

SOME ASPECTS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE-VIET CONG TACTICS IN "LIBERATED" AREAS OF SOUTH VIETNAM

General Pattern

Accounts made by South Vietnamese refugees and Vietnamese Communist prisoners of war and defectors reveal some tactics being employed by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars and VC cadres in South Vietnamese localities captured during the 1972 Communist spring offensive. Although slight modifications are noted, the present tactics do not differ substantially from those employed in previous years. In their proselytizing campaign, the Communists still work within the framework of combined persuasion and terror. The emphasis on either of the approaches depends upon the desired results and the degree of Communist influence in a given area.

The proselytizing effort is being pursued mainly by the NVA, with the VC cadres playing a less important supporting role. This may be attributed to a number of factors. One possible explanation is the dearth of well-trained and disciplined VC cadres in the countryside. The situation is aggravated by the reassignment of local VC to military duties. There are also indications that Hanoi was disillusioned by past VC excesses, which have caused the alienation of villagers from the movement, and is therefore trying to be more careful this time by relegating the VC to the background. However, the NVA seem to be repeating the same tactical mistakes previously committed by the VC.

Initial NVA-VC Organizational Work

Before attempting to capture a hamlet or a village, the NVA normally encircle the area and seal off all avenues of escape to prevent the civilian population from running away. Apparently, the VC terror tactics employed during the 1968 Tet offensive had generated fear among the villagers, and it has become instinctive in them to flee from their localities at the first sign of a Communist siege.

Once a locality is captured, the NVA-VC troops at once proceed to disorganize the legitimate local administration, at first by persuading the local officials to resign "voluntarily" in favour of the new regime or, if this is not feasible, by assassinating or intimidating them. However, terror is not used indiscriminately to achieve this objective. Only officials who are considered as obstacles to a smooth Communist political take-over, such as those who are very popular, capable and "uncooperative" are likely to be killed.

Following the disorganization of the local government, the occupation troops invite the residents to a general meeting to listen to a "pep talk" by the troop leader on the significance of the so-called "liberation". The residents are then asked to turn in their government identity cards, which are subsequently replaced by Communist documents showing the basic information about the holders and specifying the areas where they are allowed to move about.

If there is doubt on their military ability to ensure a longer occupation of a certain area, the Communists employ a different tactic. The NVA and VC troops openly or clandestinely—depending upon the amount of their control—establish contact with the villagers not necessarily to enlist the latter's support for the "liberation" movement, but primarily to obtain their names and other important information about them. The most influential villagers are then "appointed" to key positions in some Communist-sponsored "paper" organizations or are awarded Communist citations allegedly for "past services", in both cases without the knowledge of the villagers concerned. When government forces come to recapture the locality, the NVA deliberately leave behind documents concerning the fictitious appointments and awards. The discovery of these documents by government forces leads to a circuitous and inconclusive process of interrogations, on the one hand, and denials by the villagers of their alleged Communist involvement, on the other, thereby creating mistrust and suspicion between the government and the people. Thus, the situation becomes vulnerable to Communist manoeuvrings, making it fairly easy for them to recruit the disillusioned villagers for political and military service.

Just before the recapture by government forces of Communist-held areas, the NVA also usually make some efforts to "invite" the residents to go to North Vietnam, where they say life would be "safer and better". Generally, the people are against the idea and try to avoid the journey by escaping from the village, proceeding towards the direct-

ion of the advancing government troops. However, some villagers—probably believing that the North is being spared from bombing—are attracted by the North Vietnamese offer, only to find out later on that once in North Vietnam they have no choice but to follow the highly-regimented system of the Hanoi regime.

Village Security System and "Liberation" Associations

Furthering their organization work in areas under their firm military control, the Communists start to classify the villagers into three categories for security purposes:

1. Those with relatives in the North or with relatives with the VC rank-and-file, who are openly sympathetic to the "liberation" movement, are free to move around in designated areas;
2. Those who have worked for the Government in any capacity or who have relatives working for the Government are watched at all times and are required to report regularly to the NVA-imposed authority; and
3. Those who have no relatives either with the Government or the Communist side, but whose political outlook is not clear, are not completely trusted and are therefore subject to periodic investigation and surveillance.

*After the initial organizational work, a further grouping of the villagers into so-called "liberation" associations formed along functional, professional or social lines is undertaken. Thus, there are "liberation" associations among farmers, women, workers, youth, students, and intellectuals. These associations form the core around which the local Communist party machinery is built and through which orders from higher echelons are transmitted to the people. The work of the associations is co-ordinated by the village liberation councils, which in effect serve as the local "government" organs.

Machinery for Village Administration

The village administrative machinery (liberation council) is under the absolute control of the local Communist party organ, which is referred to as the village liberation committee. Although the political structure of the councils varies from place to place, they are normally

made up of six members, including one chairman, one vice-chairman, one secretary, a security officer, a finance and supply officer and a man responsible for health and medical problems. In some cases, the council also includes a propaganda officer. The secretary of the council is ordinarily the most powerful person in the village, exercising control over the military units and administering the civil "government". All key positions in the councils are ordinarily occupied by Communist party members or by hard-core VC cadres. Village officials, according to captured documents, must be of "working class" origin, must have taken part in combat, "serve the people with all their hearts" and must "have the people's confidence".

The village liberation councils perform the basic local government duties, with emphasis, however, on those that will help in sustaining the Communist war effort in the South. The villagers are subject to heavy taxation, which is collected in the form of money or goods. These taxes are supplemented by forced contributions of rice and other crops. In some cases, crop harvesting is done by the "liberation" troops themselves, just to be sure that all the produce is confiscated and sent to a centrally-located stock-house where it is kept. The people are informed that the rice will be rationed according to the number of members in each family. In most cases, however, the families do not get an adequate share since the bulk is allotted mostly for the consumption of the troops and political cadres. In some instances, the Communists deliberately cut the entire rice ration and the NVA are quick to blame the alleged intensive US bombing for such failure in distribution. This ploy, apart from averting rice shortage in NVA-controlled areas, is also putting some kind of pressure on the villagers to protest US bombing and, eventually, to shift their sympathy to the Communist cause.

Recruitment is also a basic task of village liberation councils. It is carried out among men and women, including children as young as 12 years old. Quite clearly, the recruitment policy reflects the serious manpower shortage in the North. Men and women between the ages of 17 and 30 are separated into special labour groups, digging caches for NVA arms and supplies and building shelters for the troops. Recruits are given weapons, claimed by the NVA to have been captured from government forces. Their military training usually lasts only for two days after which the recruits are told that they are part of the local defence forces and that they should feel "patriotic and proud for being able to participate in the liberation of the Fatherland". In some cases,

recruits are sent to Hanoi for more intensive training on "guerilla and political warfare".

Indoctrination and Terrorism

Apart from the rigid administrative control, so-called "liberated" areas are further rendered politically reliable by intensive indoctrination and the use of terror tactics.

As in other proselytizing activities, the NVA appear to have taken over from the VC the major responsibility in the conduct of indoctrination courses. While slight variations are observed from place to place, indoctrination sessions seem to follow a definite pattern. The first day is usually devoted to the study of the biography of the late North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh. The second day is focused on discussions concerning the alleged "aggressive role of the US in the South," while the third day is usually a review session. The review is apparently in preparation for the course on the fourth day, when the participants are told to write down and discuss their "own" reflections, which must necessarily follow the lines impressed on them by their North Vietnamese lecturers. The fifth day is again a lecture session centring on the "true nature of the puppet Government of South-Vietnam". Much effort is being exerted to impress on the participants that the VC-sponsored Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG) is the "genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people". Typical of Communist indoctrination programmes, the last day is devoted to self-criticism, done orally and in writing. The written self-criticism is usually kept by higher level cadres since it commits its author to a pledge not to repeat his previous mistakes and to prevent infraction of other rules.

Supplementing the regular indoctrination session in providing object-lessons to the villagers is the extensive use of the so-called "people's courts". However, unlike indoctrination which is more effective in instilling discipline among the "willing" and sympathetic elements, the "people's courts" have been more of a primary instrument in dealing with "tyrants" and "anti-revolutionaries", i.e., those who support, or sympathize with, the Saigon Government. Although the trials held in these "courts" are mostly prejudged, they have some propaganda value for the NVA. Somehow, the trials help in creating the impression that the "liberation" movement is concerned with

providing "justice" for everyone and that it adopts a "humane and lenient" policy in dealing with its "enemies".

According to unofficial estimates, there are about 30 locations in the "liberated" areas of South Vietnam where "people's courts" exist. Court sessions are usually held at night. There are at least three reasons for the timing, namely:

1. There is far less chance of interruption by Government forces at night;
2. Darkness provides the proper setting to help create the atmosphere of fear which emphasizes the object-lesson; and
3. The local population cannot refuse to attend the trials since by night time they are considered free from their daily chores.

The "court" consists of a judge—sometimes augmented by a committee of cadres sitting with him—, a prosecutor and a clerk. The accused cannot avail himself of the services of a counsel for his defence. Even if such services are allowed, no villager, at the risk of being included in the list of "undesirable" elements, will dare to speak in behalf of the accused.

During the trial, a group of cadres is always intermingled with the crowd. This group leads the crowd in calling out for the pre-determined verdict when the judge asks whether the accused should be convicted or acquitted. It is seldom that an accused is acquitted; if ever, his acquittal only means that he is spared from the death penalty but not from serving a prison term ranging from two to twenty years for the purpose of "re-education".

Another major element in, and probably the core of, the Communist proselytizing programme in the "liberated" areas of South Vietnam is the use of violence. It is almost a doctrinal necessity for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong to employ terrorism when circumstances allow and demand its use. It is purposely intensified or reduced at various times for specific motives and objectives. For instance, the failure of "soft" methods, such as indoctrination and propaganda, generally leads to an intensification of violence. On the other hand, a lull in terrorist activities was noted during the first phase of the 1972 Communist spring offensive when the North Vietnamese—apparently hoping that a less hostile attitude towards the South Vietnamese population could incite the latter to stage popular uprisings against the Government—appeared to have deliberately reduced their

terrorism. However, the employment of terror tactics again gradually gained momentum as it became apparent to the Communists that they could not get the people's support unless stronger and violent measures were introduced.

The main assassination targets of the NVA-VC include hamlet and village chiefs, policemen, rural development cadres and other community leaders. However, even ordinary civilians who are considered by Communist standards to be "unsuitable for indoctrination" or "lacking in enthusiasm" for Hanoi's brand of liberation are not spared from assassinations. Assassinations in the form of "spite killings" and killings for "personal revenge" have also been reported in some areas newly-captured by the Communists.

These and other accounts of atrocities trickling out of Communist-occupied areas, on the one hand, have served to generate doubts among villagers, particularly those living in localities that are under constant Communist pressure, on the capability of the Government to provide them adequate security. On the other hand, they have served to instil fear in the minds of the South Vietnamese, prompting most of them to seek refuge in areas under firm Government control.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The formation of the NFLSV was not an unexpected development. It was conceived, planned, and established by Hanoi to serve as its main tool to pave the way for a Communist take-over in the South and, eventually, to force a reunification of North and South Vietnam under Communist terms.

The concept of the NFLSV falls within the framework of the united front tactic, which Marxist-Leninists consider as necessary and useful in generating "revolutionary fervour in countries where reactionary governments rule". From the viewpoint of the Communists, South Vietnam—like any other country in South-East Asia where they have yet to seize political power—fits well into their description of a "reactionary regime". Hanoi has thus imposed upon itself the special responsibility of leading the "liberation" struggle in South Vietnam by establishing the NFLSV.

In conformity with Hanoi's designs and in order to gain the sympathy and support of the Free World countries, the NFLSV has been trying to project the image that it is an entirely indigenous South Vietnamese movement, absolutely independent from North Vietnam, fighting a "justifiable civil war" with the end in view of establishing a "liberal" regime and pursuing a policy of "peace, independence, and neutrality". In fact, the NFLSV is entirely dependent on its DRV mentors for ideological inspiration, tactical guidance, and moral and material support. That this is indeed the real nature of the NFLSV and of all its affiliated organizations has been evident in their organizational and ideological links with the VWP. Undoubtedly the Hanoi leadership exercises complete control over the whole Viet Cong infrastructure, including both military and political elements, from the national level down to the basic units. Through the years, the VWP has been able to develop the NFLSV into a disciplined, highly-motivated and ideologically-orientated group.

Hanoi's control extends beyond organizational matters. It determines the main features of the NFLSV programme and prescribes the

necessary strategy and tactics to be adopted in pursuit of its goals in South Vietnam. Essentially, the NFLSV programme conforms with Hanoi's two main objectives in South Vietnam, namely, the establishment of a Communist-dominated government in Saigon—probably in the form of a coalition—and, eventually, the reunification of North and South Vietnam under Communist aegis. To conceal its true motives, the programme is worded in such a way that it reads like the platform of any other political group seeking participation in a government. The pledges to work for the preservation of political and civil liberties and the adoption of far-reaching reforms in the economic, social and cultural fields are not different from the usual commitments made by any political party seeking popular support. The programme includes appeals designed to gain the greatest possible support from the South Vietnamese. Obviously to gain international acceptance and support, it advocates a policy of "peace and neutrality" in the conduct of the Viet Cong's foreign relations. In general, the NFLSV programme is identical with the programmes adopted by the other so-called "liberation" movements in Indo-China; the Pathet Lao in Laos and the pro-Sihanouk forces in the Khmer Republic also profess similar policies.

The NFLSV's strategy and tactics, which again substantially reflect the thinking of the North Vietnamese leaders, combine political, diplomatic and military forms of struggle. The emphasis on any of these approaches depends on the particular course of action favoured by the VWP faction that happens to be in control of Party affairs at any given time. However, whatever the dominant faction, the tactics employed by the NFLSV always follow a certain pattern.

For the political struggle, the Viet Cong make extensive use of united front tactics. Indeed, the establishment of front organizations representing almost every single segment of South Vietnamese society has enabled the NFLSV to gain the widest possible support. The organizational effort is complemented by the extensive use of publicity media—from the simplest form to the most sophisticated—for agitation and propaganda. Militarily, the NFLSV usually undertakes selected or specialized operations designed to achieve maximum psychological impact. As may be expected, the decision on whether to employ small scale attacks or to launch big offensives rests with Hanoi. The Viet Cong also employ violent or terrorist tactics to attain not only military but also political objectives.

A number of factors had helped the NFLSV in its early organiz-

ational and expansion efforts. Perhaps the most important of these had been the vulnerability of the then Ngo Dinh Diem government, which at the time of the NFLSV's formation was ill-prepared to tackle the enormous problems facing the country. The enormity of these problems was underscored by the fact that following the Geneva Accords of 1954 South Vietnam was suffering from political confusion and economic dislocation. Worse still, it was not prepared to meet the challenge posed by the remnants of the Viet Minh, which formed the nucleus of the NFLSV. The Diem regime also lacked competent leadership and was, therefore, unable to provide organizational skill at the top and effective administration at the lower levels. These and other shortcomings of the Diem Government had caused the alienation of the people, thus rendering the situation vulnerable to Communist exploitation. It was then fairly easy for the NFLSV to undermine the people's confidence in the established authority and to gain popular support.

However, as more evidence of Hanoi's control over the NFLSV surfaced in later years, the popularity of the Front in the countryside and among urban intellectuals started to show a downward trend. One explanation to this was the traditional mistrust and suspicion on the part of indigenous South Vietnamese of North Vietnamese motives. Moreover, the memory of the bloody and violent agrarian reform launched by the Hanoi regime in the mid-1950s as part of its campaign to build socialism in the DRV was still fresh in the minds of the South Vietnamese, who abhorred what had happened and were therefore less inclined to support a North Vietnamese-sponsored organization. Apart from the natural predisposition of the South Vietnamese, Viet Cong excesses and violent tactics had instilled fear among the people. Most of them started to doubt the promises made by the NFLSV and regarded the organization merely as Hanoi's instrument of terror in the South. Their fear found justification in the period following the 1968 Communist Tet offensive and the 1972 spring offensive when the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, realizing the failure of their military moves, resorted to outright terrorism to attain certain political and military objectives.

The foregoing factors, coupled with the Saigon Government's own political and military gains, brought about a rapid decline in the NFLSV's popularity and apparently prompted the DRV to take over from the Viet Cong the main responsibility for the prosecution of the

war and the implementation of the proselytizing programme in the South. Lately, the DRV has also assumed the task of negotiating directly with the US on a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict, implying the complete relegation of the NFLSV to the background.

Despite all this, the NFLSV continues to play a useful role insofar as Hanoi's long-range objectives are concerned. Certainly it has not been written off as a political force in South Vietnam. At least from the point of view of Hanoi, the NFLSV still serves as a useful instrument for the attainment of its long-range goals of reunifying the North and the South under Communist aegis and of eventually establishing hegemony over the whole of Indo-China. There is as yet no positive guarantee that Hanoi will abandon its ambitions in the event of a negotiated Vietnam settlement. Until these goals are accomplished, the NFLSV facade will be needed by the North Vietnamese leaders.

Annex A

PRESIDIUM OF THE NFLSV CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Chairman	Nguyen Huu Tho
Vice-Chairmen	Huynh Tan Phat Ibih Aleo Phung Van Cung Thom-Me-The-Nhem* Tran Nam Trung Vo Chi Cong
Members	Bonze Thick Thien Hao Dang Tran Thi Nguyen Huu The Nguyen Ngoc Ngoi Nguyen Thi Binh, Mrs. Pham Xuan Thai Tran Bach Dang Tran Buu Kiem

SECRETARIAT OF THE NFLSV CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Secretary-General	Huynh Tan Phat
Deputy Secretaries General	Ho Thu Le Van Huan
Members	Ho Xuan Son Ung Ngoc Ky

CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chu Phat	Nguyen Ngoc Thuong
Dang Quang Minh	Nguyen Thach

* Died in July 1966; his replacement is not known.

Duong Ky	Nguyen Thi Binh, Mrs.
Duong Ky Nam	Nguyen Thi Thanh Loan, Mrs.
Duong Quynh Hoa	Nguyen Thuy Duong
Hoang Bich Son	Nguyen Van Dong
Huynh Cuong	Nguyen Van Hieu
Huynh Dang	Nguyen Van Tien
Huynh Thien Tu	Nguyen Van Tu
Huynh Van Tam	Nhu Son
Joseph Marie Ho-Hue Ba	Pham Thien Vi
Lam Kiet Khanh	Rochum Briu
Le Quang Chanh	Sat
Le Thanh Nam	Tran Hoai Nam
Le Thi Rieng, Mrs.	Tran Huu Trang
Le Van Tha	Tran Van Thanh
Le Van Thinh	Vo Dong Giang
Ma Thi Chu, Mrs.	Vo Van Mon
	Vu Tung

Annex B

CABINET OF THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM

Chairman	Huynh Tan Phat
Vice-Chairmen	Nguyen Doa Nguyen Van Kiet Phung Van Cung
Minister to Chairman's Office	Tran Buu Kiem
Minister of Defence	Tran Nam Trung
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nguyen Thi Binh, Mrs.
Minister of Interior	Phung Van Cung
Minister of Economy and Finance	Cao Van Bon*
Minister of Information and Culture	Luu Huu Phuoc
Minister of Education and Youth	Nguyen Van Kiet
Minister of Health, Social Action, and Disabled Soldiers	Duong Huynh Hoa
Minister of Justice	Truong Nhu Tang
Vice-Minister to Chairman's Office	Ung Ngoc Ky
Vice-Ministers of Defence	Dong Van Cong Nguyen Chanh
Vice-Ministers of Foreign Affairs	Hoang Bich Son Le Van Chanh
Vice-Minister of Interior	Nguyen Ngoc Thuong
Vice-Minister of Economy and Finance	Nguyen Van Trieu

* Reported by Liberation Radio to have died on 28 April 1971; his replacement is not known.

Vice-Ministers of Information and Culture	Hoang Trong Quy Lu Phuong
Vice-Ministers of Education and Youth	Ho Huu Nhut Le Van Chi
Vice-Ministers of Health, Social Action, and Disabled Soldiers	Bui Thi Me Ho Van Hue
Vice-Minister of Justice	Le Van Tha

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Chairman	Nguyen Huu Tho
Vice-Chairman	Trinh Dinh Thao
Members	Bonze Huynh Van Tri Huynh Cuong Huynh Than Mung* Ibih Aleo Lam Van Tet Le Van Giap Lucien Pham Ngoc Hung Nguyen Cong Phuong Nguyen Dinh Chi Thich Don Hau Vo Oanh

* He died on 3 February 1970; replacement is not known.

Annex C

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE SHORT PAPER

COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
DRV	Democratic Republic of [North] Vietnam
NFLSV	National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PLC	People's Liberation Council
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam
SVPLAF	South Vietnam People's Liberation Armed Forces
VANDPF	Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces
VC	Viet Cong
VLC	Village Liberation Committee
VNA	[North] Vietnam News Agency
VPA	[North] Vietnam People's Army
VPRP	Vietnam People's Revolutionary Party
VWP	[North] Vietnam Workers' Party

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