

'Political Struggle'

The Pentagon study divides the development of the insurgency in South Vietnam into roughly three periods:

From 1954 to 1956 the country enjoyed relative quiet as Communist cadres left behind in the South devoted themselves to "political struggle." From 1956 to 1958, after President Diem's rejection of the scheduled elections, dissident cadres in the South began the insurgency. With Hanoi's decision to take over the insurgency in 1959, the third period, that of full-scale war, began.

When Ho Chi Minh established his capital in Hanoi after the Geneva conference in 1954, American intelligence reported that North Vietnam's new leaders could be expected to concentrate on building their war-ravaged and primitive economy.

According to the American information, the Communists had taken with them 90,000 armed men from the South, leaving 5,000 to 10,000 armed men behind as a "skeletal apparatus."

From captured documents, American intelligence officials believed that the "stay-behind cadres" had the main task of preparing for the elections scheduled for 1956 to reunify the country. The cadre members were ordered to carry out only "political struggle," which meant largely propaganda activity and infiltration of the Saigon Government.

Election Victory Was Expected

A document captured early in 1955 from a Communist field organizer and sent to Washington by the Central Intelligence Agency warned that "it is not the time to meet the enemy." The Communists apparently believed, the study says, that they would get control of the country either through the elections or by the collapse of the Diem regime through its own weakness.

In 1966 the confidential Rand Corporation study of captured southern cadre members who originally went to the

North in 1954 showed that most of them had expected that the Communists would win in the 1956 elections.

"Our political officer explained that we were granted Vietnam north of the 17th Parallel now, but in 1956 there would be a general election and we would regain the South and be reunited with our families," one captive reported.

"I was a political officer," another explained. "I went to the North just like all the other combatants in my unit. I believed, at the time, that regroupment was only temporary, because from the study sessions on the Geneva agreement we drew the conclusion that we could return to the South after the general election."

While there were some incidents of murder or kidnapping in the southern countryside from 1954 to 1956, they were not directly attributable to the Communist "stay-behinds," the account says.

A United States intelligence estimate of July, 1956, noted:

"During the past year the Communists in South Vietnam have remained generally quiescent. They have passed by a number of opportunities to embarrass the Diem regime.

"Although some cadres and supplies are being infiltrated across the 17th parallel, the D.R.V. [Democratic Republic of North Vietnam] probably has not sent any large-scale reinforcement or supply to the South."

Well-Informed on Attitudes

The American intelligence network in South Vietnam, though limited in size, was well informed of the Communists' attitudes and actions during this period, the study explains. An intelligence estimate in May, 1957, noted:

"Because the countrywide elections envisaged by the Geneva agreements have not been held and because military action has been prevented, the D.R.V. has been frustrated in its hopes of gaining control of SVN. This has caused some discontent among cadres evacuated from the South in the expectation that they would soon return."

Intelligence gathered from Communist agents and documents captured in the nineteen-sixties, when the American intelligence network had expanded, filled out this picture of frustration and disillusionment among the cadre members.

A captured Communist who had been in charge of propaganda in Saigon testified: "The period from the armistice of 1954 until 1958 was the darkest time for the Vietcong in South Vietnam. The political agitation policy proposed by the Communist party could not be carried out due to the arrest of a number of party members."

Another cadre member reported: "The cadres who had remained behind in the South had almost all been arrested. Only one or two cadres were left in every three to five villages."

'Efficiently Destroyed Our Party'

A document that appears to be a party history, captured in 1966 by the United States First Infantry Division during a sweep through the area called the Iron Triangle near Saigon, described the cadres' predicament. Noting that the Diem Government's harsh security policies had "truly and efficiently destroyed our party," the document referring to the scheduled date for the elections said:

"Particularly after 20 July 1956, the key cadres and party members in South Vietnam asked questions which demanded answers:

"Can we still continue the struggle to demand the implementation of the Geneva agreement given the existing regime in South Vietnam? If not, what must be done? A mood of skepticism and nonconfidence in the orientation of the struggle began to seep into the party apparatus and among some of the masses."

For some cadres, the document said the answer was "armed struggle" despite their orders. It continued:

"The situation truly ripened for an armed movement against the enemy. But the leadership of the Nam Bo Regional Committee [then the Vietcong's headquarters for the southern part of South Vietnam] at that time still hesitated for many reasons, but the principal reason was the fear of violating the party line.

"The majority of party members and cadres felt that it was necessary to immediately launch an armed struggle in order to preserve the movement and protect the forces. In several areas the

party members on their own initiative had organized armed struggle against the enemy."

According to the Pentagon account, the result of the cadres' decision to begin armed struggle was soon apparent in Saigon.

American intelligence officers in Saigon estimated that 30 armed terrorist incidents were initiated in the last quarter of 1957, with at least 75 local officials assassinated or kidnapped. On Oct. 22, 13 Americans were wounded in three bombings in Saigon.

But, the account says, "there is only sparse evidence that North Vietnam was directing, or was capable of directing, that violence."

During this period, from 1956 to 1958, the party leaders in Hanoi were engaged in "a serious reconsideration" of their policy, the account says.

Sometime early in 1957 Le Duan, a southerner who had led the fight in the South during the French Indochina war, returned to Hanoi from a two-year stay in the South, carrying news that the struggle there was going badly. According to American intelligence reports, he told the Politburo that it was wasting time with its orders for "political struggle." He was said to have urged military pressure.

Most Powerful Man in Hanoi

Mr. Duan, the study notes, was named a member of the Politburo later that same year, and in September, 1960, he became the First Secretary of the party.

The futility of their policy must have been brought home to the leaders in Hanoi according to the study, when on Jan. 24, 1957, the Soviet Union proposed the admission of both North and South Vietnam to the United Nations.

But until 1958 North Vietnam was still primarily concerned with its internal development, the account says, especially during 1956, when there was a peasant revolt against the Communists' marsh land-reform program.

In December, 1958, or January, 1959, the study continues, "Hanoi apparently decided that the time had come to intensify its efforts."

American intelligence quickly picked up clues about this decision.

The C.I.A. came into possession of a directive from Hanoi to its headquarters for the Central Highlands during December, 1958, stating that the Lao Dong party's Central Committee had decided to "open a new stage of the struggle."

And in January, 1959, the C.I.A. received a copy of an order directing the establishment of two guerrilla operations bases, one in Tayninh Province near the Cambodian border and another in the western Central Highlands.

The C.I.A. also learned at this time that Mr. Duan was making a secret visit to the South.

The decision that had been made privately by the Politburo was formally ratified by the Central Committee at its 15th meeting in May, 1959. All available evidence suggests that this was "the point of departure for D.R.V. intervention," the narrative says.

Scholars and journalists who have studied the origins of the insurgency, but who have not had access to American intelligence reports, have not attached such significance to that 15th session.

The United States Embassy in Saigon, reporting to Washington on the Central Committee decision, noted that a resolution had been passed saying that the struggle for reunification would have to be carried out by "all appropriate measures other than peaceful," the embassy reported.

The document captured by the First Infantry Division recalled the 1959 decision:

"After the resolution of the 15th plenum of the Central Committee was issued, all of South Vietnam possessed a clear and correct strategic policy and orientation.

"The directive of the Politburo in May, 1959, stated that the time had come to push the armed struggle. Thanks to this we closely followed the actual situation in order to formulate a program, and in October, 1959, the armed struggle was launched."

Special Training for Tribesmen

A rapid build-up of Hanoi's potential for infiltration followed the party's decision to take a more active role in the insurgency, the analyst says.

Infiltration from North Vietnam had actually begun as early as 1955, United States intelligence reports show, but only in 1959 did the C.I.A. pick up evidence of large-scale infiltration.

To operate the infiltration trails, a group of montagnard tribesmen from Quangtri and Thuathien Provinces were given special training in North Vietnam in 1958 and 1959.

Early in 1959 also, the C.I.A. reported, Hanoi formed "special border crossing teams" composed of southerners who went to the North in 1954. Their mission was to carry food, drugs and other supplies down the trail network.

And in April, 1959, the C.I.A. learned,

the 559th Transportation Group was established directly under the party's Central Committee as a headquarters in charge of infiltration.

Large training centers for infiltrators were reportedly established early in 1960 at Xuanmai and Sontay, near Hanoi. During 1959 and 1960, United States intelligence officials estimated, 26 groups of infiltrators, totaling 4,500 people, made the trip south.

From later interrogation of captured infiltrators, United States intelligence officers learned that until 1964 almost all the infiltrators were native southerners who went to the North in 1954.

A Rand Corporation study of 71 of the infiltrators showed that two out of three were members of the Lao Dong party; that they had all undergone extensive periods of training in North Vietnam before being sent south; and that most of them were officers, senior noncommissioned officers or party cadre members.

Big Rise in Assassinations Noted

Hanoi's decision to switch from "political struggle" to "armed struggle" was rapidly reflected in a rise in terrorist attacks in South Vietnam during the second half of 1959, the Pentagon study says.

The United States Embassy, in a Special Report on the Internal Security Situation in Vietnam in January, 1960, noted that while there were 193 assassinations in all of 1958, there were 119 assassinations in the last four months of 1959 alone.

Even more alarming, the embassy said, were Vietcong attacks for the first time on large South Vietnamese Army units. A Vietcong ambush of two companies of Saigon's 23d Division on Sept. 26, 1959, with the killing of 12 Government soldiers and the loss of most of their weapons, brought home "the full impact of the seriousness of the present situation."

The stepped-up insurgency led to the first American deaths of the war in South Vietnam. On July 8, 1959, a terrorist bomb inside the Bienhoa base compound killed two United States servicemen.

In its January, 1960, report on the deteriorating situation, the embassy also passed on to Washington two comments made by the North Vietnamese Premier, Pham Van Dong, which it considered significant:

First: "You must remember we will be in Saigon tomorrow, we will be in Saigon tomorrow." These words were spoken by Premier Pham Van Dong in a conversation with French Consul Georges-Picot on Sept. 12, 1959."

And second: "In November, Pham Van Dong twice told Canadian Commissioner Erichsen-Brown that 'We will drive the Americans into the sea.'" The Canadian, a representative on the International Control Commission, was stationed in Hanoi.

The National Liberation Front for South Vietnam was officially founded on Dec. 20, 1960, the study relates, and within a year its membership had quadrupled to 300,000. By then the insurgency had taken root.

Other Events Of the Period

- April 12, 1945—Roosevelt dies.
- May 8, 1945—War in Europe ends.
- Aug. 6, 1945—Atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima.
- Aug. 14, 1945—Japan surrenders.
- Jan. 10, 1946—First U.N. General Assembly opens.
- Nov. 2, 1948—Truman elected.
- Dec. 7, 1949—Communists complete take-over of China.
- June 25, 1950—North Korean troops invade South Korea.
- Nov. 1, 1952—First U.S. hydrogen bomb explosion.
- Nov. 4, 1952—Eisenhower elected.
- March 5, 1953—Stalin dies.
- July 27, 1953—Korean war armistice.
- Aug. 12, 1953—Soviet Union explodes first H-bomb.
- Sept. 8, 1954—SEATO Pact signed.
- July 18-23, 1955—Summit meeting, Geneva.
- Oct. 23, 1956—Hungarian uprising begins.
- Oct. 29, 1956—Suez invasion.
- Nov. 6, 1956—Eisenhower re-elected.
- Oct. 4, 1957—Soviet Union launches Sputnik I.
- July 15, 1958—U. S. Marines in Lebanon.
- Jan. 1, 1959—Castro takes power in Cuba.
- Sept. 15-27, 1959—Khrushchev visits U. S.
- Nov. 8, 1960—Kennedy elected.