounced in strong terms the intrusion of Communist troops into their respective countries. This ploy has apparently failed, and until now the present regimes in the two countries continue to demand the withdrawal of the NVA-VC troops from their respective territories.

To ensure that the PRG could function effectively, the founding congress entrusted it with "full power" to direct and solve all domestic and foreign problems of the country. It was assigned a list of tasks, all focused on the Communist effort to seize political and military power in South Vietnam. According to the "Basic Resolution":

"The PRG has the duty to mobilize and lead all people and armed forces, to lead the People's Revolutionary Committees\* of all echelons and ministries, to strive to develop the victories obtained, to step up the general offensive and up-rising movements in co-ordination with diplomatic struggle, and to continuously develop the resistance forces in all aspects to defeat the US imperialists' aggressive policy, topple the reactionary puppet administration, force the Americans to end the aggressive war and withdraw all US and satellite troops from South Vietnam, and to achieve the objectives of independence, democracy, peace and neutrality, proceeding toward national reunification."

In the performance of the above tasks, the PRG was also empowered by the founding congress "to promulgate laws, decrees, instructions and circular", which must be based, however, on the political programmes of the NFLSV and the VANDPF.

### **PRG Organizational Structure**

The "Basic Resolution" states that the PRG "is organized according to the principle of centralized democracy [a fundamental Communist organizational tenet] from central level to basic units."

At the national level, the PRG comprises a Chairman, three Vice-

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\* *This is a reference to the various local administrative bodies formed by the NFLSV in preparation for the eventual establishment of the PRG.*

Chairmen and the following Ministries: Defence; Foreign Affairs; Interior; Economy and Finance; Information and Culture; Education and Youth; Public Health, Social Action and Disabled Soldiers; and Justice. All Ministries are headed by Ministers, who are assisted in their work by Vice-Ministers.

In addition, there is a Secretariat attached to the Chairman's Office, also headed by a Minister, assisted by a Vice-Minister.

The PRG "Cabinet" is assisted by an Advisory Council consisting of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and 11 members, who, according to the "Basic Resolution", must represent "the NFLSV, the VANDPF, political parties, people's organizations, religious communities, ethnic minorities, political forces, and notables and intellectuals struggling for peace, independence, and neutrality in South Vietnam". It is the duty of this Council "to join ideas with the PRG in setting forth stands, adopting domestic and foreign policies, and in promulgating, completing, and revising laws, decrees, instructions and circulars of the government".

This organizational pattern is supposed to be followed in the lower echelons down to the hamlet level in Communist-controlled areas. However, for obvious reasons, this has not been done. Since this elaborate governmental structure requires a certain degree of permanency, it is not practical for the PRG to fill up all the positions in the local organs established in areas liable to be recaptured by the Government. Moreover, there is a dearth of capable and disciplined cadres who are considered qualified for the local offices. Thus, in most cases the local administrative machineries are made up of only six members, including one Chairman, one Vice-Chairman, one Secretary, a Security Officer, a Finance and Supply Officer and somebody responsible for health and medical problems. If feasible and when necessary, the list sometimes includes a Propaganda Officer.

### **PRG National Leadership**

The national leadership\* of the PRG is heavily drawn from the NFLSV, obviously to ensure the Front's control over the activities of the "government". Nine PRG "Cabinet" officials also hold important posts in the NFLSV Central Committee, including the PRG Chairman Huynh Tan Phat, Vice-Chairman and Minister of Interior Phung Van

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\* See Annex B for complete list of PRG officials.

Cung, Minister to the Chairman's Office Tran Buu Kiem, Defence Minister Tran Nam Trung and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh. The remaining four officials occupy vice-ministerial posts. Four of the less important ministries are occupied by VANDPF members, in an apparent attempt to keep the fiction that the PRG is not an exclusive NFLSV affair. As part of this effort, six of the 13-man Advisory Council also come from the VANDPF. This representation, however, does not really mean much since the Council is apparently not entrusted with any definite responsibility. Moreover, the Council's Chairman is Nguyen Huu Tho, who is also Presidium Chairman of the NFLSV Central Committee.

The key link between the VWP and the PRG is believed to be Defence Minister Tran Nam Trung. As stated earlier (NFLSV Organization and Leadership), it is almost certain that Tran Nam Trung is in fact Lt. Gen. Tran Van Tra, who is an alternate member of the VWP Central Committee.

### **The Image-Building Effort of the PRG**

Since its formation, the PRG has engaged mainly in propaganda designed to expand its domestic base and to obtain international recognition as the "true representative of the South Vietnamese people".

The responsibility for the major part of this propaganda effort falls on the VC's Liberation Radio and the Liberation Press Agency, with assistance being provided by Radio Hanoi, the [North] Vietnam News Agency, Radio Peking and the New China News Agency. Moscow publicity media also provide assistance, although in most cases they publicize only issues affecting the PRG's international posture.

Much of the PRG's domestic propaganda are carried out through what the VC refer to as "revolutionary" papers being published in "liberated" areas. Most of them are in Vietnamese, but some appear in the Jarai, Ede, and Khmer dialects. They do not carry political articles only; some have religious stories and poetry. Other propaganda media include news sheets, magazines, "information houses", and bulletins pasted on walls and trees. Apart from these publications, the PRG makes extensive use of public meetings to spread out its propaganda to a bigger audience. The PRG also boasts of film-making facilities, and occasionally produces something claimed to have been made in South Vietnam.

The basic themes of PRG propaganda are its claims that the



Viet Cong "government" is the "legitimate, genuine, representative of the South Vietnamese people" and that it is engaged in a "patriotic struggle to liberate the South for eventual reunification with the North". The first of these themes, however, appears to have lately lost its significance even from the viewpoint of the Vietnamese Communists themselves, who are now basing their demand for "rightful representation" in the Saigon Government on what they claim as a "realization that there exist two administrations [the legitimate Government and the PRG] in South Vietnam". At least by implication, the present VC negotiating posture shows the failure of their attempts to establish a base for their so-called government.

The publicity treatment for the second basic theme, i.e., the PRG's professed mission to work for the "liberation" of the South, has not been reduced in scope and extent in spite of the apparent failure of the NVA-VC 1972 spring offensive to accomplish its military and political goals. Also, despite the recent international moves towards a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam conflict, the PRG and the NFLSV continue to call for an intensification of the "anti-imperialist" struggle.

In this connexion the PRG has exploited a number of propaganda sub-themes, including the following: alleged VC battlefield successes; constant calls for a general uprising; claims of desertions from the Government armed forces; worldwide support for the PRG and the NFLSV; progress reportedly achieved in "liberated areas" of South Vietnam; PRG policy of "peace, independence and neutrality"; the alleged "failures of US-puppet pacification and Vietnamization programmes".

### **The PRG "Diplomacy"**

In contrast to the domestic propaganda effort, which has apparently failed to achieve substantial gains, the PRG's diplomatic campaign has yielded some positive results, mainly in the form of "recognition" extended by socialist countries and a host of so-called neutral Afro-Asian nations.

Even long before the formation of the PRG, the Vietnamese Communist machinery for international image-building had already been well-established. The NFLSV had previously launched a vigorous programme under which hundreds of delegations were sent abroad annually for political, technical, cultural, or social visits or to attend various

conferences sponsored by socialist countries, foreign Communist parties and by Communist front organizations. It had also succeeded in establishing what it called as its "permanent missions" in not less than 17 foreign capitals.\* Thus, when the PRG was established, it was relatively easy for it to gain acceptance in those countries with which the NFLSV had established formal or informal contacts.

Another factor that had helped in boosting the PRG's effort to gain acceptance abroad was the almost immediate publicity support and assistance that it received from Communist countries. Some countries which profess to be neutral in their international affairs, but are apparently against the Free World in their political outlook, also provided moral support for the PRG.

At the time of writing, the PRG has been recognized by 30 countries—or 31, if the recognition extended by Cambodia during the Sihanouk rule is counted\*\*—as well as by the "liberation" movements of the Pathet Lao and the Peking-based National United Front of Kampuchea. It has established diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level with most of these countries, including Albania, Algeria, Arab Republic of Egypt, Bulgaria, Chile, Communist China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Mali, Mongolia, North Korea, Poland, Rumania, Uganda, USSR and Yugoslavia. In keeping with the PRG's avowed mission of working for the eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam, the PRG has not established an embassy in North Vietnam; it has, instead, a "permanent representation" in Hanoi. In addition to the embassies, the PRG has also established information

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\* These included Algiers, Bucharest, Budapest, Cairo, Djakarta, East Berlin, Hanoi, Havana, Moscow, Peking, Phnom Penh, Prague, Pyongyang, Sofia, Tirana, Ulan Bator and Warsaw.

\*\* These countries include Albania, Algeria, Arab Republic of Egypt, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Chile, Communist China, Congo (Brazzaville), Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea (Republic), Hungary, Iraq, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, North Korea, North Vietnam, Poland, Rumania, Somalia, South Yemen, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda, USSR and Yugoslavia.

*The present Khmer Republic recognizes the Republic of [South] Vietnam.*

offices in France, Denmark, Ireland, Norway and Sweden. It has a PRG "representative" of uncertain status in Finland, and has maintained unofficial contacts in Peru and the Netherlands. In August 1972, the PRG scored what the Communists consider as a major diplomatic victory by gaining membership in the so-called Non-Aligned Nations Conference held in Georgetown, Guyana.

What may perhaps be considered as a set-back in the PRG's diplomatic campaign was the decision of the Indonesian Government, which had recognized the NFLSV and consequently allowed the latter to establish a "permanent mission" in Djakarta, not to recognize the Viet Cong "government". Another set-back was the Lon Nol Government's decision, following the deposition of Sihanouk as Cambodia's Head of State, to sever diplomatic relations with the PRG and to restore relations with the Saigon Government.