1971 AND BEYOND: THE VIEW FROM HANOI

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Only future historians, perhaps, will be able to muster enough objectivity to soberly assess the enormous accomplishments and successes that the Lao Dong, with the help of that unknown number of Vietnamese who in one form or another support and adhere to it, has scored in its battles, first against the French, and then against its present and much more formidable antagonist, the United States. It is one thing to say the guerrilla loses if he does not win or wins if he does not lose, but those are just empty generalizations. The Vietnamese "guerrilla" appears to be quite sui generis, and his achievements in the face of truly incalculable odds cannot be explained in terms of some theoretical military or political model.

What is Hanoi's "secret"? It is not, first of all, as some observers have always insisted, technique, nor is it inherent in the situation. To assume that they could do what they did simply because one can frustrate a big power in a guerrilla war if one is the guerrilla, is not the answer; it would appear that others in similar situations have not or would not have been able to do the same. Nor is the secret to be found, as other observers believe, in organization. Naturally, organization, technique, and the situation all had something to do with it. But no amount of these could have yielded the same results without the

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people involved; they are at the heart of the mystery. Yet, really
very little attention has been paid to the people we face. Of course,
observers have looked at Hanoi's history, its economy, its demographic
features and so on. But few have tried to find out, even to the extent
that such investigations are possible, how the North Vietnamese (or
the VC) function, what animates them, what gives them their strength
and confidence in this -- for them -- truly catastrophic yet also so
far successful war.

The only key we have to understanding, at least partially, our
adversaries in Vietnam is to look at the aggregate of their actions
and their statements. Their actions are plain for all to see but not
always self-explanatory. Why don't they yield in Paris? Why don't
they melt away and try again later? Why do they engage in certain
modes of attack but not in others? How are they able to do it? How
can they sustain the effort, absorb the punishment? We can provide
an answer to that only if we look at what they say, whether they are
leaders in Hanoi making policy statements, or prisoners of war in our
captivity in the South. How reliable are such sources? They are just
as reliable as any other sources -- at least. The official line pro-
mulgated to their own people and army, and also to the world at large,
by Radio Hanoi or the army paper Quan Doi Nam Dau, or the NLF's
clandestine radio station in South Vietnam, can of course not be
dismissed as "propaganda," even though "propaganda" is one objective
of that line. Though what Hanoi says contains, naturally, some exag-
gerated claims, the Vietnamese Communists, like other Communists,
have a great penchant to air their actual theories, views and methods
in public in such a way as to permit the foreign analyst a very good
look at what they think. On the other end of the scale, there are the
prisoner-of-war statements from which we can learn even more.

As far as the latter are concerned, the most frequently heard
objection, of course, is that "prisoners only tell you what you want
to hear." But anyone who has spent some time with prisoner interroga-
tions, knows that this is not the case. To be sure, there are prisoners
who think they can ingratiate themselves with their captors by saying
the "right" thing, and there have been some of those in Vietnam, mainly
among the defectors; yet even from those we can learn a great deal if we know how. But when prisoners from the VC or NVA tell us exactly what we do not "want to hear," i.e., things that indicate that they are devoted to their cause and confident of ultimate success, or well fed and able to carry on, why then should we assume they are not telling us the truth? In such cases, the skeptics will say that the men are well indoctrinated or brainwashed, and that they merely say what their leaders wanted them to say. But, in the first place, "indoctrination" is not a serious term, denying as it does the possibility that people on the other side of the fence can go through opinion formation processes similar to our own even if they do not have access to either the Reader's Digest or the New York Review of Books; and second, what some call an "indoctrinated" person may after all still be a functioning person, functioning in a coherent and individually effective fashion. And actually our staunchest adversaries in Vietnam are usually men who have suffered severe losses in their families and endless hardships themselves, and been witness to terrible things -- all caused by the war. Their views are convictions shaped by personal experience.

In the following, the various sources available to us will be probed for an explanation of the success that our adversaries have so far registered, and the confidence that has allowed them to act as they have in the past and may sustain them at present and in the future.

1. The Sources of Confidence

Looking first at the sources of confidence, we will be looking primarily at the leadership in Hanoi. Of course, the successes of the past must also be sources of confidence for the future as far as the Hanoi leaders are concerned, but successes of the past are not enough to inspire confidence in the future unless one is more of a pragmatist than the Hanoi leaders are. The Hanoi leaders need -- and have -- more than past successes to fuel and sustain their confidence. Foremost among what they both need and have are their theories of ultimate success. These theories are primarily concerned with their enemies, i.e., with the U.S. and its allies.
First, one might say that the Hanoi leaders and their disciples down the ladder in Party and Army are very ardent theoreticians. They love and believe in theory, certainly more so than the Russian Communists do at this stage, or the more pragmatic Communists in a dozen other countries, and perhaps even more than their Chinese brethren to the North. In any event, to every major foreign or domestic problem, on peace or war, there is in their view a "correct" solution that can be found by applying the Marxist-Leninist scriptures to the situation at hand. And this application of theory not only yields "correct" answers to war fighting down to the tactical level; or on how to proceed in the Paris negotiations; or on how to deal with one's big wayward allies; but mainly of course on the war itself -- and the theory shows incontrovertibly that the war will end, if not in formal victory, at least in a departure of the Americans, followed by a united though not altogether unified Vietnam.

At the core of these overall theories is the theory of "Contradictions," or "Antagonistic Contradictions." This theory is of course related to the theory of "antagonistic and nonantagonistic differences" which Mao established after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, but it gives Mao no credit and seems quite different. The theory says that regardless of what the physical power of the U.S. and its allies may be, this power cannot, at least not indefinitely, be brought to bear upon Vietnam, as several sets of contradictions must dilute and eventually stay that power.* The Hanoi leaders, incidentally, are not only firm believers in their theories, or at least seem to be, but they also consider themselves important originators in the area of theory. They like to claim credit for "creative" efforts along such lines for themselves.**

* In general, the North Vietnamese leaders are apparently fiercely independent and practice that "self-reliance" that Lin Piao demanded in an article on September 3, 1965. They also have imbued their soldiers with the feeling that they can fight this war alone. The latter, when interrogated on this point, usually say: "When we need the Chinese we will ask them to come in. So far we don't need them." Therefore, early U.S. psywar to the effect that "you are being let down by your Chinese allies" was a psywar blunder.

The theoreticians in Hanoi see mainly five sets of contradictions that will eventually make the U.S. desist and help them gain the peace and unification they seek.

- The first set of contradictions (and the various contradictions are merely discussed here seriatim, not in order of importance), are the contradictions in the "imperialist camp." The various imperialist countries, though war need not necessarily break out among them, being guided by neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist motives that clash with each other, will disintegrate as "imperialist blocs." This will leave the U.S. isolated and therefore less eager or able to fight in Vietnam.

- The second set of contradictions pertains to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, qua involvement. It sees contradictions between the American imperialist war and the civil war in Vietnam, the neo-colonialist vs. the national liberation effort; the struggle of the "exploiters" against the "oppressed people"; the superior technology against the "people's army's" tactical superiority. In such a war there is an "unjust" and a "just" side, with "the people" eventually winning over weapons. This contradiction is also seen as causing the war to escalate either in intensity or to spread: escalation or U.S. broadening of the war is a result of preceding failure which was caused by the contradiction, but cannot be overcome by the escalation.

- The third set of contradictions pertains to contradictions in the U.S. society. The American people cannot, by definition (as the Hanoi theoreticians define it), support this war that is being waged by their ruling classes. To the extent that the people support it at all, they do so because they are forced to or misled by propaganda that cannot have a lasting effect. The war will deepen these contradictions in the U.S. society and make the U.S. Government desist eventually.

- The fourth contradiction is between the U.S. and Saigon. Even though the Saigon leaders are, in Hanoi's words, lackeys and puppets of the U.S., they cannot consolidate themselves without
U.S. support and cannot attain that degree of independent power the Americans want them to obtain, precisely because their visible support by the Americans must weaken them in Vietnamese eyes (foreigners, Westerners associated with U.S. destruction), and also because Saigon's embracement of the war (needed to sustain the war) alienates Saigon from the Vietnamese people.

The fifth contradiction, finally, is the contradiction between the U.S. and the South Vietnamese people (and presumably the Cambodian and Laotian people) whose "puppet governments" have fallen into disrepair for reasons inherent in contradiction four. This "De-Vietnamization" as one might call it, which the Hanoi leaders foresee as a probable sequel to a failing Vietnamization, will be a more direct takeover by the U.S. in the area and will create more antagonisms between the Americans and the Vietnamese.

A further aspect of the matter, though not an additional contradiction, is that the Hanoi leaders believe that the Americans, aside from being plagued inescapably by these contradictions, do not understand the situation in Vietnam and have no tools for assessing it correctly. American "science of war," in their view, lacks an entire dimension in that it deals seriously only with weapons and strategies. But they think they can correctly assess the situation.

In some long and sweeping perorations on "military science" General Giap has over the years revealed his own views on the war and how to conduct it. Giap's views on the war are -- though he never seems to use the word -- that the war must be total, i.e., that it must be sustained and conducted with all the material and non-material resources of the nation, throughout all of Indochina. Giap says:

Our military science does not treat lightly the material and technical factors, but it pays great attention to the moral and political factors. Our military science does not treat lightly the problem of quantity, but it attaches great importance to the problem of quality and combat efficiency. Our military science not only pays attention to developing the
strength of each force, of each form of struggle, and of each separate combat form, but it also pays great attention to developing the combined strength of all forces and forms of struggle which are closely related to each other.*

This is a rather long way from, presumably Mao-inspired, earlier and much simpler theories expressed by Hanoi leaders to the effect that "people" and the "just cause" always and automatically prevail over weapons and armies. Giap, and the rest of the Hanoi leaders are not "paper tiger" theoreticians by any means. But Giap thinks that people who have not shaped their views of the world and of war on the basis of what Marx and Engels have said on the subject, cannot conduct war against their adversaries in Vietnam successfully. Giap says:

Marx and Engels established the basis for scientific theories on war and armies as well as on military art. . . . The military theories [of Westerners] -- founded on the realities of unjust wars -- have a reactionary and unscientific content. . . .

Armed with these (and more) theories on the one hand, and supported by a willing population and a cohesive army on the other, not to mention its two big contributing allies, the Hanoi leaders appear to be confident. But are they really? Actually the question would have to be divided up: Are they confident that the U.S. will desist? And if so, are they confident that they can carry the burden until that time?

As they are human, one may well assume that they cannot but go through periods of strain and gloom. But on balance, there is no evidence to conclude that they should not feel confident, perhaps not as confident as they claim, but quite confident nevertheless.** In view of the fact that they see the war as ultimately global, i.e.,


**Incidentally, the war itself is for them presumably a sort of shield against a host of contradictions of their own they may in one way or another have to face eventually, such as questions of succession in Hanoi, of relations with Moscow and Peking, of reconstruction, and so on. For them, the war may keep the lid on at least for quite some time -- no one can tell.
as one between the two camps rather than as one between a tiny country and the mighty U.S., and as they see the camp of their enemies and particularly its leader, the U.S., as torn and weakened by the contradictions delineated above, they may well feel all the confidence they pretend to have. This may be all the more true as they seem equally confident that Vietnamization cannot work because all the Americans or their allies do in Vietnam, including Operation Phoenix, will be rejected by the people. But -- and this is of course important -- they do not appear to see any automaticity in any of this. Unless they assassinate collaborators -- which they do -- or infiltrate ARVN -- which they do -- or inflict casualties and setbacks on the U.S. -- which they do -- nothing they think can work for them.

2. The Sources of Success

Army Morale. Without a doubt the greatest source of strength for the Hanoi leadership in its struggle against us has been the morale and motivation of its soldiers. Despite objections occasionally raised by discriminating methodologists, who complain that samples are not representative and so on, the vast bulk of prisoner statements over the years (over 1000 interviews) in RAND's files show clearly that the VC or NVA soldier has maintained a surprisingly high level of morale throughout, a level of morale not equalled by the Nazi soldiers in World War II or the Chinese soldiers in the Korean War, particularly after those wars had produced some heavy reverses for the attackers. One might point out beforehand


that such findings of high VC and NVA morale, dating back to 1965, have been consistently confirmed by events: there have been few NVA prisoners -- and very few cadre -- taken in this war; there have been rather few defectors, despite the Chieu Hoi program, and many of those were perhaps refugees; there have been no unit surrenders, other than maybe that one single NVA battalion that is often talked about, but has never been confirmed. And of course, the war-fighting capacity of the NVA soldiers in almost any engagement has been astonishing, particularly in view of the discrepancy in arms. And the NVA soldiers still fight when engaged, just as they fought lately again in Laos, often under the most incredibly adverse conditions -- without air cover of their own, pounded by B-52s, showered with napalm and so on. How can they maintain their morale under the conditions under which they must fight?

The first part of the answer is that their morale is not that of robots, fanatics, which might be fierce but brittle. On the contrary. These soldiers and their cadre emerge from interviews as undramatic, laconic, matter-of-fact people, dedicated but perfectly capable of becoming frightened and discouraged. But when they do, their system of what one might call morale restitution goes into action. This system consists primarily of almost daily criticism—self-criticism sessions (Khiem Thao) at which everything that worries any man or cadre, or that he feels he has done wrong in the opinion of his fellows, is laid bare and discussed. A few prisoners have complained of the emotional rigors of the system, but most of them insist that the system does redress their morale when it sags and therefore they appreciate it. In fact, the system anticipates and alleviates possible future morale troubles. Taken together with the system of the three-men-cell that obtains in all VC and NVA forces, designed to lend great emotional and physical support to its members in their virtually symbiotic relationship in combat, the system of criticism and self-criticism is the effective group therapy that lends great resilience to the soldiers' morale. And resilience, rather than mere strength, is what describes the morale of the NVA and VC
forces best. The NVA soldiers have indeed learned to "bend like bamboo in the wind," as they like to put it.

But there are other important things that sustain the men in battle. One is their relationship with the people in the countryside. Much has been made of it that the fish must be and in fact already has been deprived of its water. But aside from the physical evidence to the contrary -- the VC and NVA forces could not operate the way they did and do without considerable public support even in Laos and Cambodia -- prisoner interrogations revealed that despite some problems that have arisen between the soldiers and the population as a result of the long war, the bond between them has remained close enough to provide physical and emotional support to the soldiers. The reason for this seems to be that despite the rigors of the war the soldiers continue to treat the local population with respect and otherwise attractive behavior.

Next there is the relationship between the cadre and the men. The cadre often are men who, in their words, have decided to devote themselves entirely to "The Revolution"; they have made "the clean break" with all the ordinary facets of daily life whose little bourgeois features and temptations are of course as prevalent in Communism as in other societies. Having made the break, these men devote all their energies or, in Freudian terms, all their libido to the army and its cause, and are both "mother and father" to the "fighters," i.e., the privates who often miss their families and shrink from the great hardships under which they live and fight. The relationship between these cadre and the men, in and out of battle, is a great source of strength to both, leading to great faith in the leadership at all levels. It also leads to great independence and initiative in battle on the lower levels. Studying the relationship, one is surprised how much give and take there is between the cadre and the privates -- much more than one would expect to find in a totalitarian system, and indeed much more give and take than in our own army.

Further, one of the most sustaining elements in the soldiers' morale is their astonishingly uniform and strong belief in their
cause, both abstractly and concretely: they do believe, as they are
told in education sessions every day, that they are fighting the "just
war"; that they are fighting for Vietnam's "freedom and independence";
that just wars will be won; that "people are more important than weapons."
But they also have a deep personal hatred, a true abhorrence of their
enemy, the United States. They see the United States in starkly simple
terms: invaders who have come from thousands of miles away, who destroy
what the local people have built up in their country, kill them and their
families, and try to prevent them from pursuing what they consider a
patriotic and constructive duty and task: Revolution and Unification.
Most of the soldiers in the NVA have personally suffered grievous losses
as a result of the war which they attribute unhesitatingly to the Americans
whom they generally regard as "worse than the French."

In their view of us, there is no redeeming feature or am-
bivalence of any kind, such as could be found not infrequently even in
dedicated Nazi soldiers during World War II who often had a certain half-
suppressed admiration or envy or at least a curiosity about the Americans
whom in any event -- and much to Goebbels' chagrin -- they never brought
themselves really to hate or fear. With the NVA soldiers this is entirely
different. If one can make a comparison at all, the NVA soldiers feel
about Americans the way the Wehrmacht soldiers felt about the Russians,
and even that would cover only the Nazi soldiers' hatred of the Russians;
but the NVA soldiers feel neither the slightest guilt toward us, such as
many Nazis felt toward the Russians, nor the same fear. In fact they
seem to feel very little fear of us, and what fear there is they and
their leaders try systematically to exorcise, and they are quite success-
ful at this. Of course, as we have such multifarious capabilities of
inflicting death on them, to eradicate fear of us means for them to erad-
icate fear of death itself, and on this they work assiduously. In quite
a few of the captured company records one finds notations about this or
that soldier by his cadre to the effect that "he still fears death"; and
in some of their self-criticism (practiced often also in writing) one
finds, in captured documents, statements to the effect that "I was still
afraid of death."

No NVA interrogation I have ever seen has revealed any trace of
guilt for having gone to fight in South Vietnam. There never seems
to be any doubt in the minds of NVA soldiers that in this war, no matter how costly, the Americans are entirely at fault and must be made to leave the country whatever it costs and however long it takes. And to our objection that they invaded the South they all reply that North and South are one country, inhabited by one people, so how could they invade it? The war, they feel, is entirely defensive, and therefore entirely necessary. And that is always the most important element in an army's high morale.

Another source of strength for the NVA cadre and simple soldiers is the ideological simplicity of his cause. While part of that cause is that the "imperialist" or "neo-colonialist" Americans must be driven out, it is not overly political in most aspects. Few NVA soldiers even seem to regard themselves as Communists, or "Reds" as we call it. They see themselves as defenders of their country against yet another Western intruder who must cease bringing physical destruction and political pressure to bear on them and who can be made to desist. And they see themselves as crusaders for unification, independence and a better life for all Vietnamese.

There are many other pillars in the soldiers' morale; it would lead us too far to enumerate them all. The point is all these elements are strong and tend to reinforce each other. And the soldier can go on also because, due to what his leaders tell him, his expectations remain realistic and he does not become disillusioned by setbacks. As one soldier put it in that simple and straight language with which most Vietnamese surprise their interrogator: "The instructor taught us that The Revolution is not a short-term business." And as another said, revealing the equanimity that can only be the result of many things other than "indoctrination": "Frankly, I was never disappointed with the result of any battle. Fighting the war we always think there will be times when we win and there will be times when we lose, and we should not be too optimistic when we win and not too pessimistic when we lose. When we lose we must find out what caused us to lose and gain experience for the next time."* The NVA soldier is told that

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this will probably be a long war, and that before it ends it will become "fiercer." But he is also told that it may conceivably end sooner, in fact quite suddenly, if the American people would tire of the war as a result of their basic reluctance to continue it and his success in battle which alone can sufficiently increase that reluctance.

Thus, while there are many underlying reasons for the success of the Lao Dong in the struggle against us, the prime element -- which of course is in turn a composite of many other elements -- is the military machine at its disposal, spurred on as it is with almost incredibly resilient morale and, incidentally, composed of men of remarkable intelligence, matter-of-factness, and practical ability on all levels. So well-grounded seems their morale, and so self-resurrecting, that it is not really possible to see how it can be broken. One RAND report concluded in 1967 that short of the NVA (and their VC allies) being physically destroyed, "collapse, surrender or disintegration was -- to put it bizarrely -- simply not among their capabilities." And unless, concluded the study at the time, we "killed more of them than could be in anybody's interest, they could not be overcome." And a subsequent study (1969) concluded that morale had not deteriorated and was not likely to deteriorate.

Finally, the NVA soldiers, just as their VC companions, are sustained in their firm belief that they cannot and will not lose this war. This does not mean they expect to win it in the conventional sense, by driving out the Americans. Rather, they feel convinced that sooner or later, in some as yet indistinct form, the war will come to an end and the Americans will depart, leaving "the Vietnamese to settle their own differences." Almost uniformly, prisoners, when asked during the days of the largest American troop commitments in Vietnam what in their view the effects were of so many American troops in the country, and perhaps even many more coming in, would reply: "This will make the fighting fiercer and prolong the war." None ever said, "Well, that settles it, the Americans will win." And even of the defectors only a few feel differently. In fact, perhaps the most striking thing about most defectors is that they had, almost all of
them, given up the fight for personal reasons, such as fear, fatigue, quarrels with their cadre. Most had retained both their conviction that their cause, i.e., the cause of Hanoi and the NLF, was "just" and that it would eventually prevail. Such unshakable belief in eventual war termination in one's own favor is of course both cause and result of very high morale among troops.

Other Sources of Strength. Aside from their trump card -- their armed forces -- the principal other secrets of the Lao Dong's success in the war would appear to be threefold: their great intelligence and flexibility in the management of their two big allies, of their own leadership problems, and of the total war they are conducting.

To some extent they were lucky: the present leaders inherited a Communist party that had not been ruined by its leader, Ho Chi Minh, as other parties had been by their leaders. After Ho's death, they were remarkably successful in maintaining an effective collective leadership. No serious Hanoi-ologist has ever been able to detect any serious friction between Le Duan and Thruong Chinh, or the "war firsters" and the "North Vietnam firsters," or the Moscow faction and the Hanoi faction.* One very qualified observer of the Lao Dong, John Donnell of Temple University, has stressed this point. Yet, if we consider how beset the leadership must have been time and again, and will be for years to come, by the most difficult and fateful decisions, such as how to conduct the war; whether or how to rebuild industry while the war still progressed and heavy bombing resumption remained a possibility; how to deal with their, in many ways, eccentric or obstreperous major allies, we are impressed with their ability to reconcile their differences to the point that they apparently have. Also, there have been no shakeups in the Party or High Command, no sudden zigs or zags in the propaganda line, no other signs of instability. Nor have the leaders been forced to resort to the kind of pressure

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*For the dexterity with which Hanoi leaders have dealt with conflicting pressures by their allies, see John C. Donnell and Melvin Gurtov, *North Vietnam: Left of Moscow, Right of Peking*, in Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *The Communist Revolution in Asia: Tactics, Goals, and Achievements*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
against their population in the North that might have alienated
the people and caused difficulties. True, there was, in the spring
of 1969 the decree to the effect that spies and saboteurs had to be
captured and punished, which made some observers in the West believe
that rebellion in North Vietnam was close at hand. But actually,
and this again is reflected in our many extensive interviews with
prisoners, the Hanoi regime is perhaps one of the most genuinely
popular in the world today. The 20 million North Vietnamese, most
of whom live in their agricultural cooperatives, like it there and
find the system just and the labor they do rewarding. We may find
that hard to believe, but this is what the prisoners told us very
convincingly until 1969 at least, i.e., as long as we talked to them;
and there has been no indication since that people have changed their
minds in the North as concerns the Revolution or the war or their
living conditions. Again, as in the case of the soldiers, one strong
point for Hanoi is that the people in the North, particularly since
the bombing, are reported to regard the United States as the aggressor
who must be fought until he desists, so that no burden of propaganda
proof in that connection seems to devolve upon the government in Hanoi.

Partly because of the apparently inexhaustible courage and morale
on the part of their armed forces and the dedication of these forces
and the civilian population in North Vietnam to the "Revolution," the
leadership has been able to mobilize all human and material resources
for the kind of total war Hitler spoke and always dreamed of but never
attained. The people in North Vietnam and their armed forces, just
like the NLF and VC in the South and those that adhere to them, or
even the Pathet Lao in Laos, are really devoting their entire lives
to the war in one form or another. They accept the war and all its
facets. It may be illuminating to look at a quote from the French
journalist Jacques Decornoy (admittedly not an impartial observer).
Decornoy reports that a Vietnamese sitting with him in a Hanoi hotel
lobby during the regular bombings said to him: "This lobby in which you
are now sitting -- we already consider it destroyed. We are ready.
We are accepting it all beforehand."* It is presumably this particular

spirit that prevented the continuous bombing of the North from bringing Hanoi to plead for peace or even seriously to disrupt the efforts of the people, even though, by destroying much of North Vietnam's industry, it affected the results of their efforts. There is no reason to assume that bombings or the threats thereof would not remain equally ineffective again, ineffective, that is, in the sphere of morale. In fact, the renewed bombings and threats of much more to come already have failed to frighten Hanoi into abandoning what it considers the "correct" way of fighting this war.

The other important aspect of total war, one might postulate, is that it must be in the minds of its participants altogether open-ended, i.e., have everybody ready to do his share in it "as long as it takes." In producing this open-ended view of the war Hanoi has been conspicuously successful. Some army cadre go so far in this respect that they have no expectation of survival. As one of them put it: "I decided to sacrifice myself for the Revolution." Of course, not every one of North Vietnam's citizens will be equally dedicated or resigned to give his life. But to the extent that we know, the soldiers and people are resigned to fighting on "as long as it takes" against the Americans, due to their deep-seated view that the war is purely defensive. Nor are they fed by the local media any extravagant promises, to the effect that the war may soon be over. On the contrary, the North Vietnamese media generally speak of a long war and if we look at local specialized journals we may find articles on how to do agricultural tasks or do commercial fishing or cope with medical problems caused by bombs in a detached, timeless way, as though the war were simply part of life in North Vietnam indefinitely and that everybody must simply adjust to it.

Thus, while tactics, strategies, outside support, U.S. mistakes, NVA organization, terrain and many other factors may have helped our adversaries in Vietnam in their battle against us, these factors cannot have compensated for the vast military, economic and political resources that we employed against them with considerable tenacity over many years. Rather, what maintained them was the extraordinary cohesion, resilience
and apparently unwavering dedication on the part of the people, soldiers and civilians, and their firm conviction that they had absolutely no choice but to endure the hardships of what seemed to them an entirely defensive war against a foreign invader intent on building, only more so, the colonialism of the French.

It has often been asked whether the high morale of soldiers and North Vietnam civilians does not attest to the failure of our psychological warfare. General Westmoreland and others were quite interested in that problem. Could the American case not have been made, or still be made in such a way as to convince the people in North Vietnam, or the NVA soldiers, or at least substantial numbers of them, that this war is not necessary, that they will somehow lose or at least not successfully conclude it, that this will not hurt them, that the U.S. has other aims in Vietnam than the French did? From the interrogations at hand that would appear next to impossible; neither the psychological makeup of the NVA forces nor of the people in North Vietnam show any psywar vulnerabilities in the ordinary sense, i.e., while they do of course show the toll taken by the hardships these people endure, they do not reveal any susceptibility to alternate appeals. But better psywar would also appear next to impossible from a review of the actual psychological warfare efforts that we have made. From what I have seen (and I was myself a psychological warfare officer in World War II), our psywar efforts in Vietnam were quite versatile, eloquent and to the point, both to the NVA and in leaflets dropped over the North. They could not be much better. They just failed to score.

The Prospects. Now that we have deployed a theory on what are or have been the Hanoi leaders' sources of past success and confidence for the future, we might ask, what are they likely to do? This of course lands us squarely in the area of speculation. To begin with, a few words on how they see American strategy. We have already pointed out that they see such strategy as doomed to failure if they apply their own "correct" strategy. But what, specifically, do they seem
to think we have in store for them? The following answer to the question is a highly condensed summary from FBIS reports.

They say (and apparently think) that the American policy of Vietnamization and withdrawal is designed to deceive both the American people into supporting the continuation of the war, and designed to deceive them. But they think that Americans are in error as to what their Saigon partners can or will do for them, grossly overestimating their military and political capabilities and that, when that becomes apparent, the Americans will continue or resume their own military efforts or at least try to do so, perhaps in modified form, but will then be increasingly hampered in bringing their force to bear by the contradictions under which they labor. As for ultimate aims, they seem to think that the U.S. wants to subdue Indo- china permanently, for "neo-colonialist" reasons, i.e., to turn it into a strategic outpost in Southeast Asia, and into a political outpost against the spread of Communism. Above all, they do not think, apparently, that any conciliatory behavior on their part toward us can save them any hardships, such as bombings of the North. They must, they seem to think, inflict at minimum cost continuing losses and delays and other setbacks upon the U.S. and Saigon even if that may bring down bombings and other things upon them. They seem to feel that any strategy they can possibly embrace is a high-risk strategy in any event which is undoubtedly the reason they have defied throughout — though with moderation — the threats made against them by the Administration since 1969.

To begin our speculation on what they might do next it might be best to speculate on what they are not likely to do.

1. One thing they are not likely to do is make such concessions in Paris (or elsewhere) as would amount to their giving up the game. This means they will not make any substantial concessions at all, as that would be tantamount to giving up the game. Contrary to Americans who believe that a compromise can be reached, they appear to see the situation as an all-or-nothing one in which no concession by either side except surrender of the central war aim can possibly be perceived. They could of course give up formally in Paris and resume their efforts
five years later. But they could have done that all along the line
and never did, so one does not see why they should do this in the
future. Besides, aside from anything else, it probably would create
for them too many internal propaganda problems.

2. They could locally escalate in the form of terrorist acts or
by otherwise inflicting great or humiliating damage on some U.S. forces.
This they are unlikely to do, mainly because it would contradict one
of their many theories: not to humiliate the enemy, not to hit him
harder than is absolutely necessary, particularly if the enemy can
do such great immediate damage in retaliation. No in particular was
always trying to avoid this.

3. They could call in the Chinese who would then come in or not,
as the case may be. But they are not likely to do this either, as
they would have to fear the results of hostilities between the U.S.
and Chinese armed forces on their soil, aside from their well-known
aversion against being too dependent in general, and on the Chinese
in particular.

4. They could sit still and wait until the Americans, committed
more or less to leave altogether, will have left. This they cannot do,
as the war takes place also in the form of Pacification and Operation
Phoenix, against which they must react or lose all chance of staging
a comeback in the South after the considerable time it would take the
U.S. to get out in any event. Pacification and Phoenix are particularly
hard for them to cope with, as they are mainly invisible as forms of
war to the world at large, so that their response to these operations
looks easily like wanton aggression or terror, just as does their res-
ponse in the form of local terror to "Pacification." But while the
Americans withdraw men, the war goes on just as before, throughout
Indochina, which makes it "incorrect" for them to sit still and wait
for the American departure, even if it should eventually come (but
would be all the less likely to come, and also take all the longer,
if they did nothing).

5. They could stage a major offensive, with or without a new
attempt to stage a National Uprising, on a similar or larger scale
than at Tet 1968. This they are most unlikely to try, because of
their "preserve manpower" theory laid down by Ho and so far followed
by them, * and also because it not only would probably fail to have
the desired result but bring down heavy bombing on the North to boot.

What then can or will they do? Unsensational though it sounds,
they are most likely to do just "more of the same," i.e., engage
ARVN when they feel they must, but occasionally also for demonstration
and demoralization purposes, and to keep their own fighting machine
sharp; to inflict on U.S. forces the kind of casualties that will
neither be too little to go unnoticed in the U.S., nor so heavy as
to bring down on them heavy retribution and, worse, a renewed resolve
by the American people. Also, being very aware of the problems
generated by the U.S. by the war's cost not only in casualties but
also in dollars, they will try to keep the war expensive for America.

Above all, they will try to keep the war "open-ended" in every
way, with regard to their military preparations, their strategy, their
tactics, their economy, their domestic propaganda, and the attitude
of their people and soldiers. In a classic answer to the famous
German prelate Martin Niemoeller who visited Hanoi in 1966, Ho, when
asked whether he would fight on to "final victory" said: "If by
'final victory' you mean the departure of the Americans, then we will
fight to final victory. Everything depends on the Americans. If
they want to make war for 20 years then we shall make war for 20
years. If they want to make peace, we shall make peace, and even
invite them for tea afterwards."** This open-ended, "defensive"
and "counter-attacking" posture is likely to remain their posture,
and they are likely to support it in the field with moderate but more
or less constant "defensive" fighting and continuing sporadic attacks
on villages and officials. This may be a high-risk strategy for
them, but all strategies for them are high-risk strategies, and by

* They only expended considerable manpower in Laos and probably
considered that inevitable because the battle, from their viewpoint,
was defensive and offered an opportunity to meet ARVN under reasonably
favorable circumstances.

** Der Speigel, January 17, 1967.
comparison this still seems like the lowest-risk strategy they can pursue with any hope of success.

Will they, as so many observers think, strike in a big way once U.S. forces are down to, say 200 thousand or less? Nothing seems more unlikely. What purpose could it possibly serve for them? It would almost surely lead to heavy retribution or coercive efforts against the North, renewed U.S. efforts in the South and so on. At the same time, it could not possibly bring tangible success, such as an American Dunkirk. It cannot speed the end of the war, as it would surely not accelerate American departure. Unless greatly pared-down U.S. forces should suddenly engage in a course of action, alone or together with ARVN, that they were entirely unable to tolerate from their point of view (and one cannot imagine what that could be), they would only harm themselves if they launched such an offensive.

No matter how the U.S. proceeds, their plan is most likely to neither lie low nor to stage dramatic attacks, but to continue

(a) to fight Pacification, i.e., "security for the people" and the building of a rural base for the Saigon leaders, with the help of terror;
(b) to fight Operation Phoenix by evasion of the police, infiltration of the police, and the training of new cadres;
(c) to keep infiltrating ARVN so as to weaken it and have insurance against surprises (presumably the operation in Laos was well signalled to them beforehand by their agents in ARVN, aside from the fact that staging activities in the border area were easy to observe);
(c) to keep up combat in the field at more or less current levels (depending of course on levels initiated by us and/or ARVN) for the same range of politico-military purposes which such combat has always had.

Will they be able to follow this course if they have selected it as their "correct" strategy? That, of course, will not just depend on their physical and non-physical capabilities and on their intentions, but also on what we and even others will or will not do.