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THE VIET CONG POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE
IN
SOUTH VIETNAM

[A SEATO Short Paper - 55]

(This paper is based on information available up to 31 October 1972)

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM

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PREFACE

Scope

This Short Paper discusses the Viet Cong's political infrastructure, centred on the so-called National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) and its affiliate and subsidiary organizations. For a better understanding of the nature of the NFLSV, the Paper includes a discussion of the Front's origin and development, the extent of Hanoi's control over it, its policies, objectives, organizational structure and leadership and some aspects of Vietnamese Communist tactics. To limit its scope, this Short Paper does not cover extensively the Viet Cong's military organization. Anyway, compared to the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong play only a minor role in the prosecution of the war in South Vietnam.

Aim

Although the NFLSV has apparently lost much of its significance in the light of current developments, a study of its nature and political orientation, as well as its growth and development, remains relevant in the day-to-day assessment of Communist subversion and insurgency in South-East Asia, particularly in Indo-China where the other "liberation" movements follow the NFLSV pattern. It is felt that the NFLSV provides an object-lesson in the use of united front tactics to achieve Communist goals in the region.

Sources and Date of Information

In order that this Short Paper may be available to a wide range of users, both official and non-official, only overt sources of information have been used.

The "cut-off date" of information is 31 October 1972.

THE FORMATIVE STAGE OF THE NFLSV

Preparations for a United Front in South Vietnam

In line with the Marxist-Leninist principle that a "national united front" is indispensable for the success of any Communist movement, particularly in a non-Communist territory or in any country where the existence of Communist groups is illegal, the Democratic Republic of [North] Vietnam (DRV) had long prepared for the formation of one such organization that could be Hanoi's primary instrument for the prosecution of the so-called "war of national liberation" in the South.

The preparations for the establishment of a united front gained momentum in the period following the conclusion of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indo-China. At that time, most of the Viet Minh* political and administrative cadres who had been actively involved in the struggle for Vietnam's independence had remained in the South, thus keeping intact the Viet Minh organization in that region.

Initially, these cadres were engaged in organizational and propaganda work operating through a network of cells scattered in many parts of South Vietnam, particularly near the Laotian and Cambodian frontiers and in the southern delta region. Rejoined later on by small North Vietnamese military groups who were reinfilitrated into the South, the Viet Cong (VC—Vietnamese Communists in the South) expanded their activities to include a systematic campaign of terror and violence aimed at discrediting the Government in the South. Early assassination targets included the civilian population, Buddhist and Catholic clergymen, police and local administration officials. In villages where they lived and worked, the VC cadres were active in recruiting followers, collecting taxes, conducting intensive political activities, carrying on vil-

* The Viet Minh or the Vietnam Independence League was formed by the Vietnamese Communists in May 1941 at the eighth meeting of the Central Committee of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party convened by Ho Chi Minh in Kwangsi Province, South China.

large-wide indoctrination sessions and organizing sabotage teams among the population. Capitalizing on the blunders and administrative weaknesses of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, the Communists were able further to undermine the credibility of the Saigon Government and to win broader support from the people. This enabled them to establish some sort of political system in several areas in South Vietnam. From then on expansion was relatively easy.

Hanoi's Directive to Form the NFLSV

By 1960, the Hanoi leadership felt that the opportunity had come to form a united front in South Vietnam. It was the official line in Hanoi that North Vietnam had a special responsibility in South Vietnam. Such a responsibility was revealed in the most unequivocal terms by Le Duan, First Secretary and Politburo Member of the [North] Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP) Central Committee, in his political report to the Third National Party Congress held in Hanoi in September 1960. In that report, Le Duan assigned to the VWP the "two strategic tasks of carrying out a socialist revolution in North Vietnam and . . . of realizing the tasks of the national people's democratic revolution, by eradicating the colonial and semi-feudal regime in South Vietnam and realizing national reunification". He added that "these two tasks are closely connected, exert mutual influence upon each other, and stimulate each other's development (and) . . . have the common goal of achieving the peaceful reunification of the country". Describing the North as "the common revolutionary base of the whole country", Le Duan called on the South Vietnamese people, "under the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist party [VWP] and the working class to endeavour to build a worker-peasant-army coalition bloc and set up a broad national front against the US Diem clique on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance".

Le Duan gave an outline of what the united front was expected to accomplish. He said:

"This front must be able to unite all patriotic classes and strata, the delta and minority peoples, all patriotic parties and religions, and all those who have anti-US-Diem tendencies . . . The activities of the front must be extremely varied in order to unite all forces that can be united and win over all the forces that can be won over, neutralize the forces

that must be neutralized, and draw the masses of the people into the common struggle . . ."

He also expressed the hope that this "revolutionary movement" in the South "would create favourable conditions for the peaceful reunification of the country".

Formation of NFLSV and its Immediate Tasks

In compliance with Hanoi's directives, the Viet Minh elements in South Vietnam lost no time in forming a united front which could best serve their purposes. Three months after the third VWP Congress, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) was formed. A manifesto issued in connexion with its formation was a virtual paraphrase of Le Duan's political report and NFLSV became the political arm of the VC.

According to Communist sources, the NFLSV was established on 20 December 1960 during a "conference of representatives of various forces opposing the fascist regime in South Vietnam". In the manifesto referred to above, the NFLSV was given the task of uniting "all sections of the people, all social classes, nationalities, political parties, organizations, religious communities, and patriotic personalities, without distinction of their political tendencies, in order to struggle and overthrow the rule of the US imperialists and the ruling clique in South Vietnam, and achieve independence, democracy, peace, and neutrality for the attainment of the peaceful reunification of the country". Elaborating on this task, the manifesto also carried a ten-point programme of action, which was essentially a reiteration of Hanoi's plan for the eventual reunification of the North and the South under Communist terms.

All attempts were made by the DRV to portray the NFLSV as an "indigenous southern movement", apparently hoping to conceal Hanoi's role in the formation of the new front organization. For instance, it was not until 29 January 1961—more than a month after the announced date of NFLSV formation—that the [North] Vietnam News Agency (VNA) made the first reference to the formation of the Front. In referring to the formation of the NFLSV, VNA tried to give the impression that it was not the original source of information as it attributed its sources to some foreign media in Saigon and in Phnom Penh. Despite all these initial subterfuges, however, evidence gathered through the years has conclusively proved that the NFLSV was in fact formed and directed by the VWP.

The VWP, the NFLSV, and the VPRP

Despite the apparent link between the VWP and the NFLSV, the Vietnamese Communists tried all means to avoid giving a Communist label to any of the Front's activities. Thus, the VWP-DRV media, while publicizing the "revolutionary activities" of the NFLSV, were always careful to emphasize that they were done "under the banner of the NFLSV". However, it soon became apparent that it was extremely difficult for Hanoi to continue perpetuating this fiction, while at the same time trying to exercise effective control over the NFLSV, which was then showing tendencies to be more independent in its military and political activities. The DRV needed another organization in the South through which the VWP could ensure direct and effective control over the NFLSV. Thus, on 18 January 1962, Radio Hanoi announced the formation on 1 January 1962 of the so-called Vietnam People's Revolutionary Party (VPRP), which was later to emerge as nothing but a VWP branch in South Vietnam.

The VPRP was initially described by Communist sources as "a representative of the Marxist-Leninists in South Vietnam", a thinly-disguised attempt to avoid calling them "Communists". Claiming to be the "vanguard group" in the struggle to overthrow the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, the VPRP immediately endorsed the NFLSV manifesto and programme of action and "volunteered to become a faithful member-organization" of the NFLSV. It was apparently hoped that this announced affiliation of the VPRP to the NFLSV would serve to justify to the outside world the presence of "Marxist-Leninists" in the Front and at the same time project the idea that the VPRP--being just one of the thirty-odd organizations in the NFLSV--could not possibly constitute a dominant faction in the Front. This proved to be a futile Communist scheme, however, as more evidence was gathered in later months showing the real intentions and motivations of the VWP in the formation of the VPRP. A VWP document dated 7 December 1961 and captured in May 1962 in Ba Xuyen Province (south-west of Saigon) by South Vietnamese Government troops was quite explicit on the real status of the VPRP. It stated:

"In regard to the foundation of the VPRP of South Vietnam, the creation of this Party is only a matter of strategy . . . To deceive the enemy it is necessary that the new Party be given the outward appearance of the division of the Party [VWP] into two and the formation of a new Party

so that the enemy cannot use it in the propaganda . . . The VPRP has only the appearance of an independent existence. Actually our Party is nothing but the VWP, unified from North to South under the direction of the Central Committee of the Party [VWP], the chief of which is President Ho."

Another captured document, a communique of the VWP Central Committee addressed to the NFLSV militants in January 1962, further revealed that the VPRP was created not merely to represent the Marxist-Leninists in the Front, but actually to assume control of the NFLSV. The communique said:

"For over six years, the members of the VWP have worked in the South and have struggled against the US-Diem regime. The revolutionary movement has become stronger and has developed, but it continues to lack organization and leadership . . . For these reasons, it is necessary that the revolution be placed under a unified leadership system. Only in this way can the revolution be stepped up. The VPRP was created to ensure proper leadership to the revolution . . . The Party is always empowered to take the immediate situation into consideration. The Party is the highest organization. It is responsible for all the other organizations, associations for liberations, and for those which will overthrow the old regime for the benefit of the new. The Party is the sovereign organization."

An unusually frank article written by a certain Hong Vu in the VWP's theoretical journal Hoc Tap of January 1966, entitled "The VPRP and its Historic Mission of Liberating the South", gave further clear indications on the real relationship between the VPRP and the NFLSV. The article emphasized the importance of the role played by Communists in organizing and sustaining the revolution in the South, saying that "the partisans of Marxism-Leninism are in fact the soul of the NFLSV and the centre of unity of the southern people". It went on to explain:

"The experiences of the world and our country's revolutions have shown that in order to win the greatest success . . . the revolution must be led by a workers' revolutionary party . . . The VPRP assumed the historic role of vanguard

body to the southern revolution. At the same time, it volunteered to become a faithful member of the NFLSV. The Party has cleverly associated its revolutionary line with the revolutionary eagerness of the masses."

HANOI'S ORGANIZATION OF CONTROL IN THE SOUTH

The Central Office for South Vietnam

Hanoi's supervision and control of Communist activities in the South is exercised through the so-called Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN). Originally, this office was immediately responsible to the "Reunification Board" of the VWP Central Committee, but from the latest information available, it appears that COSVN has established a more direct access to the VWP Politburo.

Through such devices as interlocking organizations and concurrent assignments, the COSVN directs and supervises the VPRP, the NFLSV and its affiliated organizations, including the Viet Cong-style government (PRG--Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam) and the South Vietnam People's Liberation Armed Forces (SVPLAF). Major policy decisions on such matters as bloc relations, diplomatic and international affairs, general war strategy and, possibly, the peace negotiations are adopted by the northern-based VWP Central Committee or by its Politburo. These are then transmitted to COSVN, which in turn issue them in its own name to every NFLSV post in the zones, inter-zones, districts, villages and hamlets. The NFLSV provides the necessary united-front facade and the channel for communications with the other elements in the infrastructure.

The Evolution of COSVN

The COSVN is not a new organizational tool of Hanoi in South Vietnam. For administrative and control purposes, the whole of Vietnam was divided by the Communists during the Viet Minh period into six inter-regions, with South Vietnam being covered by Inter-region V (Southern Trung Bo) and Inter-region VI (Nam Bo). Following the re-emergence in 1951 of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party under its present title (the VWP), the Nam Bo Inter-regional Committee was dissolved and replaced by COSVN. COSVN was then directed by a six-man Party Committee composed of Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung, Ha

Huy Giap, Ung Van Khiem and a certain Thuong Vu.* After the signing of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Indo-China, the COSVN was dissolved, thus leaving the control of Communist activities again in the hands of the old inter-regional committees. VWP activities in the South at the time were mainly in the form of overt political struggle.

The decision to reactivate the COSVN was apparently reached during the Third National Party Congress held in Hanoi in 1960, at about the same time that the DRV leaders were formalizing the idea of a broader united front in the South. This Congress was believed to have secretly elected to its Central Committee several South Vietnamese hailing from the central and southern parts of the country who were subsequently assigned in South Vietnam reportedly with instructions to reorganize the COSVN. However, it was not until 1961, after the NFLSV was formed, that evidence regarding the Party's decision to reactivate the COSVN started to surface. For example, Article 24 of the VWP Regulations published in Hanoi in 1961 stated that beside the other VWP organs created to deal with Communist activities in the South, "the Central Executive Committee [The Politburo] may appoint a number of Central Committee Members to establish a Central Office (or offices) whose responsibility is to provide guidance to Party work in particularly important Party decisions. The Central Office is placed under the leadership of the Central Executive Committee". Thus, COSVN was reinstituted in 1961 to provide direction to the NFLSV and the VPRP, which was formed a year later.

COSVN's Top-Level Organization

Hanoi's control of the Communist apparatus in the South is evident not only in COSVN's evolution but also in its organizational structure, its links with the VPRP and NFLSV, and the composition of its staff.

In theory, the VPRP Congress—the Party being the southern branch of the VWP—is at the apex of the Communist infrastructure in the South. This body is supposed to elect the VPRP Central Committee, which is required to meet once every six months to formulate

* All of them, except Thuong Vu whose identity has never been adequately established, are all active in the VWP. Le Duan, Le Duc Tho and Pham Hung are Members of both the Party Central Committee and the Politburo. The other two are Central Committee Members.

specific policy guidelines. Evidence gathered through the years shows that this Central Committee is in fact the COSVN, composed of some 30 to 40 members. Within the Central Committee is an inner body called the Current Affairs Committee (sometimes referred to as the Standing Committee), which is the equivalent of a Politburo or Secretariat in the Communist party system. Exercising the day-to-day supervision over Communist political and military activities in South Vietnam and comprising the ten most powerful COSVN members, this Committee is considered to be the highest, actual authority on Communist affairs in the South. Indeed, the Current Affairs Committee serves as the crucial link between the VWP and the COSVN since all members of the Committee also hold key positions in the VWP hierarchy, most of them being either Full or Alternate Members of the Party's Central Committee or the Politburo or both. Under this set-up and considering that the VPRP is regarded as the "sovereign and vanguard" organization within the NFLSV, Hanoi's control over the NFLSV is thus fully established.

Functional Sections of COSVN

Subordinate to the Current Affairs Committee are the various functional sections which advise the former and oversee the implementation of relevant policies. The main sections include the following:

- a) The Organization Section—This section handles all administrative matters relating to civilian political cadres of COSVN. It is also concerned with problems of recruitment and assignment of personnel at higher levels.
- b) The Propaganda, Culture, and Indoctrination Section—Sometimes called the Propaganda and Training Section, it supervises the entire propaganda operations of the VC. As such, it is responsible for the smooth operation of the main VC propaganda media, namely the Liberation Press Agency and the Liberation Radio, and the issuance of all other Communist publications and periodicals. It also supervises the training of cadres to be assigned to indoctrination duties, particularly in the fields of mass motivation and political agitation.
- c) Finance and Economy Section—According to captured documents, this section is in charge of preparing the COSVN budget, establishing tax rates and quotas for use in each region, detailing to subordinate units the tax collection methods and

accounting procedures that should be employed and establishing rules on fund expenditures.

- d) Security Section—This section administers VC intelligence and counter-intelligence, performs police functions such as the maintenance of public order through criminal prosecution and provides security in general for the COSVN area. It also operates a detention camp. Most of the cadres handling these jobs are trained in North Vietnam and their selection is reportedly controlled by the DRV Ministry of Public Security.
- e) The Civilian Proselytizing Section—It supervises the recruitment of civilian personnel for assignment in organizations connected with COSVN and the NFLSV. It also seeks to infiltrate non-Communist groups.
- f) The Military Proselytizing Section—It has the responsibility of motivating Government forces to defect to the VC or to work for the Communists as fifth columnists or agents.

Apart from these functional sections, COSVN has established a so-called Front Committee, which from all indications is the most important working unit that maintains liaison with, and control over, the NFLSV and its affiliated mass organizations. It is reported that Maj. Gen. Tran Luong (alias Hai Hau), a Member of the VWP Central Committee and of COSVN's Current Affairs Committee, is the Chairman of this Committee.* The other known members of the Committee are Nguyen Huu Tho, Presidium Chairman of the NFLSV Central Committee and Chairman of the PRG Advisory Council, and Nguyen Huu The, a Presidium Member of the NFLSV.

The Military Administration

COSVN's control over military affairs is exercised through the Military Affairs Committee. This is separate from the civil functional sections described above, but is still subordinate to the COSVN's Current Affairs Committee. Originally, this was just a semi-political body resolving major problems of military policy, distinct from operational details. By 1965, however, as VC military operations intensified,

* He was known to have led COSVN's Military Affairs Committee from 1962-63 and was therefore the first to use the alias Tran Nam Trung which goes with the job.

the need for a military command arose. The Committee was therefore transformed to handle both strategic and combat tasks and is now serving as COSVN's military command and as the Headquarters of the SVPLAF. Through COSVN, it receives its orders on military matters from the VWP Politburo or from the [North] Vietnam People's Army (VPA) High Command. On occasions, it may also communicate directly with the VPA.

The Committee is divided into three major staff departments, namely the General, Political and the Rear Services Staff Departments. The General Staff Department is responsible for the organization, administration and development of military activities. It maintains sections for operations, military intelligence, signal and communications, engineering, military training, administration and correspondence, chemical operations and for the militia.

The Political Staff Department provides guidance on all VWP policies, maintains records of all Party members serving in the military, supervises education, indoctrination and self-criticism and handles problems of discipline and morale.

The Rear Services Staff Department provides logistical support to the SVPLAF.

COSVN's Leadership

The identification of individual leaders of COSVN is a formidable task because the North Vietnamese have exerted efforts to conceal their involvement primarily by using code names. However, captured documents and statements of Communist prisoners have given some details about past and present COSVN leaders.

From 1962 to 1964, the top COSVN leader and concurrently VPRP Secretary was believed to be Nguyen Van Cuc*. Although a native of the North, Nguyen Van Cuc spent most of his years in the South. He was reportedly one of those secretly elected to the VWP Central Committee in 1960 and was subsequently elevated to the VWP Politburo in 1967. He is now reported to be COSVN's second in command in political affairs, next to COSVN Chief Pham Hung.

During 1964, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, a VWP Politburo Member, Secretary of the VWP Central Committee and a Member of

* Also known as Muoi Cuc and Muoi Ut.

the DRV National Defence Council, arrived from Hanoi and assumed command of COSVN. He must have held this position until his death* on 6 July 1967.

Following Thanh's death, reports indicate that Pham Hung, a former DRV Vice-Premier and at present a Politburo and Secretariat Member of the VWP, took charge of COSVN. He is an old hand in this scheme, having served in the original COSVN until its dissolution in 1954. Apart from being COSVN chief, he was reported to be concurrently VPRP Secretary and Commander and Chief Political Officer of the SVPLAF.

Other important personalities identified with COSVN in recent years include:

"Lt. Gen. Tran Van Tra**--He is believed to be the Chairman of COSVN's Military Affairs Committee. In this capacity, he is assumed to be Pham Hung's main deputy for military affairs. Tra is an alternate member of the VWP Central Committee and is also reported to be a deputy Chief of staff of the VPA.

Hai Van***--He has been identified as VPRP Deputy Secretary since the Party's founding in 1962. Unconfirmed reports state that he is a "secret" member of the VWP Central Committee. In COSVN, he exercises general supervision over organizational, security and propaganda affairs.

* According to DRV media, he died in Hanoi following a heart attack. American sources, however, believed that he was killed in a bombardment in South Vietnam.

** He is also known as Tu Chi, and Tran Nam Trung. The latter name is given to him in his capacity as head of COSVN's military arm.

*** Also known as Nguyen Van Dang and Pham Xuan Thai.

NFLSV PROGRAMME AND POLICIES

The NFLSV Political Programme

In the middle of August 1967, the NFLSV Central Committee convened an "extraordinary congress" of the NFLSV somewhere "in a liberated area" of South Vietnam. This congress adopted a new political programme, divided into four parts, dealing with the NFLSV's domestic and foreign policy objectives. This programme presumably supersedes the 1960 ten-point manifesto as it incorporates, and elaborates on, almost every single point of the earlier programme.

The first part of the new programme is primarily designed to provide a rationale for the Front's domestic and foreign policies. Thus, it attempts to portray what it called "US imperialist aggressors and their lackeys"—as "the most dangerous enemies" of the Vietnamese people. At the same time it calls on the Vietnamese people to unite "in defeating the US imperialists' war of aggression and in overthrowing the puppet Saigon administration". Pledging itself "to strive shoulder-to-shoulder with the Vietnam Fatherland Front"* in accomplishing its objectives, the NFLSV also appealed to "all patriotic forces and individuals who oppose the US aggressors to join its ranks". Those "who do not adhere to its ranks", the NFLSV said, should at least "take joint actions against the common enemy".

The second part of the programme is focused on the NFLSV's domestic objectives. Treated in fourteen clauses or sections, the objectives include the following:

- "1. To achieve a broad and progressive democratic regime, to abolish the disguised colonial regime, to overthrow the puppet

* The Vietnam Fatherland Front was founded in September 1955, being the third Communist front formed under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The first two fronts were the Viet Minh and the Lien Viet, respectively.

administration, to set up a national union democratic Government including the most representative persons among the various social strata . . . ;

2. To build an independent and self-supporting economy;
3. To enact the land policy and to carry out the slogan of 'land to the tiller';
4. To build a national democratic culture and education, develop science and technology, [and] to promote public health . . . ;
5. To improve the living and the working conditions of the workers, labourers and civil servants;
6. To build up a strong South Vietnam People's Liberation Armed Forces with a view to liberating the people and defending the fatherland;
7. To show gratitude to the martyrs, to cater for disabled army men . . . ;
8. To organize social relief;
9. To put into practice equality between men and women, to protect mothers and children;
10. To strengthen unity, to practice equality and mutual assistance among nationalities;
11. To respect freedom of creed, to achieve unity and equality among the different religious communities;
12. To welcome puppet officers and puppet officials back to the just cause . . . ;
13. To protect the rights and interests of overseas Vietnamese; and
14. To protect the legitimate rights and interests of foreign residents in South Vietnam."

Part three of the programme deals exclusively with the problem of reunification, i.e. under Communist terms, which is the ulterior motive behind Hanoi's present activities in Indo-China. Adhering closely to the DRV's official line, the NFLSV programme asserts that "Vietnam is one" and that the "Vietnamese people are one". The programme pledges to work for the reunification "step by step and through peaceful means on the principle of negotiation between the two zones". It further says that pending the reunification, "the people in both

zones will make joint efforts to oppose foreign invasion and defend the fatherland [and] at the same time endeavour to expand economic and cultural exchanges”.

The last part outlines the foreign policy objectives of the NFLSV. It purports to pursue a foreign policy of “peace and neutrality” and to achieve this, the programme specifies the following guidelines:

- “1. To establish diplomatic relations with all countries regardless of their social and political systems . . . to accept the technical and economic assistance from any country without political conditions attached, to join no military alliance, to accept no military personnel or military base of foreign countries on South Vietnam territory;
2. To strengthen the friendly relations with all countries which sympathize with, support or assist the struggle . . . for national salvation of the Vietnamese people, to strengthen the relation of good neighbourhood with Cambodia and Laos, to unceasingly consolidate the solidarity and mutual assistance between the peoples of the Indo-Chinese countries with a view to defending their respective independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity . . .;
3. To actively support the national liberation movement of the peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America . . . [and]
4. To actively struggle to contribute to the safeguarding of world peace . . . to demand the dissolution of the aggressive military blocs and foreign military bases of imperialism . . . to develop relations with international democratic organizations and the peoples of all countries . . . and to actively contribute to the consolidation and development of the world peoples’ front in support of Vietnam . . .”

Major Elements in the NFLSV Programme

Outwardly, the NFLSV’s stated goals and objectives are common to formulations of any other group seeking political accommodation in any country. The pledges of political and civil liberties and of reforms in the economic, social, cultural and health sectors are similar to the usual commitments made by a government to the population that it claims to represent. It was apparently hoped that the inclusion of those issues in the programme would conceal the real objectives of the

Front and would imbue the programme with the necessary appeal among the various socio-political groups and forces that were then starting to voice some legitimate grievances against the Saigon leadership.

However, there are at least four major elements in the programme that deserve special mention as they are crucial to the overall Vietnamese Communist strategy in South Vietnam. These elements include the NFLSV attempt to unite all strata of the population under its leadership, its demand for the formation of a coalition government in South Vietnam, its avowed policy of neutrality in foreign relations and its professed objective of North-South reunification.

The NFLSV as the "Vanguard" of the National United Front Strategy

As mentioned earlier, the NFLSV's founding manifesto of 1960 assigned to the Front the task of uniting "all sections of the people, all social classes, nationalities, political parties, organizations, religious communities, [and] patriotic personalities, without distinction of their political tendencies". In the context of the so-called "war of national liberation", which is being employed in South Vietnam, the achievement of this immediate task is a necessary prerequisite before the NFLSV can proceed to effectively pursue its major objectives of overthrowing the legitimate Saigon Government, eliminating American presence in South Vietnam, forming a Communist-dominated government, and finally reunifying the South and the North under Communist aegis.

Thus immediately after its formation, the NFLSV engaged in intensive organization and propaganda work geared mainly towards winning the support, or at least the sympathy, of the South Vietnamese irrespective of their political inclinations. It was not necessary that the adherents and sympathizers must share the political views of the NFLSV leaders or of their Hanoi mentors since the main idea was merely to expand the organization's mass base and to get the people's involvement in the Front's activities.

To further pursue this objective, the introduction to the 1967 political programme stated that the NFLSV would undertake activities which would help in "further broadening the bloc of great national

union, encouraging and stimulating the entire people to rush forward, resolved to fight and defeat the US aggressors, and to build an independent, democratic, peaceful, neutral and prosperous South Vietnam". The programme directed its appeal to all sectors of the population, specifically to the peasants, workers, labourers, "martyrs and disabled armymen" and their families, to all nationalities, all religious communities, to all men and women, mothers and children, "functionaries of the puppet administration", to overseas Vietnamese, to foreign residents in the South, and even to capitalists and industrialists. The programme concluded with a statement that "the NFLSV warmly welcomes all political parties, mass organizations and patriotic and progressive personalities who broadly rally within and outside the Front . . ."

However, even before the formulation of this programme, it was already evident that this invitation to the various sectors of the population to join the NFLSV was only a ploy, which the Communists hoped would help in enlisting the widest possible support for their cause and in projecting the Front as a broadly-based movement. The essence of this strategy is the mobilization of diverse groups and classes, including those who are identified with bourgeois-entrepreneurial groups or religious communities or any group whose outlook is basically anti-Communist, and working on them to compromise with the Communists on important aims. A Vietnamese Communist document captured on 15 February 1961 clearly shows the real intentions behind this invitation. It stated:

"In the present situation of South Vietnam, the Central Committee of the Party [VWP] supports the integration of these elements [non-Communists] into the Front [the NFLSV] not because the Party is betraying the policy of class struggle, not because the Party is going to entrust these classes with heavy responsibilities in the revolutionary liberation of South Vietnam, but only to utilize their abilities and prestige in order to push forward the revolution and to give more prestige to the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. This line of conduct is only a temporary policy of the Party. When the revolution is crowned with success, the policy will be revised. Then the Party will act overtly to lead the revolution in South Vietnam."

Communist Demand for a Coalition Government in South Vietnam

Supplementing its united front tactics, the NFLSV has persistently demanded for the establishment of a coalition government in South Vietnam with Communist participation. It may be pointed out that this is a standard Communist manoeuvre in countries where the Communists are in the minority or where their party is declared illegal. Suffering from these two shortcomings, the NFLSV obviously hopes that its participation in a coalition government would legalize its status as a political organization and would consequently enable it to freely expand its activities and to broaden its popular base. But NFLSV objectives extend far beyond these organizational goals. Since the beginning, the Viet Cong's demand for participation in a coalition has been so premised as to ensure, initially, a Communist dominance in the government and, eventually, a Communist take-over of the whole political set-up.

In the Vietnamese Communist concept, a coalition presupposes the overthrow of the existing regime and its replacement by a government composed mainly of Communist elements, their allies and likely sympathizers. The founding manifesto of the NFLSV stipulated the overthrow of the then ruling Ngo Dinh Diem administration, which was alleged to be a "disguised colonial regime", as a prerequisite to the formation of a "national democratic coalition administration". The Viet Cong were not satisfied with the subsequent deposition of Ngo Dinh Diem, since the ensuing situation did not afford them the opportunity to participate in the various administrations formed in Saigon since then. Moreover, the promulgation of a new South Vietnamese Constitution in April 1967 dealt a severe blow to the Communist scheme since the Constitution formalized the exclusion of the Communists from Government participation. Obviously because of this, the 1967 political programme contains a strong demand for the overthrow of "the puppet administration . . . the abolition of the Constitution and all anti-national and anti-democratic laws enacted by the US imperialists and the puppet administration . . . [and] the setting of a national union democratic Government including the most representative persons among the various social strata . . ."

Communist exhortations, however, have failed to elicit the desired response from the people, partly because of the gains achieved by the Government in broadening its popular base and partly because of

the people's suspicion concerning Communist motivations. Probably realizing that under present conditions it is virtually impossible to bring about a political upheaval that could lead to the overthrow of the Saigon leadership, the VC have somehow changed the tone of their demand—this time calling merely for the immediate resignation of President Nguyen Van Thieu and the formation of a “three-segment government of national concord”. As stipulated by the VC on various occasions this three-segment government will include the participation of the Viet Cong, “persons of the Saigon Administration [but without Thieu] really standing for peace, independence, neutrality and democracy, and of persons of various political and religious forces and tendencies standing for peace . . .” Quite clearly, the change in semantics does not reflect a corresponding shift in Vietnamese Communist strategy for the seizure of political power.

Neutrality in Foreign Relations

A third major element in the NFLSV programme is the VC promise to pursue a policy of neutrality in their foreign relations. Like the other two elements already discussed, this is intended to imbue the political programme with a powerful appeal and thus to seek the widest possible support from the population. It is obviously the hope of the Communists that their professed policy of neutrality, apart from diverting the people's attention from the ideological orientation of the NFLSV, would serve as a suitable compromise that all segments of the population could accept. Evidently, the VC seek to exploit the longing for peace of the war-weary South Vietnamese.

However, in Marxist philosophy—of which the NFLSV is a strong proponent—neutralism is viewed in a different perspective. Communist pronouncements and elucidations on this policy clearly show that to them neutralism assumes essentially an anti-imperialist posture and is never regarded in the sense of foreign policy non-alignment. An “agit-prop” memorandum issued in July 1963 by the VPRP, the southern branch of the VWP, explained in very clear terms the real meaning of the policy. It said:

“The peaceful neutrality proposed by our Party is quite different from the neutralism of capitalism in a nationalistic country. Our neutrality is a new form of struggle and a part of the international proletarian revolution. Thus, in reality there is no neutrality but the choice of the socialist

side and the determination to fight back imperialism, especially US imperialism . . . A peaceful policy of neutrality does not hinder the democratic national revolution. The term 'peaceful neutrality' exploits favourable circumstances to hasten the national democratic revolution and hasten the reunification of the country."

Reunification of the North and the South

The last major element in the NFLSV programme which, in fact, constitutes the core of Communist strategy in South Vietnam is the call for the reunification of the North and the South. In an attempt to make this element acceptable to the Southerners, who are traditionally suspicious of the Northerners, and to elicit a favourable international response, the programme makes it a point to emphasize that reunification will be achieved "step-by-step and through peaceful means on the principle of negotiation between the two zones without either side using pressure against the other and without foreign interference". The so-called seven-point VC proposal presented at the Paris Peace Talks in July 1971, went further than the NFLSV programme, stating:

"Pending the reunification of the country, the North and the South will re-establish normal relations, guarantee free movement, free correspondence, free choice of residence, and will maintain economic and cultural relations on the principle of reciprocal advantages and mutual assistance."

However, Communist sophistry has failed to woo the support of the Southerners, who apparently realize that the proposed reunification is only a scheme to conceal Communist designs in the South. Even among NFLSV elements, the question of reunification is more a divisive than a rallying factor. There are at least three distinct attitudes on the problem within the NFLSV ranks: those who advocate it at all cost; those who favour it, but maintain that it is difficult to achieve; and those who are totally opposed to it for fear that it could mean absorption of the South by the North. This fear finds justification in an article written by VWP Politburo Member Truong Chinh in the April 1961 issue of the Party's theoretical journal Hoc Tap. Drawing a clear blueprint for the Communist take-over of the whole of Vietnam, Truong Chinh said:

"However, we [the VWP leaders] are firmly convinced that the revolution in South Vietnam and the struggle to

achieve peaceful national reunification will surely succeed because they are evolving under these favourable conditions: socialist North Vietnam is being rapidly consolidated and strengthened, is providing good support to the South Vietnamese revolution, and is serving as a strong basis for the struggle for national reunification.

Unable to endure the oppressive, exploiting, and murderous policies of the enemy, southern compatriots have to rise and group themselves under the fighting banner of the NFLSV to destroy the US-Diem regime [referring to the deposed Ngo Dinh Diem rule] and set up a national democratic coalition government. Once established, this government will agree with the DRV Government about achieving national reunification under one form or another, including the holding of free elections throughout the country. *Thus, though South Vietnam will be liberated by non-peaceful means, the Party policy of achieving peaceful national reunification is still correct.* [Underscoring added]."

That Truong Chinh's view on reunification still prevails is evident in the numerous pronouncements of DRV Party and Government leaders supporting it and in the 1972 spring offensive launched by the Communists which apparently has been intended as the final, definitive struggle to achieve the prescribed "step-by-step" process towards eventual reunification.

Communist Imprint on the NFLSV Programme

On the whole, the NFLSV programme reflects a typical Communist strategy usually employed during the so-called "national democratic phase of the revolution" in a given country. This phase involves the extensive use of broad, united front struggle against "colonialism and imperialism" and against "feudalism". It is the hope of the Communists that this struggle would lead to the establishment of a "progressive" [i.e. Communist-dominated or pro-Communist] regime, which in turn would pave the way for an eventual "socialist" [Communist] take-over. As regards South Vietnam, the NFLSV programme indeed goes further than the mere establishment of "socialist" rule as it envisages the eventual reunification of the North and the South under a Communist regime.

NFLSV ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

Organizational Set-up at the National Level: The NFLSV Congress

The organizational structure of the NFLSV at the national level closely resembles that of the VWP. This requirement is imposed by the fact that the Front is the main operating arm of the VWP in the South.

On top of the Front's organizational structure is the NFLSV Congress, which is supposed to be its highest policy-making body. However, this Congress—unlike its counterparts in other Communist organizations—has not been convened at regular intervals, probably due in part to security considerations and in part to the Front's failure to assemble the necessary number of members to make the Congress a fairly representative body. The First Congress was convened in February 1962, more than a year after the NFLSV's announced formation. The Second Congress did not take place until January 1964 when a new and expanded NFLSV Central Committee was elected. There has been no report since then of any subsequent regular Congress, although in August 1967 the NFLSV Central Committee convened an "extraordinary Congress" that adopted a new political programme. Jointly with the so-called Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces (VANDPF)—the urban-based front created by the VC in April 1968—the NFLSV also convened in June 1969 a "Congress of National Delegates of South Vietnam," which served as the founding conference of the PRG.

The Central Committee

In between congresses, the task of providing policy guidance is assumed by a Central Committee, which is elected by the Congress itself. The present Central Committee is supposed to have a total membership of 64, but there are plans to expand it to more than a hundred in the future. Of the 64 seats, only 53 were originally filled up. Eleven seats were reserved for "political parties, organizations, forces and notables who may join the NFLSV at a later date." It is not clear whether those who were subsequently reported by NFLSV/VC public-

ations as having been appointed as Central Committee members were designated to fill up the vacancies or were just replacements for those members who had died.

The Presidium

Since the Central Committee is not in session most of the time, its powers are delegated to the Politburo (or Presidium) and to the Secretariat.

The Politburo, considered as the political core of the NFLSV, is composed of selected members of the Central Committee. It is headed by a Chairman (sometimes referred to as President), who is assisted by six Vice-Chairmen. According to earlier reports, the Politburo was specifically responsible for implementing VWP guidelines on the NFLSV's foreign affairs and military activities. Following the establishment of the PRG, however, indications are that the diplomatic activities—while remaining under Hanoi's overall control—are now administered by the NFLSV-sponsored government. It is also doubtful whether the Politburo still retains supervisory charge over the VC's military programme following the failure of the 1968 Tet offensive, which resulted in a severe decimation of the VC rank-and-file. The 1972 spring offensive involving the deployment of North Vietnamese regulars, with just marginal and spotty VC support, which obviously followed General Giap's military blueprint strongly suggests that Hanoi has assumed direct supervision of the day-to-day combat activities in the South, probably leaving to the NFLSV merely the task of implementing the violence/terror phase of the military campaign.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat is the NFLSV's main administrative and organizational organ. It is headed by a Secretary-General, who is assisted by two Deputy Secretaries-General and two members. It comprises at least five major sections, namely:

- a) Organizational Activity Section—At first this section was directly concerned with personnel recruitment and organization building, such that activists from this section during the formative years of the NFLSV actually went to the countryside to seek out possible cadres. However, as the Front expanded its membership, it became necessary to delegate this task to lower levels. Thus, the section is now mainly con-

cerned with training, retraining and indoctrination of organizer cadres.

- b) Permanent Liberation Association Liaison Section—It coordinates the activities of the various associations formed by the NFLSV among the different social and functional sectors of the population including youth and students, women's groups, intellectuals, writers, artists, journalists, peasants and traders.
- c) Agit-Prop Section—Working under the supervision of COSVN's Propaganda, Culture and Indoctrination Section, this unit administers the NFLSV's publicity media and exercises control over all agit-prop teams.
- d) Military Proselytizing Section—It works in close conjunction with COSVN's own section charged with the task of wooing ARVN soldiers into the Communist ranks or of at least reducing the effectiveness of Government troops. This job is entrusted to trained VC agents who do the proselytizing either within the ARVN itself or indirectly through the families of Government soldiers. This section also supervises the handling of prisoners of war, who are exploited in the VC's proselytizing work and propaganda drive.
- e) Administrative Section—It takes care of the Front's budget and expenditure, intelligence, security and communication.

Local NFLSV Organizational Structure

Whenever practicable and feasible, subsidiary organs closely resembling those at the national level are established in localities under NFLSV control. In areas under government control, the Communists—in keeping with the orthodox Communist front's organizational requirements—put up phantom paper organizations.

The local NFLSV organs, if they exist, are neither decision-making bodies nor command units. They are established primarily to execute and implement anything decided at the highest level. Even the interzonal and zonal headquarters—supposed to be the highest local subsidiaries—only serve as clearing-houses for directives from the top, as message centres and as way stations for couriers and runners. It is

at the provincial level where these generalized directives are translated into specific operational orders.

A typical NFLSV provincial headquarters presents an elaborate hierarchic structure. It consists of a central committee, a presidium, a secretariat and a number of sections responsible for the actual implementation of specific orders. In most cases, the important positions in the provincial organizations are held simultaneously by a few key individuals, most of whom were secretly drawn from the ranks of the Viet Minh obviously to ensure Marxist orientation of the local organs.

Below the provincial level is a network of district, village and hamlet committees, the structure of which vary greatly depending on the nature and degree of Communist control in the localities concerned. In areas completely under VC control, local central committees, presidiums and secretariats exist; otherwise, the functions of these organs are wholly entrusted to very few selected individuals who are loosely organized into a sort of "executive committee." In some cases, if it is absolutely impossible for the NFLSV to establish local units, the work in the localities is carried out by the provincial committees concerned or is entrusted to the various "functional liberation associations" created by the NFLSV itself.

In whatever forms they exist, the local organs are expected by higher units to establish direct contact with the masses. They are directly responsible for agitating the people against the legally-constituted authorities and for motivating them to work for the "liberation" movement. Their propaganda work is mostly devoted to playing up the grievances of the people against the Government and at the same time giving publicity to promised VC reforms. Recruitment of political and military cadres is also a basic responsibility of local NFLSV organs. In most areas, local units are assigned minimum recruitment quotas by higher echelons, the quotas depending on the number of people in the locality, the extent of VC influence and the security situation. Where possible, local units perform governmental functions, such as tax collection, school supervision and land redistribution. Higher echelons depend heavily on local organs for financial, manpower and other logistical support.

The Viet Cong Cell

Scattered throughout South Vietnam are the numerous VC cells which form, as in any other Communist grouping, the basic organiz-

ational unit of the NFLSV. Captured documents show that a cell is normally composed of three members, who are required—which is most unusual for a clandestine, operational unit—to have an intimate knowledge of each other. They are established along social, occupational and functional lines. Thus, there are cells in various industries, in farms, in manufacturing concerns, and among the youth, students, intellectuals and women's groups—in fact in any place where at least three NFLSV members can be recruited.

The primary mission of the cell is to establish a link between the masses and the leading NFLSV organ in any given locality. Towards this end, the cell disseminates party slogans and decisions among the masses, attracts new members and instructs them on discipline and revolutionary virtues, assists in organizational and agitation work and participates actively in the day-to-day economic and political life of the locality. Local NFLSV control sections comprising a number of cell leaders inspect and supervise the work of the various cells to ensure that directives are being followed and to report to higher organs the progress or deficiencies noted.

Other Organizations

Supporting the NFLSV is a proliferation of various "liberation" groups cutting across virtually all social lines and professions. Established by the NFLSV itself to provide the Front with mass base support, most of these organizations exist only at the village level. The hierarchic structure of these groups publicized as reaching to the national level in the form of congresses exists only on paper. In many cases no members are named, or perhaps one or two officers only, and usually nothing is heard from these organizations for months on end. However, some of them—including the Farmers' Liberation Association, the Liberation Women's Union, the Liberation Labour Union and the Liberation Youth Union—achieved initial success in gaining adherents and were better organized than the rest.

As the NFLSV began to turn coercive beginning mid 1963 and as the true objectives of the so-called "liberation" movement were gradually revealed to the villagers, those organizations started to lose support from their members and likely sympathizers. Some just disappeared, while the others were simply retained in the NFLSV propaganda to give the impression of an expanding VC control and of a nation-wide "salvation movement". VC efforts to keep these organiz-

ations "alive" by sending delegations supposedly representing them abroad on friendship visits or official missions to socialist countries proved to be a futile exercise.

It was not until 1968, during the launching of the Communist Tet offensive in South Vietnam, that VC political cadres started reactivating moribund organizations and creating new ones. Generally, the new organizations fell into one of four groups: 1) "uprising committees" designed to support regular armed units in the military takeover of cities and towns; 2) proselytizing organizations to encourage military and civil defection from the Government side; 3) political alliances intended to woo professionals and intellectuals who could play a future role in the NFLSV-proposed coalition government; and 4) territorial administrative organizations to serve as provisional local governments in "liberated" cities and provinces. However, except probably for the VANDPF—which is still retained at least on paper for its propaganda value—all the organizations formed during this period met the fate of the earlier ones; they disappeared just as fast as they were formed. The failure of the 1968 Tet offensive to promote a general uprising in the South and the subsequent gains achieved by the Government in its pacification drive had made it virtually impossible for the VC to maintain these groups.

NFLSV National Leadership

The leadership in the whole VC infrastructure revolves around very few personalities*, who in keeping with basic Communist organizational principles, hold concurrent assignments in the various NFLSV entities. Most of them, particularly the indigenous South Vietnamese, were non-Communists at the start, although they had associated in one form or another with known Communist figures. In most cases, their association started and developed during the period of the Vietnamese struggle for independence. From then on, their conversion to Communism was easy, particularly in the face of the excesses and other shortcomings of the previous administrations in South Vietnam.

Probably the best known NFLSV figure is Nguyen Huu Tho, who has been the Presidium Chairman of the NFLSV Central Committee since the Front's inception. He is concurrently Chairman of the

* A list of identified NFLSV leaders and members of the Central Committee is contained in Annex A.

PRG Advisory Council. A lawyer by profession, Nguyen Huu Tho got involved in revolutionary activities only during the latter period of the Vietnamese struggle against the French. He was neither a Marxist nor a doctrinaire. The general image he projected was that of a man who was colourless and non-controversial. These attributes apparently made him best suited for the position of NFLSV Chairman, which for all purposes is only a ceremonial job.

Huynh Tan Phat, Secretary-General of the NFLSV Central Committee and PRG Chairman, is considered to be the Front's theoretician. Unlike Nguyen Huu Tho, Huynh Tan Phat had been an active revolutionary since the early years of the Vietnamese independence movement. It was during this period that he got in contact with Communist figures without, however, losing his anti-Communist posture. It was not until the early 1960s, after the formation of the NFLSV, that he had serious discussions with Communist leaders. His deputy Secretaries-General, Hu Thu and Le Van Huan, were also considered as non-political figures until they became closely associated with NFLSV elements.

Dr. Phung Van Cung, a Presidium Vice-Chairman of the NFLSV Central Committee and First Vice-Chairman of the PRG, is identified as the NFLSV/PRG liaison man with VANDPF. (This is quite unexpected since he does not appear to occupy a key position in the VANDPF). A doctor of medicine, he served in the Ministry of Health during the Ngo Dinh Diem reign. He was described as a non-political personality prior to joining the NFLSV. There were a lot of speculations why he joined the VC, but the most popular version was that—having worked with the French before—he was blackmailed into this affiliation. Nonetheless, he seems to fit well into the Communist system with his rigid personality and his alleged predisposition to the use of terror tactics.

Vo Chi Cong, in his capacity as Chairman of the VPRP Central Committee and Vice-Chairman of the NFLSV Central Committee, serves as a key link between the two organizations. Like the rest, he had actively participated in the fight for Vietnamese independence where he gained experience in organizing clandestine revolutionary activities.

Ibih Aleo is another Vice-Chairman of the NFLSV Central Committee and is also the Chairman of the Western Highland People's

Movement for Autonomy. A Montagnard, he had never exhibited a clear ideological orientation until he joined the NFLSV. It is generally believed that he had little power in the NFLSV, but is being retained to woo the support of the ethnic group that he represents.

The other NFLSV Central Committee Vice-Chairman, Thom Me The Nhem, was reported to have died in July 1966, but his replacement is unknown. He was an ethnic Cambodian and a Buddhist monk. He joined the NFLSV because of alleged religious persecution.

Tran Nam Trung completes the list of Vice-Chairmen of the NFLSV Central Committee. His biography is not clear, but evidence seems to show that he is in fact Lt. Gen. Tran Van Tra, an alternate member of the VWP Central Committee and Chairman of COSVN's Military Affairs Committee. Apparently his position in the NFLSV ensures VWP control over the policies of the Front.

Local NFLSV Leadership

It is doubly difficult to establish the quality of the NFLSV's leadership at the local levels. For security purposes, their identification is never divulged. It is generally assumed, however, that there is a lack of trained and disciplined leadership in the NFLSV's local organs. The situation is aggravated by the reassignment of local political cadres to military duties.

THE PRG: VIET CONG-STYLE GOVERNMENT

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

* 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 uprising 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-

* 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

* 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

* 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.