

After War and Cease-Fire, the South

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 5—One of the mysteries of the Vietnam war has been the other side, those South Vietnamese Communists and nationalists who—with the support of North Vietnam—have battled the Saigon Government and the United States to a standstill.

They have been called by the names Vietcong, a phrase—pejorative, in their view—meaning Vietnamese Communists, and National Liberation Front and now Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.

Today, with the sanction of the recently signed Vietnam peace accords, this group of guerrilla fighters controls upward of 30 per cent of the area of South Vietnam and is in the process of tightening its administrative grip in "liberated" zones.

Despite its existence, the Nixon Administration has said that it will recognize the Saigon leadership of President Nguyen Van Thieu as the "sole legitimate government" of South Vietnam. In a recent television interview, William H. Sullivan, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, noted that what he termed the "so called" Provisional Revolutionary Government "does not have a capital, does not have any outward manifestations that make it feasible to be called a government."

Almost a Way of Life

This absence of "outward manifestations"—in the Western view, at least—has been almost a way of life for the South Vietnamese guerrillas.

United States and South Vietnamese military forces have looked, and bombed, in vain for the famed political and military headquarters of the guerrillas—known as COSVN, for

Central Office of South Vietnam—since the early 1960s.

It was then that the guerrilla movement, led largely by Communists, announced the formation of the National Liberation Front, described as a coalition of Communist and non-Communist forces against the Saigon Government. The announcement, in a clandestine radio broadcast, told of a convention in December, 1960, somewhere in the jungles of Vietnam at which the Liberation Front was set up.

Similarly, the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government was announced in June, 1969, by the guerrilla radio, which described a three-day meeting somewhere in South Vietnam. The meeting was apparently attended by scores of delegates representing what the guerrillas said were "various political parties, mass organizations, nationalities, religious and patriotic personalities from both the rural and urban areas."

United States officials described the coalition at the time as "old wine in new bottles."

'Aggression' From North

The official view of the United States Government, as expressed in a State Department white paper in 1965 and repeatedly stated since, is that the war in South Vietnam was directed and financed by North Vietnam. United States officials have characterized the war as a product of "aggression" from the North.

Some scholars argue, however, that there is equally persuasive evidence indicating that the conflict was a civil war, one that might be aided and abetted, but could not have been instigated, by outsiders.

That basic division of view extends to the analysis, now going on, of the background of the Provisional Revolutionary Government's delegates to the joint four-member Military Com-

mission meeting this week in Saigon. United States officials and scholars are also closely watching the names suggested by the guerrilla radio as possible members of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, the three-party group whose functions, according to the peace agreement, would revolve around the organization of general and local elections in the South as soon as possible.

United States officials, convinced that those they call hard-core Communists have control, maintain that while the non-Communist members of the coalition may have nominal authority, they lack real political power.

One relatively well-known figure much in dispute is Nguyen Huu Tho, a former Saigon lawyer who has been chairman of the Central Committee of the Liberation Front and its leading official since it was set up 13 years ago. He is not a member of the Communist party of South Vietnam—the People's Revolutionary party, which is the southern branch of the North Vietnam Communist party—and is, therefore, widely considered by United States experts to be more of a figurehead than a policy maker.

Two Views of the Man

In a published analysis of what he termed "the faceless Vietcong," George A. Carver Jr., former head of Central Intelligence Agency operations in South Vietnam, described Mr. Tho as having "little political repute or professional standing among his former colleagues at the South Vietnamese bar."

In an interview last week, Tran Van Dinh, a former deputy South Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States, noted that Mr. Tho led the first anti-United States demonstration in Saigon more than 20 years ago to protest American support of the French.

"He is extremely popular

Vietnamese Communist Groups Remain

with the people in South Vietnam," said Mr. Dinh, a critic of the war who has been living in exile in Washington since he left the South Vietnamese diplomatic service in 1964. "It is wrong to assume that he was just a figurehead. You Americans exaggerate party affiliation too much as a key to power."

On the other hand, a well-informed intelligence expert in an interview, reaffirmed his belief that "there's no question that Tho has been a front guy for years for North Vietnam."

He added that in his view the real powers in the Provisional Revolutionary Government were its president, Huynh Tan Phat, and its minister of defense, Tran Nam Trung. Both were born in South Vietnam, long served in revolutionary activities against the French and are principal leaders of the Communist party in the South.

Named as a General

There is some confusion over Mr. Trung, whose name has been said by some intelligence officials to be a pseudonym of Lieut. Gen. Tran Van Tra, second-ranking member of the Provisional Revolutionary Gov-

ernment, who arrived in Saigon last week to head his group's delegation to the Military Commission.

Further research shows that in 1969 the South Vietnamese newspaper Tien Tuyen, which is published by the army, asserted that Mr. Trung was really a Vietcong general named Tran Luong.

In addition, Douglas Pike, the United States Information Agency official who is considered by many to be a leading expert on the Vietcong, has written that Mr. Trung may be General Tra, "but it is more likely" that he is North Vietnam's political commissar for all of the guerrilla forces.

The former deputy Ambassador, Mr. Dinh, said he had served with General Tra in 1944 during the Japanese occupation and noted that he was a "formidable" officer who eventually attained high rank in North Vietnam. Mr. Dinh said "it would be incredible" if Mr. Trung and General Tra were the same man because "sooner or later the N.L.F. would have to publish the lists of who is in the cabinet" and both would have to be identified.

Yet, Mr. Dinh added, the photograph in the New York Times last Friday of an officer said to be General Tra was not that of the man he had served with in South Vietnam.

"The answer," said a United States intelligence officer who is handling Vietnam matters, "is that nobody knows very much about these people, and I don't care who's talking. We just don't know who's in what position or how they interrelate, it's the same thing we can say about the top leaders of North Vietnam and the N.L.F."

Direct Influence From Hanoi

Most experts—critics of the war and those who support it—acknowledge that the most significant members of the Provisional Revolutionary Government are also members of the Communist party, and all agree that Hanoi exerts direct influence on its policies.

But it was also suggested in interviews that there may be more autonomy than is generally realized.

A Government expert noted that there were three potential clashes between the North and South Vietnamese Communists:

personality disputes, bureaucratic disputes between operatives in the field and higher officials and—most significant, in this official's view—"the obvious fact that the South has been told by the North that they're on their own."

"The North is saying that 'we'll keep supporting you,'" this official added, "but that 'now you must keep making the political effort by yourself.'"

Two leading Vietnam scholars, David G. Marr and D. Gareth Porter, both critics of the war, said in separate interviews that in their opinion the Communist officials of the Provisional Revolutionary Government were aware that they had to compromise with nationalist forces to achieve their goal of a complete political victory in the South.

Mr. Marr, a former professor of Vietnamese history at the University of California who is now director of the Washington-based Indochina Resource Center, said that while Communist officials would continue to play a major role, "they know it's not in their interest" to attempt to take over the coalition.

Need for Compromise Seen

"They know the special situation in the South is terrible from an organizational point of view," he explained. "There's been total chaos and the class structure has been destroyed. The basic distinction in the next few years will be between the few who made a killing on the war and those who lost everything. It's not going to be between landlord and tenant."

Mr. Porter, now a doctoral candidate in Cornell University's Southeast Asian studies program, suggested similarly that the Communists and the Provisional Revolutionary Gov-



Easifoto
 Nguyen Huu Tho, left, N.L.F. chairman, Huynh Tan Phat, P.R.G. president, and National Liberation Front flag.

a Mystery

ernment know that "they have to compromise with the third force"—the large group of non-Communist but anti-American people in the South.

"They can't plan their strategy simply on the basis of disciplined adherence to the movement," said Mr. Porter, who has taught political science at the University of Akron, Ohio, has spent several years in Vietnam doing research and has written widely for magazines on the war. "They know they have to have a degree of sympathy and support in terms of the non-Communists."

Nonetheless, Mr. Porter added, only the Communist party in South Vietnam has what he termed the "leadership and discipline" to match the political power of President Thieu.

United States experts have estimated the number of clandestine Communist party members in the South at more than 100,000. The party structure has been described in State Department documents as closely paralleling at each level—from region down to village—the open political organization of the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

The party has its own political geography and often uses names different from Saigon's for the same areas. The party also recognizes separate areas of political and military responsibility in its geographic divisions, with central administrations coming from COSVN. At least two regions in the South, however, were known to be under the direct supervision of the North Vietnamese high command at various times during the war, according to State Department records.

The guerrilla political organization, or infrastructure, is also known to operate clandestine cells in South Vietnamese cities that are otherwise believed to be under Saigon's complete control.