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SOUTH VIETNAM'S COMMUNIST FRONT PRESSES
FOR INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The Second Afro-Asian Conference, scheduled for June at Algiers, seemed a perfect opportunity for the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV -- political arm of the Communist Viet Cong) to enhance its international stature, i.e., to attract the support of unaligned countries. In the light of two documents released by the Front's Liberation Press Agency, it is quite clear that its masters, Peking and Hanoi, were bent on having it admitted to the Conference as a fully-fledged delegation representing "all the people of South Vietnam" and hence on discrediting the legal government of the Republic of Vietnam. There is little question but that the collapse of the Conference was a serious disappointment to the NFLSV, as well as to the Chinese People's Republic (CPR), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and a number of "uncommitted" but Peking-leaning nations, e.g., Indonesia and Cambodia. The sudden dashing of their hopes, however, does not mean that the NFLSV or its proponents will allow themselves to be discouraged: the Communists are quite prepared "to take two steps forward and one step back". On the other hand, the deferment of the Algiers Conference until November -- if it does take place then -- does give the moderates more time to develop counter-measures in the light of recent Communist actions.

NFLSV's Main Propaganda Theme

Since the Front was first created in December 1960 by the Lao Dong (Communist) Party of North Vietnam, it has maintained that it represents all of the people of South Vietnam as opposed to the Saigon government (GVN). In the Communist view the GVN represents only a small pro-US faction. In past months, as the tempo of the Vietnam conflict has quickened, propaganda on this theme has kept pace. By mid-June there were few days when the New China News Agency (NCNA) and the Vietnam New Agency (VNA), joined somewhat reluctantly since April by Moscow, failed to characterize the NFLSV as the "sole" or "only genuine representative" of the South Vietnamese. In this campaign, the Communists have in mind (1) to secure a seat for the Front at any eventual negotiations for a peace settlement in Vietnam and (2) to convince as large a sector as possible of world opinion that the NFLSV is "legally" entitled to take over South Vietnam at some future date. In other words, the Second Afro-Asian Conference was to be exploited in order to erect a "legal" façade.

NFLSV Plans A "Provisional Government"

There have been indications for some time that the NFLSV proposes to set up a "provisional government" in the area under its control as rival to the actual GVN. Of late the idea has assumed a more concrete form and it now appears that it is only a question of timing. At the Indochina People's Conference, held in Phnom Penh

last March, the NFLSV delegation leader, Huyhn Tan Phat, reportedly declared that the Front "at a suitable moment" would form "a government of national unity based on the Front's programme". He further averred that the Front met "international law requirements" to set up a government as it already held "four-fifths of South Vietnam territory and two-thirds of the population, had a 50,000-man army and enjoyed the sympathy of the majority in the small area remaining in the hands of the imperialists and their lackeys". He emphasized that the Front had "permanent legations" (sic) in seven countries.* In the weeks immediately preceding the Second Afro-Asian Conference, the plan for a "government" became more evident.

Propaganda Directed at Algiers

With the CPR delegation headed by Chou En-lai, at Algiers, the NFLSV would have had a shrewd devil's advocate. The Front probably counted on a dozen sure votes, among them Tanzania, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Congo (Brazzaville). It also knew that the GVN had even more sure votes, seventeen or eighteen, besides a more obviously valid claim for admission. Thus to win out against the GVN, the Front had to line up at least fourteen additional votes in order to gain a simple majority (on the basis of an estimated total attendance of 50 delegations). With this in mind the Communists launched a heavy propaganda barrage in the last frantic days before the initial Foreign Ministers' meeting at Algiers, supplemented no doubt by unpublicized "diplomatic" approaches to the uncommitted countries. The Front had already been somewhat encouraged by the Preparatory Committee's majority recommendation of June 10 that no formal invitation be addressed to the GVN, the Congo (Leopoldville) or to the Republic of Korea, leaving the matter to be taken up by the Foreign Ministers.

On June 17, NCNA and VNA rebroadcast a message released by the Liberation Press Agency on the same day and addressed by Tran Buu Khiem, NFLSV Presidium member and chairman of its External Relations Committee, to the Foreign Ministers attending the Afro-Asian Conference. In a clever distortion, Khiem referred to "the resolution of April 10, 1964, inviting us (sic) to attend the Second Afro-Asian Conference". In point of fact, of course, the GVN as a participant at the First Afro-Asian Conference (Bandung, 1955, over 5 years before the NFLSV was created), was the object of the 1964 resolution. The body of the message ran down the usual Communist claims: the SVN people welcomed the NFLSV which since its foundation has rallied all strata of the population, has always respected the 1954 Geneva Agreements..., etc. Showing that the Front, despite its bold words, was not sure of a favourable ruling, Khiem voiced

* Cuba, Algeria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Indonesia, CPR, USSR.

the hope that "in the common interests of the Afro-Asian peoples and in those of the Second Conference, the participating countries will take a correct decision" on the question of South Vietnamese representation.

In a parallel propaganda play, the Cairo press and radio paid some attention to the NFLSV delegation, which had stopped off en route to Algiers and particularly to its leader, Prof. Nguyen Van Hieu, Central Committee member and at present head of the Front's permanent mission in Prague. Outside of reporting various meetings and receptions attended by the Front's representatives, heavy coverage was given to interviews with Hieu. Two of these were of special interest. According to a Cairo broadcast, Hieu affirmed that the Front "has asked the friendly states to recognize the NFLSV as a provisional government and these countries have expressed their approval". The "friendly countries" were identified as those in which the NFLSV has permanent missions. Once recognition has been completed, Hieu added, "a coalition government will be formed from the parties which believe in the Front's programme of spreading democracy and working for the benefit of the South Vietnamese people". In short, this is the already well-tested Communist device for a gradual seizure of power. (Despite this unequivocal statement there has been no public confirmation thus far from the seven nations most concerned).

Again, Al-Ahram, in an article headlined "The Liberation Front in Viet Nam Requested the Afro-Asian Countries to Recognize It", informed its readers that Hieu promised that unification of the two Viet Nams would be carried out in a number of stages once South Vietnam had regained its full "independence". He soon made clear that this "independence" would rest in the hands of the Front. He claimed that not only had the NFLSV "liberated 10 million people" but "publishes 40 papers and magazines and has a powerful transmitter broadcasting in a number of languages..." On the issue of the Front's "legitimacy", Hieu emphasized: "The Front has committees administering its affairs like ministries. It also has a 60-member Central Committee. The struggle will no doubt lead to the formation of a coalition government..." In yet another statement broadcast by Cairo Radio, Hieu declared that the Front was "based on realizing democracy, adopting a neutral stand from the political viewpoint, liberating the Vietnamese economy, and establishing a national industry and social justice". One of the means to these lofty ends was exposed by Hieu in a subsequent remark: "...when the victory is won, the NFLSV will confiscate the lands of those (Vietnamese) co-operating with the Americans..." The terms "liberation", "social justice", "democracy", and so on, have a special meaning in the Communist vocabulary.

Not content with a single appeal to the Algiers Foreign Ministers, the Liberation Agency, again on June 17, issued a lengthy statement by the Front's Central Committee: "Memorandum on the representation of South Vietnam at the coming Second Afro-Asian Conference 1965". This key document, on which the Peking

and Hanoi press wrote numerous editorials, set forth four main theses: 1) "the puppet Saigon administration betrays the South Vietnamese people's national interests"; 2) "the Saigon administration sabotages the Bandung Conference's principles and acts counter to the Afro-Asian countries' interests"; 3) the NFLSV "struggles for the Vietnamese people's interests and for the Afro-Asian Countries' common cause"; 4) "who is the genuine representative of South Vietnam?" (the Front's answer to this question hardly needs repeating).

A good part of this document is an amplification of the message to the Foreign Ministers but dwelling on the "achievements" of the NFLSV since December 1960. It reiterated the manifestly absurd Communist contention that the NFLSV has lived up to the Geneva Agreements, to the 5 principles of peaceful co-existence and to the 10 Bandung principles of 1955. If this were true there would be no war in South Vietnam today! The document cites in contrast the "crimes" committed by the Saigon government but omits the innumerable assassinations, kidnappings and acts of terrorism against the South Vietnamese population perpetrated by the NFLSV and the Viet Cong. Unintentionally it naively admits that the Front "has done its utmost to carry out its political programme" but with equal naiveté insists that it has "strictly" adhered to international law. Possibly as part of the Front's attempt to acquire a cloak of respectability, the NFLSV memorandum proudly cites the endorsement it has received from such "eminent world leaders" as Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, President Sukarno of Indonesia and President Ben Bella of Algeria who was so shortly to be removed from office. Since the first two leaders named have been conducting more than mild flirtations with Peking and call the CPR their "number one friend", any respectability acquired would seem rather transparent.

In trying to bolster its "legitimacy", the Front goes into even more detail than before on its accomplishments. Most noteworthy in the context of an eventual "NFLSV government" is the assertion that following the Front's statement of March 22, 1965, "22 governments, 22 international and regional organizations, 449 political parties and mass organizations from 92 countries voiced their sympathy and support..." [These are not identified.] According to the memorandum, the Front at present maintains "relations with governments and organizations of 44 countries in the world and has established a permanent mission in 7 countries. A representative of the Front sits on the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in Cairo. The organizations affiliated to the Front are members of 10 international bodies. Its representatives are on the executive committees of 9 international agencies... To date volunteers from over 30 countries have applied for service [with the Viet Cong] in South Vietnam..."

Taken at face value the memorandum may sound impressive. What the NFLSV and its Communist creators and supporters choose to ignore is that the legal Government of the Republic of Vietnam has long since been fully recognized by over 60 nations and would today be a member of the United Nations were it not for the Soviet veto. In contrast, the NFLSV has never been recognized as a government by any nation Communist or other. In talking of the 10 million people they "control", the Communists similarly remain silent on the fact that this is a control by force with the exception of a relatively small hard core of indoctrinated Communists. Perhaps more revealing than anything else is another fact: no prominent political opponent of the late President Diem ever went over to the NFLSV. This Front serves as nothing more than political camouflage for the Viet Cong's armed aggression against South Vietnam. The Viet Cong forces are the armed agents of Hanoi. No one today in South Vietnam is under any illusion as to the true nature of the NFLSV. It is only outside of Vietnam that some illusion unfortunately persists.