

NOTES ON VIETNAM

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1. Even a cursory glance at the Viet Cong's origin and record reveal that this is no mere civil war. The Viet Cong, the military arm of the so-called National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, is the recognised and admitted instrument of the North Vietnamese Communist Party. Overall direction of the movement is the responsibility of the Central Committee of the North Vietnamese Communists - the Lao Dong Party itself. The Liberation Front was created and proclaimed in Hanoi in 1960. Within the Front control is held by an openly Communist organization called the People's Revolutionary Party. This Party is actually a part of the Lao Dong Party itself. In North Vietnam the Lao Dong Party has created, in defiance of all the traditions of the Vietnamese people, the most rigidly controlled Communist state outside Communist China itself. A rule of fear has been imposed through the well-known police systems, reinforced by the largest standing army in Asia except that of Communist China.
2. This is the system that the Viet Cong are striving to impose on the South Vietnamese. One of the means which they have used in the past in an effort to appeal to the South Vietnamese peasantry is the promise of their brand of economic and social reforms, and of social justice. But what in fact have these meant to the millions of Vietnamese in North Vietnam? : the collectivisation not the redistribution and ownership of the land; rigid rationing not abundance of either food or materials; summary justice in accordance with the interests of the Communist Party not justice based on a rule of law.
3. Discontent is reflected at present in the not insignificant desertion rate among Viet Cong infiltrators of northern origin who are seizing the opportunity of their infiltration to escape permanently from the North.
4. It is granted, of course, that successive Governments in South Vietnam have so far been hampered severely in achieving economic and social reform, although programmes for doing so exist, indeed have been partially implemented, for large-scale land reforms, the reorganization of rice marketing procedures and general social improvements.
5. That they have not been carried out has been due not to the lack of will to do so, but to the lack of means in the face of the continued and increasing pressures of the Viet Cong who have consistently assassinated or terrorised the provincial officials and village leaders who have attempted to implement the programmes. School teachers have been a particular target. In 1964 alone 436 South Vietnamese hamlet chiefs and other Government officials were executed by the Viet Cong; another 1131 were kidnapped.
6. There is little political or moral support for the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Most of the Vietnamese peasantry have been terrorised by them into a state of hostile neutrality. There is every reason to believe that, given security from Viet Cong reprisals, the large majority of the Vietnamese peasantry would support the South Vietnamese Government.
7. The Viet Cong claim to be the true nationalists in Vietnam - that the South Vietnamese Government is dominated by the Americans, and is therefore not representative of Vietnamese

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aspirations. But what are the facts? Can the North Vietnamese authorities on their record claim to be genuine nationalists? They have imposed on the North Vietnamese people a way of life in imitation of that imposed by the Communist Chinese on the people of China. Politically they walk a tightrope between Russia and Communist China whose regimes they have imitated and on whom they depend for their ideologies. There is little that is traditionally Vietnamese, nationally Vietnamese, in the North Vietnam regime.

8. There are many genuine nationalists in South Vietnam who have been historically divided among themselves. We must hope that a coherent nationalist movement may develop and which may bring greater stability to Vietnamese politics. This could happen in the course of South Vietnam's political evolution. This movement will certainly be anti-Communist. The million or more Catholics of South Vietnam, the large majority of whom fled South from the Communists when Vietnam was divided in 1954, represent determined opposition to the Communists. So also do the 1.5 to 2 million Hoa Hao and approximately similar number of Cao Dai opposed to Hanoi on religious and political grounds.

9. The powerful Buddhist hierarchy has now also recently - and significantly following concrete assurances of commitment for South Vietnam from the United States - adopted a firm anti-Communist posture, protesting strongly against Communist plots to subvert the Buddhist religion, and calling on all Buddhist believers to close their ranks and to oppose the Communists, that is the Viet Cong. On 12th April, the Buddhist Association in Saigon declared :-

"For more than a century, Buddhism suffered many calamities created by the Colonialists and local dictators who had sought, by every means available, to control, to sow dissension, to discriminate and to oppress in order to eradicate the people's traditional faith; but all those dangerous plots failed and Buddhism still survives with the nation, despite the fact that it had to pay a high price.

"However, those dangerous facts have not completely disappeared but are developing at present in insecure areas in the countryside and are seriously threatening the religious faith under various forms: it is the danger of communist dictatorship.

"In rural areas, the communists have occupied pagodas, confiscated lands, forbidden religious activities, forced Buddhist priests to enter the Army, indulged in savage denunciations and arrested and killed loyal Buddhist faithful of the Buddhist Association.

"The Buddhist Association sincerely praises the noble sacrifices of Buddhist priests and faithful in the defence of Faith and Religion and prays at the same time for the liberation of the Nation and the Religion from control and Subversion by the communists."

10. There are also many Vietnamese nationalists in South Vietnam who supported and fought for the Viet Minh in the war against the French. But by 1954 they recognised the purely Communist nature of the emerging North Vietnamese regime and chose

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to go to South Vietnam at that time. Some of these are now members of the South Vietnamese Government; others are senior officers in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces fighting the Viet Cong. There is no question but that a genuine nationalist feeling exists. The problem - assuredly a Vietnamese problem - is how to channel the currents of the nationalist movement into a broad stream of unity of national purpose.

11. Political instability in the South, compounded by the strain of guerrilla warfare, should not obscure the fact that in 1954 Vietnam was divided into a Communist-controlled North and a non-Communist South. Representatives of the latter were present at the Geneva Conference and refused to agree to the Agreement; subsequently, the Diem Government refused to agree to general elections throughout Vietnam on the grounds that free, democratic elections were impossible in the tightly-regimented regime established by the Communist Viet Minh. The Diem Government also declared (6th April, 1956):.... "The Government of the Republic of Vietnam will not have recourse to violence to resolve its problems and will uphold existing conditions of the present state of peace. It will not seek to violate the demarcation line and the demilitarized zone as they exist at the present time in Vietnam."

Recent Developments in the Military and Security Situation

12. At the time of the major American decisions to bomb military targets in the infiltration system in North Vietnam and to introduce combat forces into South Vietnam, there was no doubt about the gravity of the situation and its deterioration. The Viet Cong had been preparing on a more substantial scale insurgency action and action involving more open military challenge to the South Vietnamese armed forces. Territorially it was expanding its domination into coastal regions in the centre and north. The situation had been reached where if the position was to be held with hope of success an increase in allied military strength was necessary and military pressure brought to bear on the North.

13. The North Vietnamese rate of infiltration more than doubled in the last year to a rough figure of 10,000 supported by an elaborate infiltration system with extended truck transport, supply dumps, and way stations etc. An increasing proportion of arms and ammunition was coming in including heavier arms. It has recently been confirmed that a formed unit from North Vietnam namely a battalion of the 325th Division of the regular North Vietnamese army was in the northwest Kontum province. This unit could contain about 500 men. The placing of such a unit in South Vietnam would reflect months and months of preparation and its presence could be interpreted as evidence of North Vietnam's major commitment to secure victory in the South.

14. The great bulk of military supplies and requirements of the Viet Cong is increasingly coming from outside South Vietnam. Viet Cong main force units have been for some time, and continue to be, equipped and trained with the latest Chinese

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Communist weapons. This is clear evidence of the magnitude of the Chinese Communist involvement in South Vietnam. In February, 1965, a North Vietnamese vessel especially constructed in Communist China, was sunk off the South Vietnam coast. It was carrying a cargo of mainly Communist Chinese weapons, sufficient to supply 3,000 men. It was inspected by officials of the Australian Embassy in Saigon. An appraisal of a weapons cache discovered near where the vessel was sunk indicated that most of the weapons and ammunition contained in it were of Communist Chinese or Czech manufacture, except for small numbers of Soviet carbines. A count of the equipment showed the following items of Chinese origin: 1500 stick grenades, 500 lbs. T.N.T., 2000 rounds of 82 mm mortar ammunition, 500 hand grenades, 500 rounds 56mm recoilless rifle ammunition, 1500 rounds 75mm recoilless rifle ammunition, 2 heavy machine guns, 2000 Mauser rifles, 1000 sub machine guns, 15 light machine guns.

15. The bombing of the North is hitting main lines of communication running South and supporting the infiltration logistics system. McNamara recently announced that in April 24 rail and highway bridges had been destroyed or so badly damaged as to be incapable of supporting traffic out of 27 bombed. He said: "We have sought to deny them the use of their primary lines of communications and to force dependence on an inadequate secondary road system and inadequate means of support." The use of American air power has made North Vietnam aware of the costly price to be paid for its support of subversion. Its systematically created infiltration organisation - storehouses, supply dumps, training barracks and communication points - is now itself subject to systematic destruction from the air. There is no alternative. The inflicting of punishment on the neighbouring country responsible for indirect aggression, for subversion, for so-called wars of national liberation may be unavoidable if aggression is to fail and the widening of guerrilla warfare to be prevented.

16. But the struggle in South Vietnam cannot be won by the use of air power alone. Fortified by the increased rate of infiltration over the past year, the Viet Cong are maintaining their military challenge. They have the advantage of mobility and can strike hard at the objectives of their attacks. On the other hand, the Government forces have less freedom of manoeuvre, being responsible for the protection of the large population centres and communications and installations.

17. The introduction of combat units from friendly countries will afford support for the armed forces of South Vietnam in a number of fundamentally important ways. These units will help furnish security to population centres and key installations. They will strengthen the mobile reserve for counter-attack against formed Viet Cong units. They will allow the South Vietnamese armed forces greater opportunity to seek out Viet Cong guerrillas and to pacify the countryside. Additional strength will be provided during a period in which a substantial, planned programme for increases in the South Vietnamese armed forces will be carried out. A programme is now under way to expand the Army from 200,000 to 300,000 men in round terms. These numbers should be attainable if the overall situation is held; in recent months it has been noted that volunteers are coming into the Armed Forces at a ratio of 2 to 1 over conscripts.

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18. Into a seriously deteriorating military and security situation the following new factors have been injected:-

- (i) air strikes against North Vietnam's infiltration system;
- (ii) internal air strikes against Viet Cong groupings and concentrations;
- (iii) tight patrolling of the coast-line to prevent mass delivery of equipment and heavy arms;
- (iv) combat forces from abroad to strengthen basic defence.

19. It is too early to say how the Viet Cong will react to these developments and the shape of their future military intentions. Without doubt they have felt the tide of victory was running strongly in their favour. Now they know they have the might of American power against them. Morale factors may become increasingly significant. The recent developments have substantially improved the morale, political and military, of the South Vietnamese. This improvement will be tested if there are no dramatic victories or letting-up of pressure, but a long-term improvement could conceivably follow from the knowledge that the Viet Cong adversary is confronted with new problems and new dangers. The improvement would, of course, also be seriously tested if the Viet Cong could register early, substantial successes. But the Viet Cong is not - and has not been - free of morale problems. Harsh internal discipline and the rigors of guerrilla warfare cause disaffection among young recruits and defectors from Viet Cong ranks are running at present at about 100 a week. It is, of course, also estimated that the big majority of recent infiltrators are Northerners.

Regional Implications of South Vietnam

20. The Communist in South East Asia is indoctrinated in the militant thought of Chinese communism and is dedicated in the view that the Governments of the countries of South East Asia can be successively undermined through revolution and guerrilla warfare. The use of armed force and political subversion go together in the doctrine of the war of national liberation. In many areas of South East Asia Communist network and organizations exist in strength and some of them in the recent past have mounted campaigns of armed subversion.

21. The Government has consistently maintained that what happens in South Vietnam is of crucial importance for the security of South East Asia and Australia itself. Apart from China, which supports it fully, North Vietnam has the biggest land army in South East Asia. Elements of that army have been infiltrated into Laos as well as South Vietnam to give military assistance to the dissident Pathet Lao in that country.

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22. There have been recent open threats directed at Thailand. An organization calling itself the "Thailand Patriotic Front" has been established for purposes of subversion. Its programme of action, which calls for the overthrow of what it calls the "Fascist" Thai Government, is being broadcast by the Chinese radio and by Radio Hanoi, and is reproduced in Chinese newsagencies. The Patriotic Front declares that Thailand has been reduced to a new type colony and that the struggle to drive the United States imperialists out of Thailand is mounting vigorously. Representatives of the Front have been publicly received, welcomed and officially entertained in Peking.

23. Malaysia, and Malaya before it, has made great progress in achieving the peaceful integration of its complex multi-racial groupings. Indeed, so successful has this been that we are apt to forget the long drawn out emergency which, until recently, dominated affairs in Malaya. But the remnants of the Communist terrorists still hold out in the border regions between Thailand and Malaysia, hoping that circumstances will develop which will enable their movement to be revived. In the same way, in Sarawak there exists a well organised clandestine Communist organization which is composed of Peking-orientated Chinese. Communist subversion could become a threat in Malaysia if these groups were heartened by success in neighbouring areas, placing new and severe pressures on the moderate leadership among the different races now working for stability and communal harmony.

24. In South East Asia as a whole, characterised by considerable political tension and actual and potential power struggle, what happens in terms of success or otherwise in resisting the Communist challenge in one country has deep repercussions in the other countries of the area. The orientation of Indonesia is also involved. The PKI, which looks more towards Peking than to Moscow, is a growing formidable political force in the country. President Sukarno himself has identified the fate of Vietnam with the fate of Malaysia. In Vietnam, he says, just as in Malaysia, a government which is kept in office and defended by the military power of imperialists and neo-colonialists is bound to be overturned by the revolutionary will of the people. In President Sukarno's language, the "new emerging forces" will bring about the expulsion of the Americans from Vietnam and the British from Malaysia. The doctrine he employs and the support which Communist Chinese give him strengthen anti-Western and pro-Communist trends in his country.

Department of External Affairs

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