

Hanoi: Peace as a Pause

By Nguyen Tien Hung

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OFFICIALLY, it is clear, a settlement of the Vietnam war is about to be reached. But in the minds of Hanoi's leaders, the cease-fire and political accord that now appear imminent will not mean the end of the struggle. Rather, to them such developments will mean only that yet another phase in the war between North and South has been opened.

It must be understood that in the Hanoi politburo there are no "doves" on the question of unifying Vietnam under communism; all are "hawks."

What they differ substantially on is the method of accomplishing this aim. Thus the main key to Hanoi's increasingly accommodating stance at present and to what may happen after a settlement is signed can be found largely in the power struggle within the Hanoi politburo.

The struggle is between one faction headed by Le Duan, a Southerner and secretary-general of the Communist Party, and another led by Truong Chinh, a Northerner and chairman of the standing committee of the National Assembly. Their rivalry dates back to the 1940s, when they competed for the mind and confidence of the late President Ho Chi Minh. The rift was greatly intensified in 1956 when President Ho effectively replaced Truong Chinh with Le Duan as secretary-general of

the party, a post Chinh had held for 15 years.

Truong Chinh Emerges

RECENTLY THEIR CONFLICT has extended to three broad issues: the economic performance in the North; the ideological direction regarding economic policy, and, above all, the conduct of the war in the South.

Le Duan's faction called for immediate conquest of the South at all cost, and he strongly supported Vo Nguyen Giap's big-battle and total-uprising strategy. Giap, spoiled by the Dienbienphu victory and obsessed with the thought of becoming a Vietnamese Napoleon, provides Le Duan with protection against the powerful police force of Tran Quoc Hoan, an ally of Truong Chinh.

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Truong Chinh, on the other hand, wants to pursue a guerrilla strategy, accompanied by political and diplomatic efforts to help the National Liberation Front seize power in the South. For should the South fall under the thumb of the NLF, unification of the country under communism would be inevitable. Chinh's strategy is supported by Giap's lieutenant, Gen. Van Tien Dung.

Recent events in North Vietnam suggest that the politburo battle had been greatly intensified and that Truong Chinh has begun to emerge as the clear leader, capable of filling the power vacuum left by Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969. The effect of Chinh's emergence and the resulting change in Hanoi's power structure has been a reversal of Hanoi's policy on the war: from intransigence at the negotiating table to a more concessionary attitude; from conventional warfare to guerrilla and terror tactics; from an emphasis on decisive military victories to political and diplomatic offensives.

It is consistent with Truong Chinh's policies for Hanoi to agree to a cease-fire in order to recover from the war, and to prepare for new efforts to achieve final victory.

The Power Alignment

IN ANALYZING the Hanoi rivalry, it is essential to know the strength of each faction under the existing power structure. According to an unpublished study by Saigon educator



United Press International.

Chinh ally Le Duc Tho.

Nguyen Ngoc Bich on the North Vietnamese assembly election in April, 1971, Truong Chinh skillfully used the occasion to weaken Le Duan's faction by eliminating the 87 Southern deputies in the National Assembly. These deputies had been staunch supporters of Le Duan in the legislative branch.

The power center in Hanoi, though, is not the assembly but the politburo. It consists of nine full members and two alternates. Recently (about August or September of this year), the two alternates, Tran Quoc Hoan and Van Tien Dung, were promoted to full membership on the pretext that they were to fill the seats vacated by Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969 and by Nguyen Chi Thanh's death in 1967. Hoan is minister of public security, which is the equivalent here to the director of the FBI, chief of all local police forces and director of the CIA combined; Dung is army chief of staff and a Dienbienphu hero. Apparently their appointments were made as a result of Truong Chinh's influence.

As in all Communist countries, no leader would dare express himself openly on so sensitive a question as party factions. Nevertheless, based on each politburo member's past record, position, performance, and on the Vietnamese pattern of behavior, one can speculate on the current power alignment in North Vietnam as follows:

LE DUAN FACTION

• Vo Nguyen Giap, strongman of the army. Giap is a long-time, bitter enemy

of Truong Chinh. His hatred for Chinh stems from two sources—Chinh's favorable attitude toward Chinese intervention in Vietnamese affairs, and Chinh's undermining of Giap's authority by appointing political commissars to share responsibility side by side with military commanders.

• Pham Hung, director of the war in the South. Like Le Duan, Hung is a Southerner. Although he remains director of COSVN, the armed forces in the South, he was removed as first deputy on June 10, 1972, after the National Assembly election.

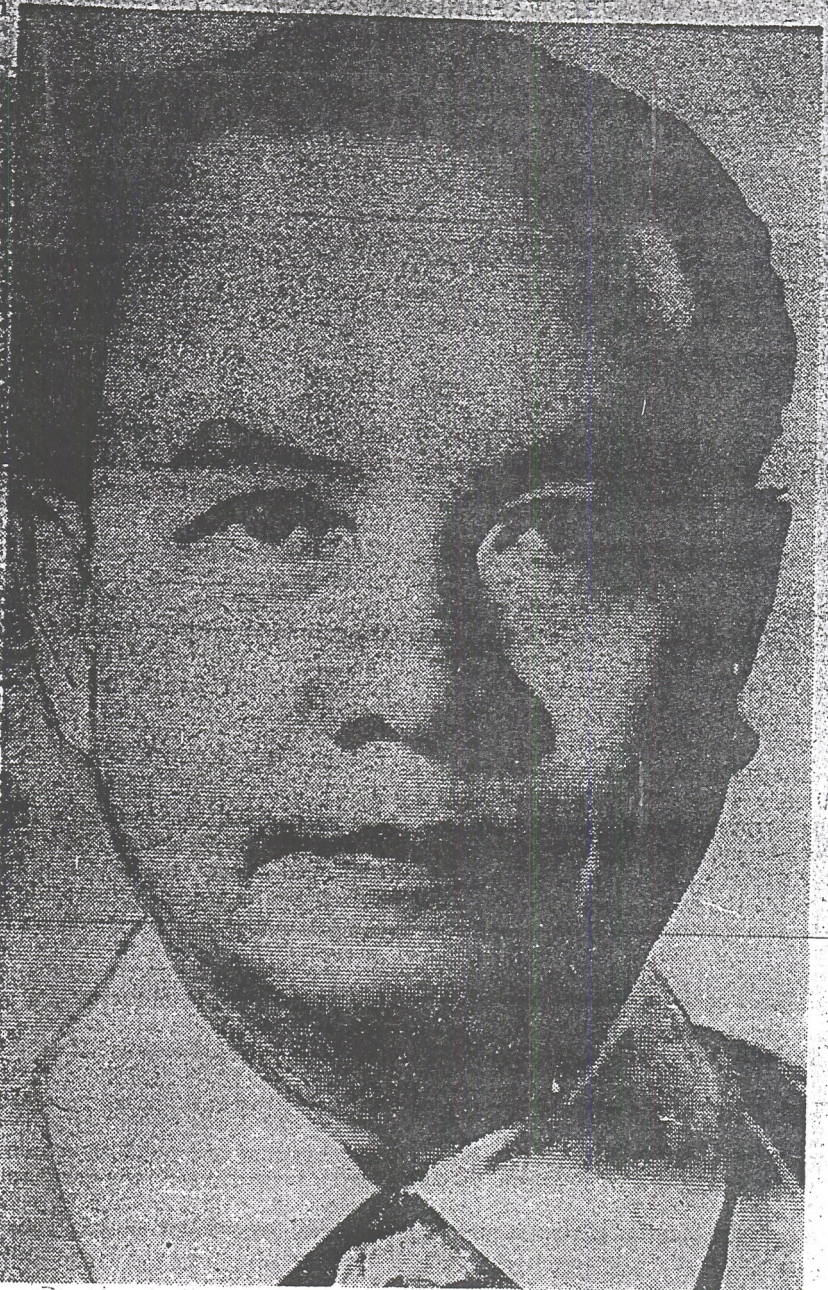
TRUONG CHINH FACTION

• Le Duc Tho, currently adviser to Hanoi's delegation to the Paris peace talks. Tho's hatred of Le Duan dates back to 1950 when he was sent by Ho Chi Minh as an inspector to the South. He became engaged in a bitter dispute with Le Duan on the conduct of the war. Duan was summoned to North Vietnam in 1951, while Tho remained in the South for some time thereafter.

• Nguyen Duy Trinh, foreign affairs minister, supports Truong Chinh because of their common agreement with Chinese policies.

• Hoang Van Hoan, Chinh's right-hand man in the standing committee of the National Assembly.

• Le Thanh Nghi, an economist, favors industrialization and is close to Chinh's position on rebuilding North Vietnam. His point of view is supported by important technocrats, such as Vice Premier Do Muoi.



Associated Press

Truong Chinh, apparent winner in the Hanoi power struggle.

• Tran Quoc Hoan, responsible for security and internal order. He controls all police forces and possesses all secret information on leading figures in North Vietnam. His lining up with Truong Chinh is explained by his suspicion of Vo Nguyen Giap's ambition to dominate the internal security domain. His recent appointment to full membership of the politburo causes alarm to Giap.

• Van Tien Dung, chairman of the army's chiefs of staff, appears to be close to Chinh. A hero of Dienbienphu, Dung is said to be displeased with Giap's taking all the honor of that victory for himself. On Feb. 4, 1971, Dung

accompanied Truong Chinh on a well-publicized tour to visit North Vietnamese troops. His recent appointment to the politburo renders him equal to Giap within the party. If Truong Chinh emerges as the strongman of the North, Dung may well take over Giap's job.

OTHERS

• Ton Duc Thang, president of North Vietnam, appears to follow Ho Chi Minh's policy of neutrality and compromises. When Ho died in 1969, Thang was chosen as president in a compromise between the two factions. His advanced age, 84, implies that he was chosen purely as a figurehead and with the expectation that he would be in office only briefly.

• Pham Van Dong, premier. Dong is the Vietnamese Chou En-lai; that is, he stays out of the leadership conflict and is ready to go along with whoever comes out on top.

All these leaders are at least 62 years old. In a part of the world where the average lifespan is only 42 years, they are at an extremely advanced stage of life. They are too old to bury their personal hatred for one another or to forget about past affiliation with either Truong Chinh or Le Duan. When Ho Chi Minh was alive, he enjoyed the image of a father who could reconcile differences in the party. Since his death, party unity has been greatly shattered.

The Economic Decline

PART OF THE Le Duan faction's recent trouble is due to the sagging state of the Northern economy, the blame for which rests squarely on the shoulders of the incumbent party secretary-general.

Agricultural performance in North Vietnam since 1960 has been so disappointing that the present food shortage has reached a critical point capable of threatening the country's political sta-

bility. Rice deficits in the North range from an estimated 1 to 2 million tons a year. The population is forced to resort to inferior and unpopular substitutes such as maize, sweet potatoes and manioc.

The per capita monthly ratio of rice, already at a subsistence level of about 27 pounds or less, is supplied in "rice equivalent" (that is, both rice and other inferior staples converted to rice) at a ratio of one pound of rice equivalent to 0.7 pound of maize, 2.3 pounds of sweet potatoes, 2.9 pounds of manioc, or 0.5 pound of soybeans.

According to an impressive but unpublished study, "The Economic Crisis and Leadership Conflict in North Vietnam," also by Saigon educator Nguyen Goc Bich, the food crisis has brought about great discontent, widespread corruption (especially at the cooperative management level), a black market, and a breakdown of the entire distribution system.

In recent months, there have been an unprecedented number of trials in the courts on charges of corruption and stealing; these cases appear quite frequently in Hanoi's daily papers. Thus, reviewing the Supreme Court activities in 1971, a report published in Nhan Dan on March 31, 1972, stated:

"As regards the handling of economic cases, in addition to the crimes of corruption, the theft of socialist property, speculation, and smuggling, we (the Court) focused particular attention upon such crimes as the willful violation of principles, policies, rules, and regulations and the lack of responsibility which resulted in serious damage to socialist property, violations of ration stamp regulations, material distribution regulations, etc."

Truong Chinh's Revenge

THE CURRENT STATE of the economy and its social consequences offer Truong Chinh a good chance to retaliate against Le Duan for what happened in the mid-'50s. In 1956, when Truong Chinh lost his job as party secretary-general to Le Duan, Truong Chinh confessed to "serious mistakes" and "left-wing deviationism" in the implementation of the land reform campaign. Le Duan exploited the economic issue and discredited Truong Chinh by holding him responsible for agricultural failures and for social and political disturbances in North Vietnam during 1955 and 1956.

Now Truong Chinh can focus on the present economic chaos to question the policy of his old archrival, Le Duan. Capitalizing on the food problem and its social consequences, often referred to as the "management problem," Truong Chinh may blame it all on failures of party leadership. In a statement delivered at the closing of the second session of the National Assembly, published in Nhan Dan on March 30, 1972, the eve of the North's spring invasion of the South, Truong Chinh declared:

"The National Assembly confirmed the great achievements recorded by our people during the past year and, at the same time, criticized the shortcom-



Unaligned in the leadership battle, have been Premier Pham Van Dong (left), and aging President Ton Duc Thang.

ings which exist in economic management and listened to many practical suggestions."

The question of economic performance is linked closely with the controversy over the ideological direction of economic policy. Le Duan advocates giving the peasants some material incentive in order to increase production. This approach, however, clashes sharply with Truong Chinh's strict adherence to the socialist principle of state control and collectivization in agriculture. As early as his first days in the secretariat office, Le Duan attacked Truong Chinh for being overzealous in pushing collectivization. After three years as secretary-general, Le Duan won the party's decision to let the peasants retain 5 per cent of their land for private use. The 16th Plenum of the Party Central Committee in April, 1959, stipulated that:

"Although in principle, the land belonging to the members should be entirely transferred to the cooperatives . . . a plot of land shall be allocated to each family, not exceeding for each member of the family, 5 per cent of the per capita cultivable land in the village, to be used for growing various crops (vegetables, fruit trees and small-scale animals breeding (poultry, pigs)."

Down With Incentives

A GOOD SUMMARY of the economic and ideological controversy going on in North Vietnam was given by one of its best economists, Nguyen Xuan Lai. Standing in the crossfire between the two factions, Lai obliquely criticized both in an article published in Vietnamese Studies in April, 1967. Referring to Truong

Chinh's faith in collectivization, he wrote:

"Those who tended their gardens or their livestock during their spare time were criticized for 'neglecting' cooperative work, seeking 'to get rich' or treading a path leading to the spontaneous generation of capitalism. . . . This 'leftist' mistake resulted from an over-simplified egalitarianism, which assumes that the more the means of production are collectivized the better the cooperative will function, and that the more vigorously labor is controlled, the more production will increase, that, under a socialist regime, everything should be concentrated in the cooperative, all the cooperative members getting the same income."

He went on to attack Le Duan's position toward private incentives:

"On the other hand, the 'rightist' mistake consisted in favoring, granting too many privileges to the family economy at the expense of the cooperative. Everything was 'transferred to the family sector': dry crops, rice, industrial plants, animal breeding (pigs, poultry, cattle) and even improved farm tools. Everything done by the family seemed better. In some cooperatives, the plots privately exploited by the members were larger than those they had brought to the cooperative on first joining. Some cooperatives had only a nominal existence."

In the ideological battle, Truong Chinh appears to have been the winner. There has been a great campaign over the last three years to proceed toward a higher degree of collectivization in North Vietnam's agricultural sector. An editorial in Hoc Tap in July, 1970, declared that the politburo had decided to proclaim a campaign "to in-

tensify collective ownership in rural areas" as the central duty of the entire country for 1969-71.

In the same article, the author attacked the tendency toward individualism and charged that there had been serious problems in rural areas, such as "greed, waste, abuse of public properties, embarking on private enterprise, ignoring the works of cooperatives, stealing cooperatives' land, and practicing the three contract system."

The "three contract system" that Chinh has criticized is a program whereby the government purchases produce from the peasants through a contract under which the government

supplies seeds, tools and the like, and the members agree to deliver a specified quota at harvest time. The system gives the peasants some incentive because, so long as they deliver the quota, they have a certain amount of control over their land and output. The contract system, supported by Le Duan, operates in defiance of Truong Chinh's desire to follow a rigid scheme of "compulsory deliveries" of agricultural products to the State. A charge against the contract system in an editorial in the party theoretical paper could not have taken place had Le Duan still had his way regarding the incentive question.

Guerrillas and Politics

ON THE WAR in the South, although both are determined to "resist the U.S. aggression for national salvation" and to follow the dictates of Ho Chi Minh to unify the country, Truong Chinh wanted to employ a long-run strategy based on continuing guerrilla tactics, while Le Duan favored a short-run strategy based on decisive, large battles coupled with local uprisings. Truong Chinh's guerrilla approach is well illustrated by his name, which means "protracted warfare"; his real name is Dang Xuan Khu.

To support a guerrilla strategy, Truong Chinh also emphasized a political campaign to weaken the South. Urging the NLF to coordinate with other opposition groups in the South, Truong Chinh advocated political struggle in a speech published in Hoc Tap in February, 1972:

"Concerning the political struggle, the Southern compatriots should mobilize and muster all forces that are eager for peace, independence and neutrality, especially those in the cities, coordinate the various forms of struggle . . . since the development of the political struggle in the cities will shake the enemy's posture seriously right in their dens and will satisfactorily coordinate with the military struggle of all our people."

Truong Chinh views the Vietnam

war as a symbol of the conflict between communism and the free world. In the same speech published in February, 1972, he stated that Indochina had become the "site of concentration of the conflicts between the socialist and imperialist countries." He also declared that the objective of the Vietnam war was not only to "protect basic national rights" but also "to make contributions in blood and bones to the defense of the socialist system, to encourage the national liberation movements of the Asian, African, Latin American and Oceanian people and to safeguard peace and democracy in the world."

Fulfilling Ho's Plan

LE DUAN'S OPPOSING position, urging commitment of North Vietnam's entire resources for immediate unification of the country, may be explained partly by the fact that, as Ho Chi Minh's most ardent and faithful disciple, he was eager to fulfill Ho's plan

of unification as swiftly as possible. At Ho's funeral on Sept. 9, 1969, Le Duan eulogized:

"Farewell to him, we swear: To hold high the banner of national independence, to determine to fight and to win over the American aggressors, to liberate the South, to protect the North and to unify the country in order to fulfill his desire."

But there is also a more personal factor behind Le Duan's stance; his ardent desire to return victorious to the South, his birthplace. In 1951, when Duan was directing the guerrilla war in the South and was summoned to the North by Ho, it was because of a quarrel between Duan and Lê Đức Thọ over the conduct of the war. The dispute was so bitter that it threatened to split the Southern resistance movement into opposing camps. Having left the South with bitterness, Duan no doubt resolved to return one day in triumph, a reaction typical of the Vietnamese way of thinking.

Le Duan's ambition coincided remarkably well with Gen. Giap's obsession with big armies, big victories and total uprising. In an article entitled "Arming the Revolutionary Masses and Building up the People's Army, Part II," (Hoc Tap, February, 1972), Giap built a powerful case for total "national uprising and war" as a means to achieve complete victory. In Part I of that article, published the preceding month, he obliquely criticized the opposing faction, saying:

"In building the Red Army, Lenin had to struggle resolutely and persis-



Le Duan, whose politburo influence evidently has

tently against every erroneous tendency. He completely smashed schemes of the Menshevik and socialist-revolutionary cliques and of anarchists who disguised themselves under a false 'arming-the-people' label to frenziedly oppose the party's lines and policies on building the Red Army."

Giap concluded that "revolutionary realities have proven that Lenin's arguments [for building a strong army] were extremely clear-sighted and truthful." These statements, made just prior to this year's spring invasion of the South, suggest that the debate over how to conduct the war was indeed intense.



Associated Press

Duan backer Gen. Giap

The Duan-Giap faction obviously won the politburo decision to invade the South. But when that offensive proved disappointing, as did the 1968 Tet offensive, the Duan-Giap faction clearly was discredited.

Truong Chinh's apparent emergence as politburo leader certainly implies a reversal of North Vietnam's policy. An agreement with the United States for a cease-fire, coupled with a demand for coalition government in South Vietnam, is only part of Truong Chinh's grand design for a long march toward final victory. What follows a cease-fire is what is of critical importance to the people of South Vietnam. They certainly cannot forget the executions carried out by Truong Chinh under his land reform program in the years immediately following division of the country.