SOUTH VIETNAM'S PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS:
A GENERAL ASSESSMENTS

William F. Dorrill

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PREFACE

Since China both influences and is influenced by the course of events in Southeast Asia, the present study of South Vietnam makes a contribution to RAND's ongoing program of research, undertaken for the United States Air Force, concerning Chinese foreign and military policy.

The following analysis undertakes two primary tasks: (a) a general assessment of the present situation in South Vietnam -- how it developed, as well as the basic forces now shaping it, and (b) an estimate of the outlook, both immediate and long-range. No systematic attempt is made to assess the impact of current American policies or to predict the probable consequences of alternative courses of U.S. action. The interpretations, have been derived independently of existing official assessments.

Research for this Memorandum was completed in early October. However, the analysis takes account of the subsequent Chinese nuclear test conducted on October 16.
SUMMARY

The cautious optimism, which arose in some quarters following General Khanh's assumption of power in Saigon on January 30, 1964, has given way to uncertainty and pessimism in the wake of acute political strife and chronic military difficulties.

In endeavoring to counter the Viet Cong threat, the government of South Vietnam continues to be able to rely on a larger (but not necessarily large enough) and better-equipped military force, a firm U.S. commitment of large-scale support, and a realistic counterinsurgency plan. However, serious military and political weaknesses remain. The government's pacification program has progressed sluggishly, has worked unevenly as between one area and another, and has suffered frequent setbacks. Some eight to twelve provinces lack effective governmental control. Within the armed forces, ineptitude, frequent changes of command, and abuse of power by officers tend to cause inertia and to lower morale.

The South Vietnamese government has also been seriously weakened by internal rivalries and divisions. A series of violent popular demonstrations and attempted coups has rendered the political situation highly unstable. Long-smoldering social, religious, and ethnic animosities have flared up. New and unpredictable political forces (e.g., the Buddhist movement and the "young officers") have arisen to challenge the formerly dominant Catholic civil servants and senior military officers. Nevertheless, the Communist insurgents currently lack the capability to achieve a decisive victory. In view of the existing weaknesses on
both sides, the war has become more of a political struggle than a military contest.

The Viet Cong probably expect to continue the war along the present tactical lines, to increase the frequency of violent incidents, and to keep up their intensive political and propaganda work. Because of their military limitations and political advantages, the Communist insurgents will probably continue to rely most heavily on terrorist pressures (assassinations, kidnappings, harassing fire, etc.). As opportunities arise, however, they will probably unleash from time to time coordinated guerrilla campaigns that involve simultaneous large-scale attacks in widely separated areas. Since the temporary lull occasioned in August and early September by the Tonkin Gulf crisis and Saigon's political turmoil, some spectacular large-scale engagements have already occurred, resulting in extremely high casualties on both sides.

Communist efforts will probably continue to be directed toward the twin goals of (a) undermining the South Vietnamese government's ability and will to resist, and (b) harassing the United States into an early withdrawal of troops and assistance. Patient in the face of adversity and confident of ultimate victory, the Viet Cong probably will continue to regard guerrilla action and terrorism as sufficient to force a divided and demoralized Saigon regime to accept "peace and neutrality." Under existing circumstances, any such settlement would almost certainly be on Viet Cong terms and, accordingly, would call for removal of the American military presence from the area without providing effective international guarantees against a Communist take-over.
It is likely that North Vietnam and China will continue to maintain the current high levels of covert infiltration and supply in support of the Viet Cong insurrection. Hanoi and Peking probably will not undertake any shift to high-risk, massive, and overt assistance unless there should be a further U.S. or South Vietnamese move toward escalation.

The recent Chinese nuclear detonation is not likely, in itself, to alter Peking's reluctance to initiate a military escalation in South Vietnam. However, the ominous, though long-range, prospect of a Chinese nuclear capability might ultimately result in intimidation of South Vietnamese leaders or a general rise of neutralist sentiment.

Stoppage of all external aid to the Viet Cong -- difficult if not impossible to achieve -- would not in itself deal a mortal blow to their capabilities or intentions. To be sure, interdiction of external supply would yield Saigon substantial long-term advantages in pacification. However, it would risk provoking a swift and possibly severe Viet Cong reaction, which could have very serious consequences in view of the current political instability. Moreover, to the extent that stoppage of external aid was secured by means that inflicted significant losses on the civilian population (even in relatively low-density areas), further short-term risks would be imposed on the South Vietnamese government.

Prolonged continuation of the present instability and popular demoralization will ultimately emasculate any effective resistance to the Communist insurrection.
Conversely, the success of current pacification efforts will depend on the establishment of a strong, efficient, and reasonably popular national government in the near future. The chances for a restoration of political stability, however, cannot be estimated with any confidence in the present rapidly changing environment.

Despite many adverse factors in the situation, a negotiated settlement on Communist terms is certainly not inevitable. If present and future South Vietnamese leaders can somehow manage to compromise their differences, overcome the ineptitude and corruption of earlier regimes, and rally "the hearts and minds" of the people, there will be a good chance of bringing the Communist insurgents under control.
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CONTENTS

PREFACE ................................................................. iii

SUMMARY ................................................................. v

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..................................................... ix

Section
I. THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM ......................... 1
   Chronological Summary: 1954 to Present ...... 1
   The Viet Cong Threat ................................. 14
   Strengths and Weaknesses of the Saigon Regime 26

II. THE OUTLOOK FOR SOUTH VIETNAM ...................... 36
   The Political Outlook .............................. 37
   The Military Outlook .............................. 51

III. CONCLUSIONS ..................................................... 83
I. THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Over the past several months there has been a marked deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam. Despite heavy losses, the Communist-led Viet Cong guerrillas have multiplied and improved their military capabilities, with vital assistance from the North. On the other hand, the South Vietnamese government has been seriously divided and weakened, a series of coups and continuing public disorders manifesting all the symptoms of a deep political sickness. This critical state of affairs did not develop overnight. Before attempting to assess the current position of the contending forces, perhaps it would be enlightening to review briefly the sequence of major events which has led up to the present crisis.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY: 1954 TO PRESENT

1954-1959:

Origins of the Insurgency: Following the Geneva Conference in mid-1954 hard-core Communist elements of the Viet Minh were ordered by the leadership in Hanoi to go underground in South Vietnam. Hiding arms, they proceeded to organize covertly the nucleus of future Viet Cong guerrilla bands. While awaiting orders to strike, they received training and supplies from the North; also their ranks were reinforced by cadres moving in through Laos.¹

Progress of the Diem Regime: Despite serious economic dislocation, acute shortages of trained personnel, and a host of other handicaps, the government of South Vietnam made conspicuous progress between 1954 and 1959. Agrarian reforms gave tens of thousands of landless peasant families their own plots to till; rice and rubber production surpassed prewar levels; the transportation system was almost completely rebuilt; construction of an industrial base was begun; school enrollments tripled; medical clinics were established over the countryside; and steps were taken to build an effective public administration.²

Political Weaknesses: Ill-prepared for independence by French colonial rule, South Vietnam's progress toward democracy was handicapped by a lack of developed political institutions, a dearth of popular and capable leaders, and by the continuing internal and external Communist threat to national security. Parties tended to be poorly organized, urban-based, dominated by a few personalities and narrowly oriented toward special interests or fanatical religious ideologies. In response to a succession of sect uprisings, abortive military revolts, and attempted assassinations, the Diem regime imposed stringent restraints on the press and all political opposition -- controls which increasingly exceeded the requirements of internal security.

American Involvement: Responding to an urgent call for assistance, the United States in the autumn of 1954 agreed to send direct American aid (primarily economic) to the government in Saigon to enable it to survive. In October, President Eisenhower explained in a letter to President Diem: "The purpose of this offer is to assist the government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means."³

1960:

Growing North Vietnamese Intervention: Although more populous and heavily industrialized than the South, North Vietnam lagged far behind in gross national product, per capita food production, and general living standards. By 1960 serious agricultural difficulties had begun to cause severe food shortages in some areas. Realizing that the Diem government was succeeding despite all predictions to the contrary (and was outstripping the North in most fields of achievement), North Vietnam began to intensify efforts to subvert and disrupt its southern neighbor. In September the Third Lao Dong Party Congress in Hanoi exhorted its members "to liberate South Vietnam from the ruling yoke of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen in order to achieve national unity and complete independence and freedom throughout the country." Three months later, on December 20, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF/SV) was created as the political organization of the Viet Cong.\(^4\)

Abortive Paratroop Coup: In November 1960 rising anti-Diem sentiment among a group of young military officers -- quietly shared in many sections of the civilian population -- climaxd in a sudden uprising by three paratroop battalions stationed in Saigon. Just as Diem was apparently agreeing to step down in favor of a provisional military regime (to be succeeded later by a "national union" government based on free elections), loyal commanders near the capital rallied to the President and revolt was put down.

1961:

Increasing U.S. Commitment: As mounting Viet Cong attacks and internal political problems increasingly jeopardized the existence of the South Vietnamese government, urgent pleas were made for expanding the American aid commitment. High-level visits by Vice

\(^4\) A Threat to the Peace: North Vietnam's Effort to Conquer South Vietnam, Part I, Department of State Publication 7308, December 1961.
President Lyndon Johnson in May, and General Maxwell Taylor in late September secured promises of major political and administrative reforms from the Diem regime. Toward the end of the year the Kennedy Administration agreed to begin a massive program of military as well as economic assistance to enable South Vietnam to defeat the Communist insurgency.

1962:

Intensified Internal and External Pressures: Rising popular discontent was dramatically evinced in February when two South Vietnamese Air Force pilots launched an air attack on the Presidential Palace, destroying one wing but failing in its apparent objective of killing Diem and the Nhus. Meanwhile, the Viet Cong stepped up operations with substantial help from North Vietnam. In June a majority report of the International Control Commission (ICC) -- signed by India and Canada but not Poland -- charged Hanoi with "subversion" and "interference" in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the illegal flow of weapons, cadres, and terrorist agents into the South continued on an expanding scale.

1963:

Worsening Military Trend: By the beginning of 1963, if not earlier, there were indications of a significantly worsening trend in South Vietnam's military situation. Government successes over the Viet Cong in 1962 had prematurely induced a widespread climate of optimism -- not confined to South Vietnamese observers alone. Actually, these successes may have resulted from the time lag required by the Communist guerrillas to learn how to cope with the government's increased mobility and striking power after the introduction of large-scale U.S. assistance (e.g., helicopters) beginning in December 1961. The Viet Cong

5 The ICC also found Saigon guilty of receiving increased military aid and establishing a "factual military alliance" with the United States, but viewed this as a reaction to increased Communist subversion. New York Times, May 26 and June 5, 1962.
victory at Ap Bac, a hamlet 40 miles south of Saigon, on January 2, 1963, may have signaled the closing of this gap in military technique (although the stage had been set by a government intelligence failure).

The Fall of the Diem Regime: Under the highly authoritarian "Mandarin rule" of President Diem the South Vietnamese government became increasingly plagued by corruption, nepotism, and administrative ineptitude. Promised reforms were not carried out and political opposition was ruthlessly suppressed. Popular dissatisfaction and dissidence mounted, seriously undermining the war effort. However, the myopic, inflexible Ngo family ignored the worsening internal trend and increasingly lost contact with key groups of the population.

The Buddhist majority, incensed by alleged discriminatory treatment at the hands of the heavily Catholic government (e.g., a ban on the flying of Buddhist flags), resorted to demonstrations which were brutally suppressed. Eight Buddhist demonstrators were killed at Hué on May 8. On July 11 an elderly bonze burned himself to death on a Saigon street in protest against the regime. However, President Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu, his brother and principal adviser, refused to make any important concessions, and on August 21 ordered military raids on pagodas in Saigon and other cities. Ultimately, they succeeded in alienating American support. On November 1, 1963, with popular dissatisfaction spreading to the upper ranks of the army, the Diem regime

6In the Ap Bac engagement, government troops supported by artillery, helicopters, and fighter-bombers and enjoying a nine-to-one superiority in strength, attacked a Viet Cong battalion. In a battle that raged all day this vastly inferior Communist force shot down 5 helicopters, killed 65 government soldiers and 3 Americans (while losing under 50 of their own troops), wounded 100 others, then slipped away in the night. See combat reports in the New York Times, January 3-7, 1963.
was overthrown in a coup which claimed the lives of both the President and his brother, Nhu.7

Government by Military Junta: For three months following the overthrow of the Diem regime, South Vietnam was led by a military junta under General Duong Van Minh. During this period there was a rapid and serious deterioration in the military situation with sizeable areas containing several million people falling to Communist control. This resulted partly from the indecisive leadership of the new ruling junta in Saigon and partly from intensified Viet Cong action. Taking advantage of the general post-coup instability, the Communist guerrillas launched a major offensive in the northern Mekong Delta.

1964:

January 30, the Khanh Coup: Scarcely three months after the fall of Diem, the nation was shaken by a second coup led by Major General Nguyen Khanh who charged (but never proved) that certain generals in the ruling junta were conspiring with France to "neutralize" South Vietnam. In the wake of these two upheavals the administrative control structure almost broke down: 35 of 41 province chiefs holding office on November 1 were replaced (and nine provinces had three chiefs each in as many months); lesser officials were replaced or shifted about in wholesale lots; the command of most major military units changed hands twice. Inevitably public confidence was shaken by these drastic changes and the concomitant loss of personal security. Army morale plummeted and desertion rates increased, both among regular troops and paramilitary forces.

On the positive side, however, the leadership under General Khanh seemed to inject new vigor, perception, and determination into the war. Already

highly regarded for his military ability, Khanh soon evinced a broad grasp of the varied political, economic, and social aspects of counterinsurgency.

March 7, The Pacification Plan: Acknowledging that a purely "military" solution was impossible, Khanh introduced, on March 7, a broad-gauged pacification program, encompassing significant social and economic reforms. The plan envisioned a combination of military operations, to drive the Viet Cong out of the countryside, and civilian programs, to build viable local economies and popular local governments. Following an "oil slick" strategy, military forces -- backed by civilian specialists -- were to push outward gradually from secure bases, their aim being to clear and hold selected areas formerly dominated by the Communists (a variation of Diem's Strategic Hamlet program). By a process of cautious expansion the original "oil spots" of government control would be linked together into a system of fortified hamlets which continued to spread outward from the secure zones like an oil slick on water.

To implement this plan Khanh called for the recruitment of 50,000 additional troops, for substantial strengthening of the inadequate corps of civil administrators, and for the expansion of training programs to provide greatly increased numbers of teachers, medical technicians, agricultural and financial specialists. He emphasized that Saigon must become responsive to the local needs of the long-neglected countryside.

July, Viet Cong Offensive: After a period of sluggish and uneven progress in the government's pacification program, the Communist insurgents, in mid-summer, unleashed another campaign of guerrilla attacks and terrorism. During the third week in July there were 920 "incidents" (i.e., armed attacks, terrorism, sabotage, and propaganda), nearly equalling the weekly record of 1,021 set in November 1963 in the turbulent period following the overthrow of the Diem regime.8

8 For the month of November 1963 the Viet Cong was credited with initiating 3,182 incidents. By comparison,
For the entire month of July Viet Cong forces inflicted some 3,190 government casualties (900 killed) -- almost double the figure for June -- while suffering a loss of 1,590. This brought the total number of government troops killed in action from January through July to 13,120 -- as against 21,000 killed in all of 1963.  

July, Mounting Internal Difficulties: The July upsurge of well-prepared Viet Cong attacks resulted in a series of demoralizing government defeats which temporarily captured the military initiative from Saigon's less maneuverable and still under-strength armies. During the previous spring and early summer there had been a mood of growing confidence that despite setbacks here and there, the youthful, seemingly vigorous leadership under General Khanh was at least on the right track and had begun to take the first steps toward victory. However, with the increasingly adverse tide of war in July, weariness, pessimism, and doubts brought latent social and political tensions to the surface.

Within the ruling circle of military officers personal rivalries intensified. Party politicians and others demanded a larger civilian role in the direction of affairs. Long-simmering Buddhist-Catholic animosities boiled over, extremists on each side viewing the other religious body as more dangerous to its own survival than the Viet Cong. Students and intellectuals, chafing under wartime restrictions and searching for personal identity in a brutal and uncertain environment, became putty in the hands of religious fanatics and self-serving politicians.

there had been only 1,782 incidents in November 1961, the "critical" month before the large-scale increase in U.S. military assistance.

During June 1964 the government had lost 1,890 troops killed, wounded, or missing -- as against 1,140 for the Viet Cong. For incident and casualty figures quoted above, see New York Times, March 27, April 27, and July 9, 1964; Washington Post, July 23, 28, and August 16, 1964; Los Angeles Times, August 7, 1964.
As military defeats and coup rumors mounted in July, Khanh attempted to inspire popular support for his leadership and for the war effort by espousing the patriotic call to arms, "Bac Tien!" ("To the North!") However, this failed to halt the trend toward popular apathy and political instability. The slogan was soon abandoned as Washington made clear that the United States would not provide support for attacks on the North.

**Early August, Tonkin Crisis and Aftermath:** On August 2 and 4, North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked American destroyers on patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin, leading to retaliatory U.S. air raids on August 5 against naval facilities north of the 17th Parallel. In South Vietnam, General Khanh seized this opportunity to strengthen his threatened political position at the expense of his opponents and rivals. On the pretext of an imminent North Vietnamese attack -- in response to the U.S. bombing of naval facilities -- Khanh declared a new state of emergency on August 7, imposed martial law, and clamped down further on press censorship.

**August 16, Abortive Governmental Reorganization:** Moving rapidly to centralize control in his own hands, Khanh pressed the Military Revolutionary Council (supreme organ of government since the November 1963 coup) to proclaim a new constitution on August 16 and elect him to the newly created post of President. Besides giving him virtually unlimited power, the new arrangement removed his chief rival General Duong Van Minh as Chief of State, and undercut the status of civilian politicians like Vice-Premier Nguyen Ton Hoan, leader of the Dai Viet party, who was said to be busily recruiting military officers for a coup attempt.

**Late August, Political Demonstrations and Street Fighting:** Opposition quickly developed to the new constitution among key elements of the urban population: students, politicians, and Buddhists. Student demonstrators took to the streets to denounce Khanh's "military dictatorship" and to demand abrogation of the August 7 emergency decrees and
other restraints on democratic action. Dai Viet leaders, fearing for their political futures, encouraged the student demonstrations and intensified their own behind-the-scenes cultivation of coup-inclined military officers. More important, a newly aggressive Buddhist leadership, now effectively organized for political action through the Buddhist Secular Affairs Institute, demanded the elimination of former Diemist officials from the government and, on the evening of August 24, presented Khanh with an ultimatum calling for the immediate termination of one-man rule under the new constitution.

Buddhists had long held Khanh under suspicion for being soft on Diemism (e.g., his ambivalent role in the abortive 1960 coup, his overthrow of the Buddhist-favored military junta under Duong Van Minh, the subsequent mysterious death of Major Nguyen Van Nhung who had reportedly assassinated Diem and Nhu) and had resented Khanh's holdover of experienced Catholic administrators in the civil service, accusing them of perpetuating religious repression and injustice. Following the August 16 constitutional changes Buddhist leaders interpreted the removal of General Minh and the centralization of power in Khanh's hands as a return to a dictatorship in which Diemist elements would have the upper hand. To avoid this possibility -- as well as further their own apparent aim of gaining a predominant role in national affairs -- the Buddhist leadership now backed their demands with the considerable influence of the Buddhist Secular Affairs Institute (established January 3) with its elaborate officialdom paralleling the national government structure from cabinet to provinces. The eight-point Buddhist ultimatum of August 24, besides demanding repeal of the August 16 constitution, called for the dismissal of alleged Diemist officials in government (in particular, former members of the Ngo Dinh Nhu's Can Lao Party), the formation of representative councils to guarantee religious freedom, and a promise of free elections before November 1, 1965.

Street demonstrations fostered by these disaffected groups quickly snowballed in the major cities. In part their growth clearly attested
deep-seated grievances, but the agitation of student
groups and youthful street mobs by religious extrem-
ists, money-dispensing political parties, and covert
Viet Cong agents also exercised a large influence.
Moreover, the demonstrations grew because General
Khanh deliberately refrained from trying to suppress
them -- on the theory that the demonstrators would
be impressed with the lack of Diemist police brutality
and would eventually rally to the support of the
government. On August 23 banner-waving mobs in
Saigon turned to violence, sacking a radio station
and storming the Ministry of Information. In the
absence of any effective governmental restraint,
long-smoldering Buddhist-Catholic animosities flared
up, often fanned by false rumors, and led to
street fighting in centers of religious tension such
as Danang, Hué, and Saigon.

August-September, The Interim Government: On
August 25, with the situation in the cities rapidly
approaching anarchy, General Khanh and the Military
Revolutionary Council yielded to Buddhist and student
demands. The August 16 constitution was withrawn.
The Council promised to dissolve itself (the members
returning to "their purely military function")
immediately after naming a new "national leader" who
would be responsible for rebuilding the government
along democratic lines. However, the military
officers were unable to agree on a new head of state
or what powers to give him and after two days of
deadlocked discussion agreed on a "Steering Committee"
or Triumvirate (Generals Khanh, Duong Van Minh, and
Tran Thien Khiem) with vaguely defined authority.
During the final hours of its deliberations, troops
for the first time opened fire on demonstrators
after a predominantly Catholic mob of several
thousands, which surrounded the Saigon Military
Headquarters, threatened to storm it in support of
Khanh's retention of full powers.

The Triumvirate of incompatible generals quickly
became deadlocked and on September 3, after a brief
rest in Dalat, Khanh resumed his pre-August 16 position
of Premier -- diminished but still the most powerful
national leader. Meanwhile a caretaker government in
Saigon under Vice-Premier Nguyen Xuan Oanh had
finally restored order in the cities, although a
Buddhist ultimatum forced it to release 509
demonstrators who had been arrested, including several
known Viet Cong agents. At Khanh's insistence, Dai
Viet leader Nguyen Toan Hoan (who had already resigned
as Vice-Premier in anger) left the country and most
of the military officers who held high administrative
posts resigned to allow the appointment of a
predominantly civilian government. 10 On September 8
the Triumvirate chose General Duong Van Minh as
chairman (to act as untitled chief of state) and
asked him to form a Supreme National Council of
prominent civilians to advise it, draft a provisional
constitution, and convene within two months a
representative national congress expected to prepare
for general elections in 1965 and a permanent,
democratic government. On September 26 the Supreme
National Council, composed of 17 representatives of
major religious and civic groups, formally convened
in Saigon and prepared to undertake its multiple
tasks.

**September 13, Abortive Coup and Rise of Young Officers:**
Meanwhile, Saigon was again shaken by an attempted
military coup. Generals Lam Van Phat and Duong Ngoc
Lam, smarting from recent removal from high posts and
alarmed at rising Buddhist influence in government,
enlisted the support (perhaps through misunder-
standing) of Fourth Corps Commander Duong Van Duc. At

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10 Among the military officers who resigned were the
following: Brigadier General Do Mao, Deputy Premier for
Cultural and Social Affairs; Brigadier General Lam Van
Phan, Minister of Interior; Colonel Vuong Quang Truong,
Minister of Health; and Lieutenant General Tran Thien Khiem,
Minister of Defense. Khanh apparently assumed Khiem's
former position as commander in chief of the armed forces.
Moreover, in a military reshuffle several high-ranking
officers who had been implicated in coup plots (e.g., army
chief of staff, Brigadier General Nguyen Van Thieu) or who
were particularly objectionable to the Buddhists (e.g.,
II Corps Commander, Major-General Do Cao Tri who had only
belatedly joined the revolt against Diem) were removed
from their posts and, in some cases, sent on diplomatic
missions abroad.
dawn on September 13, they trucked 7,000-8,000 troops into Saigon and without bloodshed seized several strategic points. However within 24 hours the revolt collapsed due to disagreements among its leaders and to the resistance of several younger officers (notably Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky and Sub-brigadier Nguyen Chanh Thi). While supporting Khanh, they pointedly warned that he must press genuine reforms -- with military participation -- or face another revolt. This warning was underlined on September 26 by a reported demand that Triumvirate member Tran Thiem Khiem be sent into diplomatic exile and that five allegedly pro-neutralist generals, who had been arrested in the January 30 coup, be prevented from returning to power. (On September 30 the government announced the imminent departure of General Khiem for London and the resignation of other members of General Khanh's official family, including press aide Lieutenant Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao.)

**Late September, Labor and Montagnard Unrest:** On September 20-21 a general strike by some 20,000 textile, transport, and public utility workers belonging to the previously tame Vietnamese Labor Confederation paralyzed communications and utilities in Saigon for 36 hours. Though settled peacefully, it dramatically raised the long-standing economic and political grievances of urban labor and reportedly forced the government to ban employer lockouts and dismissals of employees for the duration of the national emergency. (It did not, of course, deal with the equally serious problems of urban unemployment and under-employment.)

Meanwhile, in the central highlands some 7,000 Rhade tribesmen -- encouraged by Viet Cong agents -- rose in revolt on September 20. Within a short time the rebels took over five Special Forces Camps -- seized lowland troops as hostages, briefly captured the radio station at Bannethout, capital of Darlac Province, and raised anew the cry for autonomy. The latter, though vaguely defined, was taken to mean representation in the Saigon government, withdrawal of lowland military personnel, and the teaching of tribal languages and customs in local schools. Although government forces, with the help of U.S.
mediation, were able to resume control of the rebel headquarters at Bonsarpa on September 28, the specter of a spreading Montagnard uprising was not entirely removed from the political horizon.

THE VIET CONG THREAT

The Communist-led Viet Cong constitute a strong and growing threat to the government of South Vietnam today. At present they number between 28,000 and 34,000 "hard core" guerrillas supplemented at local levels by an irregular force of 60,000 to 80,000. These are deployed 35 per cent in the northern and central provinces, 30 per cent in areas immediately north and east of Saigon, 15 per cent in the narrow belt running from the Mekong Delta northward to the Cambodian border, and 20 per cent in the lower Ca Mao Peninsula. Despite heavy losses -- which have been estimated as 10,000 killed, wounded or captured in the first six months of 1964 -- the Communist insurgents apparently have augmented their forces by several thousand regular troops. Moreover, they appear to be capable of maintaining this high rate of increase from internal and external sources. 11

11 For estimates of Viet Cong size, growth trends, and deployment see remarks of U.S. Military Assistance Command spokesman at Saigon briefing, July 29, as reported in the New York Times and Washington Post for July 30, 1964. The figures of 28,000 to 34,000 "hard core" Viet Cong, which were presented in this briefing, represented a steep increase over previous official estimates of 23,000 to 27,000 released in late 1963. This suggests that possibly 5,000 to 7,000 "hard core" troops were added to the Viet Cong forces in the first half of this year. However, the U.S. briefing officer emphasized that the increases were
Viet Cong numerical growth has been more than matched by qualitative improvements in combat capability. Years of "no quarter" jungle fighting against heavy odds have produced a tough, disciplined, and resourceful guerrilla force. Increasingly, the Viet Cong have been able to turn from irregular to regular warfare, from roving guerrilla bands operating mostly at night to well-organized companies and battalions which may attack as a disciplined body at any time. Within the last year selected elements have demonstrated an ability to form rapidly into a regular force, when desired, and to carry out effective conventional operations. In some cases, simultaneous attacks have been made by two or three battalions in a coordinated action.

Stepped-up external assistance has played a key role in improving Viet Cong capabilities. Despite the strict prohibitions of the 1954 Geneva agreements, Hanoi and, more recently, Peking have long furnished substantial aid. North Vietnam has provided essential supplies and

due in part to more precise intelligence collection measures and that the revised estimate did not necessarily reflect an actual addition of that number of men. United States estimates of Viet Cong irregulars have remained constant at 60,000 to 80,000 but some unofficial sources would set the figure much higher. (For example, see Hanson Baldwin's reference to 100,000 to 125,000 "part-time guerrillas or active supporters," New York Times, May 17, 1964.)

12 The Geneva "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam" (July 10, 1954) forbade either North or South Vietnam to augment their military capabilities by enlarging the size of their military forces, establishing new bases or permitting foreign powers to do so, increasing their armaments or adding new weapons, or adding to the number
military equipment as well as trained and dedicated cadres to lead the Communist guerrillas.\textsuperscript{13} Approximately 30 percent of the total personnel in Viet Cong units formed in the eight months after the Diem regime was overthrown are believed to have infiltrated from the North.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, Chinese-made weapons and ammunition have been captured in

of foreign military personnel on their soil. From the beginning the South Vietnamese government has refused to be legally bound by the 1954 accords, claiming that it had not authorized the French representative at Geneva to sign for it. Hence Saigon has felt legally justified in requesting foreign military assistance. Moreover, it has felt morally justified in view of Hanoi's prior aid to the Viet Cong. (As noted in the previous section, a majority report of the ICC in June 1962 adduced evidence of North Vietnam's illegal action, although Hanoi -- in contrast to Saigon -- had allowed the ICC very little freedom to carry out its mission of inspection.) The United States, while refusing to sign the 1954 agreements, issued a unilateral declaration of intent to "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb [them]." Washington has argued that subsequent military assistance to South Vietnam was justified by Hanoi's previous illegal support for the Viet Cong. Moreover, it has been pointed out that under the terms of the 1954 agreements weapons could be sent to the South Vietnamese government "for replacement purposes." In deference to specific prohibitions of the Geneva accords (Article 7), the United States -- until the recent crisis -- refrained from overtly introducing "jet engines and jet weapons" into South Vietnam. See Further Documents Relating to the Discussion of Indo-China at the Geneva Conference, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, August 1954, pp. 7, 33.

\textsuperscript{13} See Joseph J. Zasloff, The Role of North Vietnam in the Southern Insurgency (U), The RAND Corporation, RM-4140-PR, July 1964 (Secret).

significant quantities -- including 75 mm recoilless rifles, rocket launchers, and large mortars. To be sure, the Viet Cong continue to comprise a largely self-contained and self-sustaining force living off the land, recruiting the majority of its rank and file troops from the local population, and capturing or crudely manufacturing the bulk of its weapons in the South. However, increasing infiltration of cadres has given the Viet Cong a vital psychological and command link with the North; the continuing supply of weapons has helped the Communist insurgents better to cope with the American-supplied armor and air power of the government forces.

An incidental effect of the increased flow of external assistance to the Viet Cong has been complication and exacerbation of South Vietnam's relations with her western neighbors. Hanoi's principal traffic artery to the Southern insurgents has been the well-worn Ho Chi Minh Trail -- actually a network of mountain paths extending down the spine of the Annamite chain in Laos, with countless exit routes branching off into South Vietnam over a 300-mile stretch. In addition, the highlands of eastern Cambodia have become used increasingly both as a supply route into the canal-laced Mekong Delta and as a sanctuary for Viet Cong forces operating in the adjacent border region. The growing use of Cambodia as a supply route and haven has occasionally provoked South Vietnamese troops (and their American advisers) to "hot pursuit" across the border resulting in serious incidents such as the March 19
attack on Chantrea. More recently, in September
Cambodian aircraft and river gunboats have been involved
in clashes and General Khanh, claiming evidence of neu-
tralist collusion between Prince Norodom Sihanouk and
Nguyen Huu Tho (National Liberation Front leader), has
threatened to blockade Cambodian commerce on the Mekong
River.

Paralleling the numerical growth and improved military
capabilities of the Viet Cong in recent months has been
a further expansion and consolidation of Communist
political control in the countryside. General Khanh
ruefully declared in May that seven million people had
been lost to Communist control in the first three months
after the anti-Diem coup and that only two million of

15 A special United Nations fact-finding mission was
appointed by the Security Council in June to investigate
Cambodia's complaint on this incident. After on-the-spot
inquiries in Cambodia and South Vietnam (but denial of
admission to Viet Cong-held territory) the UN mission
reported back to the Security Council in late July,
recommending: (1) the appointment of a high-level UN
negotiator to help restore political relations between
the two feuding countries (broken in August 1963) and (2)
the dispatch of unarmed UN civilian observers to Cambodia
to observe possible future incursions across the border --
but to restrict their operations to Cambodian territory.
A South Vietnamese proposal for an international police
force or observer mission "with sufficient personnel and
resources to keep the frontier area under surveillance"
was dropped by the UN mission after Cambodia indicated
that it would oppose such a move. Because of persistent
opposition by Cambodia, North Vietnam, and China -- as
well as the NLFSV -- there is little hope that effective
UN machinery can be established to define the 650-mile
border between South Vietnam and Cambodia.
these had been brought back under Saigon's hegemony. 16 Sizeable and expanding "liberated areas" now cover extensive portions of the countryside from the Ca Mao Peninsula to the northern highlands. Although the National Liberation Front (NLFSV) has made no attempt thus far in these areas to establish a national government to rival the successive regimes in Saigon, it has set up local shadow governments which collect taxes, run schools, and perform other administrative functions.

A skillful blending of positive economic measures, mass manipulation techniques, and terrorist intimidation has permitted the Communist insurgents to develop a political influence far beyond what might be expected from their actual "hard core" numbers. While perhaps fewer than one in fifty Vietnamese (i.e., 300,000 out of 15 million population) voluntarily support the NLFSV, it has managed to build up hundreds of loyal mass organizations among key groups -- youth, women, farmers -- at the village level. 17 These "liberation associations" put unrelenting social pressure on the broad, uncommitted masses at least to acquiesce in Communist leadership. They also undertake to organize anti-governmental activities, create difficulties for Saigon's local representatives, spread discontent among


17 These estimates are given by Douglas Pike, for four years a principal USIS officer in Vietnam, in an incisive analysis entitled "Vietnam as the Reds See It," appearing in the Washington Post, August 23, 1964.
its garrison troops or parents of soldiers, and provide food and money for Viet Cong forces operating in the region.

Contrary to a widely held misconception, the main Communist effort in the countryside -- in terms of man hours and money -- is not expended in military operations, but rather in propaganda and mass organization activities. The Viet Cong guerrillas almost always confine their attacks to areas previously "softened up" by the approximately 5,000 agitprop workers who make first contact with the local villages.\(^{18}\) Working in small teams these political cadres fan out across the countryside attracting crowds with dramatic presentations or song fests on revolutionary themes. These are followed up by mass meetings to discuss local grievances -- which can often be skilfully directed against Saigon or Washington (e.g., blaming poor harvests on U.S. defoliation or disease epidemics on "germ warfare"). Finally the population is ripe for propaganda lectures and organizational activity.

For the most part, Communist political cadres initially emphasize persuasion and nonviolent social pressures to secure a base of popular support. However, selective kidnapping or assassination of local leaders is frequently employed in a secondary role to disrupt existing order and to intimidate the population. To generate popular support the Viet Cong introduce positive measures such as labor

\(^{18}\) In 160 of the 237 administrative districts of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong have reportedly stationed at least two agitprop teams. Thus some 320 teams in all are currently deployed throughout the nation, as compared with only 20 "information teams" fielded by Saigon. In 77 administrative districts the Viet Cong have discontinued
assistance in planting and harvesting crops (often furnished by nearby Viet Cong troops), disaster relief programs, and redistribution of the land holdings of absentee landlords. As their position becomes stronger, they increasingly resort to terror to weed out the lukewarm and opposition elements, labeling them "traitors" or "enemy agents." Recruitment of armed forces is begun both for newly organized local militia units and for the Viet Cong. The promise of fame and adventure is an effective lure to rural youths who otherwise face a seemingly monotonous, purposeless life on farm or fishing boat. In this manner rural Communist bases are built up, progressively extending the area under NLFSV political control and, concomitantly, providing greater assistance to the Viet Cong for their military operations.

It should be noted, however, that the efforts of the Communist insurgents to build and extend their control have not been marked by uniform and easy success. They must contend with certain inherent difficulties and, partly on this account, have suffered some serious setbacks in various areas in recent months. The Viet Cong have relatively little of positive value to offer those segments of the population -- primarily the urban residents -- which can work under the protection of the South Vietnamese government. In the countryside their acts of brutality -- which appear to be increasing -- intimidate

agitprop activity, apparently confident that their control is already secure. New York Times, August 9, 1964.

19 An American army officer with recent experience in Vietnam observes that while the Viet Cong have been "fairly successful" in winning popular support in remote
but do not win reliable popular support. Similarly, with Viet Cong taxes now heavier and more systematically collected than government levies, peasants in some areas are being alienated by the oppressive Communist financial burden. Nevertheless, the NLFSV retains a strong hold over sizeable territories with large populations. Moreover, the Communist insurgents enjoy the considerable psychological asset of strong backing from the militant and Peking-oriented North.

The military role of the Viet Cong has, thus far, been complementary to the more fundamental political and organizational process. It has attempted to generate and sustain a high level of disorder and chaos, sabotaging the government's economic and social programs, subverting its administrative control, and wearing down both the civilian and military will to resist. A favored means has been the harassment and assassination of all local authorities who refuse to cooperate (especially the very popular and the very unpopular) -- district officials, school teachers, health workers, etc. Nearly 3,000 civilians in and out of government were assassinated in 1960 and 1961, while another 2,500 were kidnapped. Intimidation and liquidation of civilian leadership effectively tears and destroys the old social and political fabric. Guerrilla attacks on paramilitary village defense

and isolated regions such as the lower Delta, they have had "relatively less success" nearer urban centers. He concludes: "The city dweller who works under the full protection of the government generally finds it is in his best economic and social interests to cast his lot with the government." Lt. Colonel Jonathan F. Ladd, "Viet Cong Portrait," Military Review, July 1964, p. 77.
forces deepen the spreading terror and paralysis. Finally, direct operations against regular government units are undertaken to restrict their activities, to capture weapons, and to weaken troop morale and discipline. In general, Viet Cong attacks have been used more to achieve psychological and supply objectives than for the purely military purpose of annihilating Saigon's troops.

Whether in the Mekong Delta or the Central Highlands, the Communist insurgents employ the well-tested guerrilla tactics developed in the Viet Minh resistance by Mao Tsetung's brilliant Vietnamese disciple, Vo Nguyen Giap.\(^{20}\) Planning and operations are carefully designed to achieve maximum psychological gains with an economy of effort and a minimum of risk. Accordingly, the Viet Cong are reluctant to undertake any actions that would leave themselves vulnerable to large-scale counterattack, particularly from the air. Their favorite targets are exposed government supply convoys or small isolated outposts. The former may be ambushed and valuable weapons captured without serious risk; the latter may be overwhelmed in swift attacks by superior Communist forces -- or penetrated by defections among the defenders.\(^{21}\)


\(^{21}\)Recent Viet Cong operations illustrate the skillful use of surprise, deception, camouflage, and swift attack which have been used with increasing success. On July 4 the well-established, U.S.-sponsored Special Forces camp at Polei Krong, near the Laotian border, was overrun, reportedly with the aid of turncoat government troops. Two days later the Viet Cong felt strong enough to launch simultaneously four actions of battalion size or larger
During the last year the aggregate number of Viet Cong incidents has continued to increase at a rapid rate. There has been a steep rise in terrorist acts (assassinations, kidnappings, harassing fire, etc.) in both the countryside and the cities. Although the reported monthly totals for armed attacks have declined, the psychological effects of this have been offset by periodic short-term Viet Cong offensives featuring large-scale attacks. Moreover, the Communist insurgents have undoubtedly been busy consolidating the vast rural areas which slipped from Saigon's control in the turbulent period after the Diem

in the Central Highlands, including a bloody stand-off at the Nam Dong Special Forces camp (later abandoned by Saigon after a heroic but costly defense). In mid-July a Viet Cong force of over 1,000, using a classic guerrilla maneuver, attacked an isolated Mekong Delta outpost at Vinh Cheo, then lured a relief column of five companies into an elaborate 6-mile ambush, inflicting some 200 casualties. On August 20 a battalion-sized government force in Kien Hoa Province, after relieving a beleaguered outpost about 45 miles southwest of Saigon, stumbled into a Viet Cong ambush, suffering roughly 200 casualties (including four U.S. advisers killed). These losses, believed to be the largest of the war for a single engagement, were doubly frustrating since they probably could have been avoided if either (a) the government troops had taken proper precautions (they assumed the territory "cleared" since they had traversed it earlier) or (b) if the local villagers, who had watched the Viet Cong lay the trap, had given the troops any warning of it. In addition to operations in the remote countryside the Communist insurgents have recently scored psychological blows by launching swift, daring attacks in battalion strength in the vicinity of Saigon itself (e.g., June 17 at Duc Hoa, ten miles to the west, and August 1 at Vinhloc, only four miles west). See Denis Warner, "Vietnam: General Taylor Faces an All-Out War," The Reporter, August 13, 1964; New York Times, July 7 and 13, August 2 and 22, September 4, 1964; Washington Post, June 18 and July 5, 6, 7, and August 22, 1964.
regime was overthrown and where offensive Viet Cong operations are no longer necessary. As was noted in the previous section, the month of July saw a marked intensification of guerrilla attacks and terrorism with the incident rate soaring almost to the record high of November 1963. During August the rate of incidents and casualties temporarily subsided in the wake of exogenous developments -- the U.S.-North Vietnamese clash in the Gulf of Tonkin and the subsequent political crisis and urban rioting in South Vietnam. Following the Tonkin hostilities the Viet Cong evidently delayed action pending new orders from Hanoi; later they probably suspended routine operations to avoid driving the feuding political factions together and also, possibly, to rush covert agents to the scene of street demonstrations. Whatever the cause of the August lull, in mid-September they began a new crescendo of incidents -- mainly terroristic -- which soon exceeded the near-record weekly rate of July. Thus, despite periodic tactical fluctuations in effort, the

\[\text{22}^\text{According to the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Saigon, the weekly total of Viet Cong incidents for the last four weeks in August was as follows: 585, 595, 690, and 440 (with no battalion or company-sized attacks in the last week). However, in September the weekly rate began to increase -- from 545 to 580 and, in the third week, abruptly jumped to 975. Government casualties also mounted, reaching a figure of 965 during the third week in September, the largest weekly loss in 1964. Previously, during the month of August, government forces suffered 1,110 troops killed or missing (including U.S. advisers) as compared with 1,170 Viet Cong killed or captured (plus 210 defectors). New York Times, August 20, September 3, 4, 10, and 20. Los Angeles Times, September 18, 1964.}\]
Viet Cong have clearly shown over the last year a significant capability to sustain a high level of military activity.

Thus, in terms of both military strength and political control the Communist insurgents today pose a formidable and mounting threat to the South Vietnamese government. Militarily, Viet Cong guerrillas and terrorists are able, with increasing effectiveness, to harass and weaken the war-weary, coup-threatened Saigon regime. Politically, the National Liberation Front continues to extend its sphere of influence, bringing "liberation" to a growing number of rural areas and spreading the doctrine of "peace and neutrality" to all sections of the population.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SAIGON REGIME

In attempting to counter the Viet Cong threat the government of South Vietnam possesses important assets as well as serious liabilities. Despite heavy American assistance, it faces a formidable task: the inherent difficulty of bringing a rural-based Communist insurgency under control, compounded by the rising flow of external aid to the Viet Cong from North Vietnam and China. However, the record of successes and failures compiled thus far has been influenced more by the internal balance of strengths and weaknesses of the South Vietnamese government than the adverse circumstances surrounding it.

Among Saigon's major assets are a sizeable and well-equipped military force, a firm commitment of large-scale U.S. support, and a feasible counterinsurgency plan.
Moreover, the current leadership, though seriously weakened politically, appears in general to be both militarily competent and resolutely anti-Communist. As noted above, the leadership under General Khanh which seized power on January 30 professed determination to carry on unrelenting, all-out armed struggle to defeat the Communist insurgency. The broad-gauged pacification plan announced on March 7 -- with its political, economic, and psychological, as well as military, features -- early impressed U.S. advisers as a sound and imaginative program for winning the war. To implement its war effort, South Vietnam has over 200,000 full-time military personnel supplemented by roughly a similar number of part-time forces.\(^{23}\) If these figures are correct, Saigon would have an overall strength ratio of around 13 to 1 over the "hard core" Viet Cong, or nearly 4 to 1 over the combined regular and auxiliary Communist forces. (The French only had a ratio of 1.5 to 1 over the Viet Minh, clearly not enough to beat a modern guerrilla force.\(^{24}\) Moreover, steps have been taken to recruit 50,000 more troops to widen the margin of strength.

In addition to its existing domestic capabilities, South Vietnam is able to rely on massive economic and military assistance from the United States. This aid now flows in at the rate of nearly $2 million a day.


Militarily, it provides such things as training for the South Vietnamese armed forces, arms and equipment, air transport and support, and advice on plans and operations. As of mid-August there were 17,200 American military personnel in South Vietnam, with the total expected to rise to around 20,000 in the near future. U.S. civilian and military representatives regularly advise Vietnamese officials from the district level up to the Premiership. Moreover, the American commitment is firm. As early as March 26 Secretary McNamara pledged "economic assistance and military training and logistical support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control."25 President Johnson has reiterated this pledge and the Tonkin Gulf incidents have further reinforced American determination to stay and fight.

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25 Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, p. 569. During the current fiscal year $206 million have been earmarked for military aid to South Vietnam (not including the expenses of the U.S. Military Mission) and $375 million have been designated for economic assistance. As of mid-August the 17,200 U.S. servicemen included 11,000 Army personnel, approximately 4,500 men from the Air Force, and the remainder from the Navy and Marine Corps. American military advisers are currently attached to all regular South Vietnamese battalions and higher echelons, as well as to many smaller units. Six or more advisers are stationed in each of the 43 provinces to work with para-military forces. Small teams of U.S. Special Forces operate among the Montagnards, recruiting and training local counterguerrilla units. Civilian AID technicians assist provincial and district governments to deal with problems of administration, economics, health, and education. Figures cited above were taken from the following sources: New York Times, July 28, August 20, September 4, 5, and 20, 1964; Washington Post, September 1, 1964.
During the spring and early summer of this year the Khanh regime attempted to make the fullest use of its strengths in the war against the Viet Cong and was able to achieve some successes. Measures were taken to augment the numbers and improve the quality of both civilian and military personnel engaged in the pacification program. Significant efforts were made to recruit and train a rapidly expanding force of rural administrators, medical technicians, teachers, and police personnel. Long overdue steps were taken to improve conditions for the paramilitary forces, upon whom the burden of defending strategic hamlets against Viet Cong attacks had fallen most heavily. The regular army was given a pay raise to help boost the efficiency and dangerously sagging morale of the long-neglected, war-weary troops. By July there were scattered signs that Saigon's ambitious plans had begun to bear fruit. For the first time in months both Viet Cong defections and government enlistments were on the increase. There were reports that villages in scattered areas had refused to feed the Communist guerrillas. U.S. advisers noted some improvement in South Vietnamese military tactics and the appearance of a new aggressive spirit in combat.  

26. In mid-July government-initiated patrols and small-unit operations set a weekly high of 11,570 as compared with 7,530 early in June and 2,000 to 3,000 prior to April (the latter figures probably under-reported). On June 25 government forces near Baucot (60 miles northwest of Saigon in Tayninh Province) skillfully avoided an ambush, then raked the hapless Viet Cong battalion with withering fire from armored personnel carriers and aircraft, inflicting over 100 casualties. A day later South
While these successes gave rise to cautious optimism about the general course of the war, it was recognized that serious military and political weaknesses remained. These underlying fears were substantiated when the Viet Cong offensive in July resulted in a series of demoralizing government defeats and Saigon's temporary loss of the military initiative. The subsequent psychological gains of the Tonkin Gulf crisis were quickly offset in the political turmoil of late August following Khanh's abortive attempt to reorganize the government. The rapid political deterioration also raised serious questions regarding the future U.S. involvement.

Although Khanh has now managed to survive a menacing series of popular demonstrations and attempted coups, the political situation in South Vietnam remains highly fragile and unstable. The military elite, riven by factional quarrels and personal rivalries, has proved unable to fill the political vacuum that has existed since the overthrow of the Diem regime almost a year ago. The 60-odd splinter parties, lacking a significant popular following and working in the self-serving manner of clandestine cliques, provide no real alternative to military leadership. Since Diem, the minority Catholics have lost much of their political force and are now hard-pressed to defend their shrinking position against an increasingly demanding Buddhist majority.

Perhaps the most significant result of the recent political crises in South Vietnam has been the rising power of the Buddhist movement. The immense untapped political potentialities of this long dominant religion -- which claims at least nominal loyalty from 70 to 80 percent of the population -- began to be realized with the loosely organized Buddhist riots of 1963 which brought down the Diem regime. The subsequent establishment of the Buddhist Secular Affairs Institute has provided 11 of the 14 local sects with a united, centralized, and effective organization for political action. Although its elected leader, Thich Tam Chau, has generally steered a moderate course and given public support to General Khanh, the militant Thich Tri Quang, his former rival (who took refuge in the U.S. Embassy during Diem's last days), has gained great influence in recent months. In fact, Tri Quang is reported to have written the ultimatum of August 24 which forced Khanh to step down from the Presidency. This enigmatic, ambitious, nationalistic monk -- now in some ways the most powerful person in South Vietnam -- seems bent on eliminating Catholic influence from government and establishing a neutralist, pro-Buddhist regime (as in Burma and Ceylon). He professes to believe that the spiritual force of Buddhism, in the absence of U.S. and Chinese intervention, is sufficient to conquer Communism in both South and North.

In addition to the current political weakness and uncertainty, serious military problems remain to be solved. Even before the August crises erupted, the government's counterinsurgency effort had run into
difficulties. Although well conceived and vigorously pushed at the top levels of government, General Khanh's pacification program has made headway sluggishly and with frequent setbacks. Progress has been uneven from area to area. Particularly disturbing have been the difficulties and slowdowns encountered in the government's high priority effort to secure the seven provinces immediately around Saigon, control of which would affect 40 per cent of the population and deal a devastating blow to Viet Cong hopes. In terms of effective government control -- with the administrative machinery and economic programs this implies -- some 8 to 12 of South Vietnam's 43 provinces may be described as being in critical condition. 27

Within the armed forces many deficiencies and abuses continue to produce inertia and low motivation. Military morale continues to suffer because of erratic punishments, unfair promotions of less-talented personnel, and corruption in high places. Some military commanders disrupt the implementation of the "oil slick" strategy by capriciously diverting regular forces from assigned pacification operations before the local paramilitary forces are strong enough to resist the inevitable return of the Viet Cong. A senior American adviser, upon retiring recently after three years in Vietnam, declared

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27 This is the estimate of many responsible U.S. officials, according to the respected diplomatic correspondent, Max Frankel. See The New York Times, August 2, 1962.
bitterly: "There are too many second-raters running the war on the provincial level." While admitting that the effectiveness of the government forces was 50 to 100 per cent better than three years ago, he concluded that the rate of improvement was "not enough to win the war."28 Although serious, these military difficulties are not, of course, inherently insurmountable.

In spite of military weaknesses and the recent political deterioration, the war against the Viet Cong appears, at least on the surface, to continue at present very much as before the recent external and internal crises. Throughout the chaotic August demonstrations and street fighting in the cities, the countryside -- where four-fifths of the people live -- seemed to remain largely undisturbed. (Miraculously, even in the cities shops stayed open and business continued as usual.) There is no evidence that the disaffection with the Khanh regime voiced by urban demonstrators was shared by the voiceless peasants. For the most part they remain, as ever, passive and uninterested in politics except when persuaded or intimidated to support one or the other of the warring sides.

According to Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, field reports of U.S. advisers indicate that "the military campaign in the provinces has not been visibly affected" by the recent crises.29 Government patrols and small unit operations

have remained at a high level, although contacts with the Viet Cong temporarily declined in August (due at least in part to faulty government intelligence). The adverse military trend of July was halted during the August lull and government forces were able to score some morale-boosting, large-scale victories in mid-August and early September. However, the sudden jump in Viet Cong action in late September appears to herald a new Communist offensive such as that in July. In view of the prolonged leadership crisis in Saigon it remains to be seen how well the government's armed forces can now respond to a major Viet Cong military initiative.

In sum, the current situation in South Vietnam is mixed and charged with uncertainty. The optimism generated by the vigorous leadership of General Khanh in the six months of his first government has given way to

30 On August 12-13, a massive air-borne assault on Ben Cat district, involving 96 helicopters and some 5,000 government troops failed to make contact with the expected 1,500 to 2,000 Viet Cong regulars, due reportedly to poor intelligence and lax security in preparing the operation. Time Magazine, August 21, 1964.

31 Government forces inflicted one of the worst defeats of the war on the Viet Cong in a three-day battle, August 15-17, around the Mekong Delta villages of Hoa My and Hiep Hung (93 miles southwest of Saigon). In this engagement they partially foiled an attempted Viet Cong ambush and, with substantial air and artillery support, killed an estimated 270-280 of the 500 Communist regulars involved. This was followed on September 3 by another significant victory in Quang Ngai Province in which 103 Viet Cong troops were killed (as against 14 government soldiers killed and 27 wounded). New York Times, August 19, 1964; Los Angeles Times, September 7, 1964.
anxiety and pessimism in the wake of the current political deterioration. On the other hand, the Communist insurgents, though stronger than ever before, still have serious limitations and at present lack the capability to achieve a decisive military victory. In view of the existing weaknesses on both sides, the war in its present phase has become more of a political contest than a military struggle. Few would now agree with Deputy Secretary Cyrus Vance's assessment on August 8 that the situation was "on a plateau, [and] starting to move slightly upward." However, it should be recalled that except for the unexpected political crises in Saigon little has happened to alter the validity of that judgment. This is not to minimize in the least the awful significance of what has happened, but rather to emphasize the central importance of the political factor.

II. THE OUTLOOK FOR SOUTH VIETNAM

Assuming the continuation of presently-planned levels of U.S. assistance and the absence of any severe economic setback due to natural disaster, the future course of events in South Vietnam will be shaped most decisively by political and military forces. As suggested in the previous section, the recent alarmingly rapid deterioration in the internal political situation has rendered the immediate outlook for South Vietnam highly uncertain. Militarily, the growing Viet Cong threat and difficulties of Saigon's pacification program have cast a shadow over the more distant future. Finally, the possibility of greatly increased external intervention by North Vietnam or China -- highlighted in the recent Tonkin Gulf crisis -- continues to pose a question mark in all calculations regarding the future.

In the following analysis each of these major areas of uncertainty will be examined in an effort to arrive at realistic estimates of South Vietnam's future prospects. After assessing probable future political trends and their

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In a White House news conference September 9, Ambassador Taylor declared: "The economic situation has been relatively favorable in spite of the Viet Cong activities." Later, he said that he expected the overall U.S. economic aid effort to remain "essentially the same," but with the possibility of some minor changes in the light of a current re-examination of priorities. Other U.S. officials have suggested that more aid funds may be channeled to the cities where recent political disturbances were centered. No increase or reduction appears to be contemplated in the approximately $600 million budgeted for U.S. economic and military assistance in Fiscal Year 1965. New York Times, September 10, 1964.
implications, an attempt will be made to estimate the most likely course of military developments under two fairly distinct contingencies: (1) a continuation of the Viet Cong insurgency with no drastic increase in external support, and (2) a significant Communist military escalation involving massive infiltration or overt invasion of South Vietnam.

THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK

Among the major problems facing South Vietnam today, none is more fundamental or pressing than the need to restore political stability. The social unrest and governmental breakdown -- which in late August neared the point of anarchy in the cities and general political paralysis -- threatens to negate all previous gains in the war against the Viet Cong and, indeed, for the moment renders military operations largely irrelevant. In the absence of a reasonably stable and popular government in South Vietnam, the American policy of "assistance" would become meaningless and the continued presence of U.S. military personnel extremely difficult to justify.

The recent alarming political deterioration has given rise to the suggestion in some quarters that South Vietnam is a society in disintegration, rolling downhill inexorably to self-destruction with a force that no amount of political genius can reverse. To be sure, after nearly 20 years of war against the Japanese, the French, and most recently the Viet Cong, the basic fabric of society has been worn thin and badly rent in places. Deep-seated frustrations and war-weariness, as well as long standing
religious and political antagonisms have badly frayed individual responsibility and public discipline. However, the nature of the August demonstrations -- the fact that they did not spread beyond a few cities, remained surprisingly bloodless and undistruptive, and were halted without benefit of a cohesive leadership or a new rallying cry -- would argue against the proposition that the tightly-wound spring of society has at last been broken, or, indeed, that it has lost its resilience. There is also no evidence that the traditionally tenuous relationship between city and country, central government and provinces has been altered to the extent of causing more than temporary disruption in the continuity of local administration or rural-based economic and military programs.

It is difficult to measure the depth of specific popular discontent or the seriousness of the political malaise that gave rise to the present crisis. It seems from available evidence that active social unrest and dissidence have been largely confined to the cities, having little effect initially, at least, in the countryside where more than 80 per cent of the people live. However, it is virtually impossible to determine what is, in fact, the political will of the people in the present situation; probably the majority have no well-defined will, caring only to be left alone to live their lives with as little interference as possible from either Saigon or the Viet Cong. Certainly, only the most gross and distorted evidence of public opinion has been provided by uncontrolled, youthful street mobs, agitated
and in some cases financially supported by self-seeking politicians, fanatical religious functionaries, and covert Communist agents.

Nevertheless, the recent demonstrations have clearly exposed the extremely narrow and shallow-rooted popular base of General Khanh's government. While even his opponents concede that Khanh is a capable and vigorous leader, the events of late August revealed widespread and powerful popular suspicions and resentments toward the man, stemming chiefly from the way in which he took power from the previous military junta. The latter had been no more democratic than the Khanh regime, but had gained wide approval as the nation's savior from Diemist despotism. Distrust of Khanh turned to active opposition when, contrary to past promises, he used the Tonkin Gulf crisis to proclaim press censorship, limit the role of political parties, and then impose a highly authoritarian constitution. Broad sections of society, especially the Buddhists, interpreted these moves as the prelude to a restoration of Diemist ascendancy in government. Khanh apparently believed this fear could be offset by showing in his reaction to the popular opposition that he was at least a benevolent despot. To his credit it may be said that when the tide of public anger rose, he did not attempt to suppress it by force and had the good sense to step down before a bloody struggle began.

The sweeping concessions which Khanh subsequently made to Buddhist and student demands succeeded in enlarging his base of popular support and in solving the governmental crisis of late August, but in the process spawned the abortive military coup of September 13.
Some such dramatic reaction was almost inevitable following his wholesale removal and reassignment of high-ranking officers from strategic posts in the government and army. Apart from strong personal considerations of resentment or opportunism, the coup leaders probably shared with a host of other militantly anti-Communist officers and Catholic-aligned civil servants a deep sense of apprehension at the sharply rising influence of the Buddhist movement -- widely believed to contain neutralist sympathies. It is possible that the attempted coup was, at least in part, a Catholic response to the Buddhist political steamroller as well as a military reaction to increasing civilian control.\(^{34}\) In any event, it revealed a considerable depth of discontent among sections of the officer corps -- and very likely among other previously powerful elements in society. Moreover, its ultimate

\(^{34}\) Several of the rebel leaders had held responsible positions under the Diem regime and some (notably General Duong Van Duc and Colonel Huynh Van Ton) were associated with rumored coup preparations of the heavily Catholic Dai Viet Party, recently removed from influence in the government by General Khanh. Their fears of growing Buddhist power were also probably heightened by Khanh's recent release of the four generals who (in association with Duong Van Minh) had overthrown Diem in November 1963 and whom Khanh had arrested for alleged neutralist activities in his January 30 coup. However, in the September 13 coup General Lam Van Phat apparently carried his personal grievances too far, calling General Khanh a "traitor" in the first rebel radio broadcast, which led his fellow conspirator (and the senior troop commander) General Duong Van Duc to moderate his demands and seek a settlement short of deposing Khanh from office. (Duc now claims he originally became involved in the coup because of a misunderstanding about its aims and leadership.)
collapse brought to prominence a new group of young, zealous military men whose loyalty to Khanh is tempered by the demand that future political changes not rob the armed forces of significant influence.  

In the current atmosphere of rapid political change and newly emerging forces it is impossible to estimate with any confidence the chances for a restoration of governmental stability in South Vietnam. Experimentation and adjustment are likely to be the facts of life for some time to come, with a continuing possibility that extremism or miscalculation by one group or another may result in assassinations, coups, outbreaks of mass violence, and, ultimately, a general breakdown of order. At the moment the situation appears to have returned to an uneasy calm, but beneath the surface an intense power struggle continues between competing individuals, interest groups, and ideologies. It remains problematical whether this struggle can be continued by the new and still vaguely-conceived constitutional framework which is promised to

35 Chief among the young loyalists who saved the day for Khanh and who can now expect to play a more influential role, is Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky, the 34-year-old air force commander whose determined resistance, perhaps more than any other factor, helped break the spirit of the rebellion. A communiqué signed by eight loyal military commanders promised support for Khanh only on condition that he dismiss "all corrupt and dishonest" officials held over from the Diem regime. Spokesman for the eight was Sub-brigadier General Nguyen Chanh Thi, commander of the 1st Infantry Division based at Huế and a prime mover in the abortive 1960 paratroop coup against Diem (which Khanh helped to foil).
replace the present caretaker regime. At this juncture it is impossible to tell whether South Vietnam has entered a new season of relatively fair weather or is merely situated momentarily in the eye of a typhoon.

Several factors in the current scene suggest hopefully, a trend toward increasing political stability. General Khanh, still by all odds the most capable and vigorous national leader, has now survived both a serious popular uprising and a traditional army coup to remain the dominant political and military figure in South Vietnam. For the moment, at least, he appears to be in overall control of the government and armed forces. Unquestionably, his prestige has been severely damaged in the recent crises, but his successive feats of survival may now be building a new image of strength. In eschewing force to suppress opposition Khanh has wisely avoided adding to existing disaffection and, more positively, has displayed a character essentially different from that of Diem. Profiting by his mistake of rash haste to establish an effective one-man rule, Khanh resumed power after the August demonstrations with a disposition toward compromise and a keen sensitivity to the newly emerged Buddhist political force. His efforts to forge an alliance with the Buddhist leadership appear to have succeeded thus far, winning at least temporary support from that vital quarter. Moreover, he has seemingly retained important Catholic support, Lieutenant General Tran Thien Khiem remaining as a member of the symbolic Triumvirate (although recently removed from the scene by a diplomatic assignment which may prove tantamount to exile) and Brigadier General Nguyen Van Thieu (a reputed Dai Viet member) returning
from a brief retirement to command the 4th Corps after the September 13 coup. Thus far Khanh has apparently been able either to reconcile most of his acknowledged rivals (e.g., Minh), resist and remove them from strategic positions (e.g., the coup leaders), or force them into exile (e.g., Hoan). For the present, at least, serious overt opposition has been checked. This may now allow a new start to be made toward building a stable government.

However, numerous unsolved problems and serious uncertainties loom on the horizon, casting a dark cloud over the political future. As a result of the recent explosions of dissatisfaction within the urban population and, subsequently, among sections of the military, sweeping promises of rapid change have been made. The expectations of students and Buddhist leaders have soared since their conspicuous success in bringing down the August 16 Presidential regime. They have agreed to defer further muscle-flexing or active opposition at this time on condition that significant steps be taken before the end of November to establish an unprecedented democratic government. Thus far the student-Buddhist expectations seem to have coincided with those of the young reform-minded officers who suddenly rose to prominence by rescuing the Khanh government on September 13. However, it is likely that serious differences will arise in the future over the issue of civilian control of government and possibly over the list of "objectionable" (i.e., Diem-associated) officials to be purged from public life. These groups and the numerous party politicians still active in
Saigon expect to exercise an influence in the new regime commensurate with their real or fancied strength among the population. On the other hand, the formerly dominant groups in society -- the Catholic civil servants and soldiers prominent under Diem and the senior military officers who have risen to power in subsequent coups -- demand that their interests be protected. In the August street riots and the September 13 abortive coup they demonstrated that they could still mobilize impressive strength to back their demands.

In the very near future General Khanh may discover that he has promised too much too quickly and to too many. He will be under increasing pressure by diverse special interest groups ranging across the political spectrum from the adamant Buddhist intellectuals of Huế to the pro-Catholic generals who still command wide loyalty within the armed forces. As a measure of these conflicting pressures Khanh promised on September 3 (when resuming office after the August demonstrations) to send the generals back to their "purely military" tasks and establish a new government that would be thoroughly civilian in character. However, on September 14, after conferences with rebel and loyalist military officers, he described the political aim as "a government that has the confidence of the entire people."36 Besides satisfying the demands of diverse interest groups Khanh must solve the pressing immediate problems of finding capable civilians to fill numerous high-level posts recently vacated by military

officers -- and getting the armed forces to work in harness under new civilian chiefs. Also in the wake of recent political upheavals there is the practical security problem of increased Viet Cong infiltration into the cities and lowered troop discipline. (Would soldiers have fired on Buddhist and Catholic demonstrators if they had been ordered to do so before Khanh stepped down?)

Equally serious problems and uncertainties cloud the long-range political outlook. The Buddhist movement, most prominent of the newly emerging political forces, appears determined to expand its influence to the point of dominating any future government. However, its precise strength and capabilities for political action remain obscure. Moreover, its political goals have not been defined. While some Buddhist leaders stress opposition to Communism, others exhibit a suspiciously naive faith in the power of religious ideology to overcome the Communist threat and a militant nationalism which, carried to its logical conclusion, could mean opposition to a continued U.S. presence in South Vietnam. Similarly, the strength and aims of the increasingly influential younger officers in the armed forces remain as yet largely unknown despite their potential significance.

Apart from the interplay of factional interests in the power struggle which is now under way, the long-range political future of South Vietnam will be shaped by the government's ability to solve pressing social and economic problems which can become the basis for renewed opposition. These include the problems of unemployment, and inadequate
educational, welfare, and youth programs which give rise to serious urban unrest. Equally pressing are the long-standing Montagnard demands for greater political and cultural autonomy. Although rural Vietnam has remained largely aloof from the present political crisis, it is entirely possible that in the future serious opposition and local secession movements could be cultivated by dissident urban political leaders aided by covert Viet Cong agents. On the other hand, an effective long-range program to provide economic opportunity, physical security, and a sense of participation in government could substantially enlarge the national government's base of support and help it withstand the frequent, turbulent shifts of the splintered, clique-ridden, parochial, and impulsive urban political movements.

While myriad present uncertainties make it impossible to predict the likely course of future political developments, an attempt has been made above to discern the major factors in the current situation which make for stability and those which threaten it. In sum, after all that has happened in recent weeks -- the expectations that have been aroused, the new forces loosed, the weaknesses exposed -- it seems very doubtful that a return to the limited military dictatorship that existed before August 16 would be either possible or adequate to resolve the political crisis. Whether for good or bad, political power is passing into new hands. In the present revolutionary situation the restoration of political stability (if, indeed, that is possible) will require the establishment of a new, more broadly-based government -- one
which in fact as well as name represents the strongest wishes of the politically articulate groups in society. Such a government will have to include the participation of top Buddhist, Catholic, and intellectual leaders. Although civilian-led, it must necessarily include erstwhile military figures who have proved their administrative competence.

If political stability is to return to South Vietnam, much will depend on how well General Khanh and other leaders have learned the lessons of the recent past. Old personal feuds (e.g., between Khanh and Minh) will have to be put aside and factional rivalries subordinated to the common good. Buddhists and Catholics will have to curb their mutual suspicions and intolerance at least to the point of working together to create a reasonably harmonious and effective government. Students and older intellectuals will have to temper their demands for democratic perfection with a realistic appreciation of what is possible in a new nation desperately short of experienced administrators, and fighting for survival against a large, externally-supplied Communist insurgency. Military officers, long habituated to wielding unchallenged civil as well as military power, will have to yield gracefully to civilian control in the central government, with its inevitable inefficiencies and petty corruption. Governmental leaders will have to use their newly-won power intelligently, suppressing greed and personal ambitions in the national interest, and acting with sensitivity to the feelings of the religious groups, minorities, and the military.
In the long run, the attainment of a politically stable South Vietnam will require more than the avoidance of past mistakes; it will necessitate progress toward the development of a new, higher order of leadership and a positive program capable of eliciting wide popular support. The critical problems which any future government must solve will demand a fresh leadership, new in spirit if not in personality -- one which is endowed with charismatic appeal. Not only must today's experienced and capable leaders be retained and induced to work harmoniously together, but, in addition, other promising and popular figures must be recruited and advanced as rapidly as feasible to positions of responsibility. The planned transition from military to civilian rule will make positive support from the urban and rural populations even more necessary than before. As in any move toward democratization, the process of broadening popular participation in government will inevitably create new risks to existing authority and will increase Communist opportunities for agitation and covert political activity. However, if sufficient popular support is ever to be marshalled to build a stable government and defeat the Viet Cong insurgency, these risks must be taken and Communist political subversion effectively countered without resort to unnecessarily harsh and indiscriminate suppression of popular opposition.

Along with the development of a wise and popular leadership, long-term political stability will require at least some advance toward the elaboration of a positive ideological program, incorporating a sense of national
mission. Years of frustration and warfare have produced a state of chronic social apathy, political corruption, and individual dedication to the pursuit of self-interest. A new rallying cry is desperately needed -- a new inspiration capable of evoking popular loyalty, enthusiastic mass support, and, when necessary, personal sacrifice. (To judge from the Burmese experience, "Back to Buddha" would seem no more efficacious in this respect than Khanh's July shout of, "Bac Tien!") If the present pattern of personality-oriented cliques and unprincipled interest groups is ever to be replaced by a system of popularly-based political parties, dedicated to the common good, steps will have to be taken toward the articulation of a positive and dynamic political ideology. This will also be essential to counter the militant faith that motivates and disciplines the Viet Cong insurgency.

While perfect fulfillment of all the above-mentioned immediate and long-term requirements should not be necessary for the return of political stability, it will be essential that significant progress be made along these lines. The effort may prove too much for the actors. There certainly is no assurance that their response will be adequate to the challenge. If not, it is doubtful that even the semblance of a national anti-Communist regime could be maintained for long.

In the event of protracted instability the most likely political developments would be either the outbreak of regional secessionist movements (with, perhaps, the facade of a national government hanging on in Saigon) or general governmental collapse, the flight of present leaders, and
establishment of a new coalition government. In either case the whole anti-Communist tenor of successive South Vietnamese governments since 1954 would change. Except for the possible temporary hold out of a few strongly anti-Communist enclaves, the prevailing new leadership would seek to negotiate a political settlement with the National Liberation Front to end the Viet Cong insurgency and bring the NLF into some sort of governing partnership with non-Communist forces.\textsuperscript{37} Bargaining from a position of obvious political and military weakness, the non-Communist leaders would have little hope of securing Communist guarantees against an eventual NLF take-over (employing political, psychological, or military means as needed). Ultimately, negotiations with Hanoi would almost certainly result in the reunion of North and South Vietnam under a Communist regime. Meanwhile, assuming that Washington did not escalate military operations and attempt to occupy portions of Vietnam, the United States would have withdrawn its forces from the country, voluntarily or by invitation, except for possible temporary maintenance of token strength under international agreement.

\textsuperscript{37} Recently there have been unconfirmed reports that Hanoi is attempting to exploit family relationships of high-ranking South Vietnamese officials by covertly sending close Northern relatives to make direct or indirect approaches relative to a negotiated settlement. Among the North Vietnamese representatives rumored to have come South on such missions -- and to be presently in the Saigon area -- is a brother of Triumvirate member General Duong Van Minh. See September 9 dispatch from Saigon of Robert Shaplen in \textit{The New Yorker}, September 19, 1964.
THE MILITARY OUTLOOK

Assuming that South Vietnam is able to recover sufficient political stability to continue an organized and reasonably aggressive war effort, the future course of military developments will depend to a large extent on the gross rate of external Communist aid to the Viet Cong. If the Viet Cong insurgency continues with no drastic increase in external support, the military outlook will be for one set of probable developments. However, if Hanoi or Peking should undertake a significant military escalation, involving massive infiltration or overt invasion of South Vietnam, the trend of events could be quite different. In the following assessment of South Vietnam's military prospects, these two major contingencies will be examined separately, consideration being given to the likelihood of each and the probable consequences that would flow from it.

First Contingency: Continued Viet Cong Insurgency With No Rise in External Communist Support

It was shown in an earlier section that the Communist-led insurgency has grown substantially over the past year or so and now poses a formidable military and political threat to the government of South Vietnam. Despite some persistent difficulties and heavy losses of personnel in combat, the Viet Cong have managed to enlarge their ranks and increase their capabilities. They are better armed and professionally more competent than ever before. Better communications facilitate their coordination of expanded military operations. Moreover, the political
control of the National Liberation Front has spread over wide areas of the countryside. These successes and improvements have heightened Communist morale and permitted a hardening of political demands.

It should be recognized, of course, that fortuitous external circumstances have played an important role. Viet Cong victories over the last year or so have owed much to the instability and turmoil produced by violent changes in the South Vietnamese government. Also the Communist insurgents have been greatly assisted by a substantially increased flow of equipment and cadres from the North and by the greater accessibility of privileged sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. This should not, however, obscure the fact that the Viet Cong effort is largely self-sustaining: the vast majority of its rank and file are recruited locally; the bulk of its ordinary arms and equipment is captured; practically all of its food and its supplies are locally produced.

Thus, even if the external flow of equipment and cadres from the North could somehow suddenly be shut off (and a totally effective sealing of the porous border would seem to be well-nigh impossible\(^{38}\)), this would not in itself deal a mortal blow to Viet Cong military capabilities. Although effective interdiction would stem the flow of certain types of large caliber weapons and machine-guns, it is doubtful that this would seriously impair Viet Cong combat capabilities in the short run.

\(^{38}\) See C. V. Sturdevant, The Border Control Problem in South Vietnam (U), The RAND Corporation, RM-3967-ARPA, June 1964 (Secret).
Since infiltrators constitute only a relatively small percentage of the total insurgent force, the main immediate loss in personnel would be denial of entry to a limited number of commanders and political cadres, carriers of important messages, and bearers of essential supplies (e.g., medicine). To be sure, a successful interdiction would probably have a severe impact on Viet Cong morale and leadership -- though the extent of this would be very difficult to forecast. However, it is extremely doubtful that the severance of ties with the North would induce the Communist insurgents to desist or submit on any significant scale for at least a considerable period of time (i.e., months or even years).

Meanwhile, it is possible that the process of securing cessation or interdiction of external aid to the Viet Cong could precipitate serious short-term reactions within South Vietnam. In present circumstances the Viet Cong evidently find it advantageous not to risk their forces in an all-out military effort to win victory by force of arms. (Such an effort would have no assurance of success anyhow, as will be argued in greater detail later.) In view of the probability that interdiction measures, in practice, would be less than completely successful, it would seem likely that the Viet Cong would continue to be reluctant to assume the considerably larger risks of a major change in tactics. However, if the insurgents should believe they faced the imminent prospect of an effective severance of this with the North, the psychological blow of anticipated isolation might lead them to undertake a greatly expanded campaign of guerrilla attacks and terrorism.
The Viet Cong have already demonstrated that they have the capability to intensify attacks and terrorism on a considerable scale for at least short periods of time (i.e., a month or so). It is doubtful that even during the height of the November 1963 or July 1964 upsurges they committed more than a fraction of their total strength to military action. The political disintegration that has occurred since that time has created an environment in which a sudden, all-out Viet Cong effort could have profound consequences. While appreciating this, the insurgents probably see no need under present circumstances to endanger their forces unduly by a shift to higher risk military tactics. However, a U.S. or South Vietnamese move which effectively threatened to isolate them from the North could, in the current delicate balance, help precipitate a shift in Communist tactics. Moreover, measures which might appear to Washington or Saigon as relatively modest could be interpreted by the Viet Cong as a rather larger provocation or threat -- even though they did not anticipate thereby to suffer immediately serious logistical losses.

To the extent that future measures to stem the flow of external aid to the Viet Cong depended on military techniques that inflicted significant losses on the civilian population or gravely jeopardized its safety, other short-term dangers could arise for the government

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39 See C. V. Sturdevant, Viet Cong-Initiated Incident Capability and Recent Performance (U), The RAND Corporation, RM-4303-ARPA, October 1964 (Confidential).
of South Vietnam. Irrespective of the weapons used or the number of people directly affected as a result of intensified interdiction measures, if actual fighting were to spread to new areas -- as it would almost certainly do -- the population would be bound to suffer. Even in relatively low density areas like the Central Highlands this could have serious effects when taken in conjunction with existing local (e.g., ethnic) problems. It could lead to (1) mounting popular disapproval of Saigon for stepping up the cruel pace of war, and (2) hostility toward U.S. personnel as the "foreign" agents responsible for increased slaughter of Vietnamese. This is not to say, of course, that it would be impossible to employ any new measures for interdiction without running serious risk of adverse popular repercussions. However, it is difficult to see how such measures could be made significantly more effective than those now in use without incurring some of the short-term risks described above within South Vietnam. The risks of a dangerous external response from Hanoi and Peking will be considered in the next section.

In the long run, of course, if the external flow of support could be effectively stemmed -- without creating more serious short-term problems -- this would materially assist in reducing the insurgency to more manageable proportions. Militarily, it remains of utmost importance to prevent any sizeable build-up of large weapons which the Viet Cong might use in a sudden shift from guerrilla to conventional tactics. However, to provide the Saigon regime with any decisive advantage in the war, the
stoppage of external Communist support would need to be thorough, prolonged, and accompanied by a parallel strengthening of South Vietnam's governmental and military structure.

The increased scale and accelerated tempo of Communist operations over the past several months have led some observers to conclude that the Viet Cong are now in an advanced stage of their strategic timetable. In his writings on guerrilla warfare General Vo Nguyen Giap, borrowing from Mao Tse-tung, has outlined three main stages of prolonged "revolutionary war": defensive, "equilibrium," and general counteroffensive. In the first stage the new and comparatively weak revolutionary forces execute a "strategic withdrawal from the cities to the countryside" in order to preserve their strength, build up rural bases, mobilize the population, and prepare for a counterattack. In the second stage, as the rural build-up achieves an "equilibrium of forces" in various areas, the insurgents turn to offensive guerrilla operations. Committing units up to battalion and regimental strength, they force the enemy to divide his troops and keep them constantly off balance. Gradually the main revolutionary forces become strong enough to advance from isolated guerrilla attacks to "mobile warfare" involving several regiments or divisions in decisive conventional operations against the enemy's main elements.

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41 Giap's analysis of the nine-year war against France (1945-1954) pays particular attention to the gradual build-up
The size and intensity of Communist attacks in South Vietnam over the last several months would seem to place the Viet Cong insurgency toward the end of the Mao-Giap second stage -- with a move into the final stage possible in the future. 42 However, there are strong indications (e.g., the sharply rising incidence of terrorist activities in proportion to guerrilla attacks) 43 that the Viet Cong

of Viet Minh strength and the corresponding enlargement of the scope of operations: "Starting from small operations with the strength of a platoon or a company to annihilate a few men or a group of enemy soldiers, our army went over, later, to more important combats with a battalion or regiment to cut one or several enemy companies to pieces, finally coming to greater campaigns bringing into play many regiments, then many divisions to end at Dien Bien Phu where the French Expeditionary Corps lost 16,000 men of its crack units." (Ibid., p.49.) In another passage he recalls: "In 1947, with the plan of independent companies operating separately and concentrated battalions, we began to move to more concentrated fighting, then to mobile warfare. In 1948, we made relatively great ambushes and surprise attacks with one or several battalions. In 1949, we launched small campaigns not only in the North but also on other battlefronts. From 1950, we began to launch campaigns on an ever larger scale enabling mobile warfare to play the main part on the Northern battlefield, while entrenched camp warfare was on the upgrade [elsewhere]. This fact was clearly manifest in the great Dien Bien Phu campaign." (Ibid., p. 107.)


43 From January 1962 through September 1963 the ratio of terror incidents to attacks was roughly 2 to 1, but since that time it has steadily increased and in September 1964 was on the order of 20 to 1.
may have modified the classical pattern of "revolutionary war" and now expect to win without having to push on to the final stage of a large-scale conventional counter-offensive. In any event General Giap demonstrated at Dien Bien Phu that in the broad politico-military context of protracted warfare a general shift to regular offensive operations was not necessary; it was enough to exert ruthless, localized pressure on a single strategic spot.

Although the Viet Cong guerrillas have become an extremely serious threat in recent months, their chances of winning South Vietnam by dint of military conquest alone would still seem to be remote. Unless present information is grossly inadequate, existing Viet Cong military capabilities are insufficient to permit such a feat. Despite their potent ability to harass and terrorize, the Communist insurgents -- lacking artillery or air power -- can have little hope of winning a decisive military victory over the numerically superior, American-equipped government forces. In the light of the surprising Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu ten years ago it would, of course, be rash to dismiss the possibility that the Viet Cong might maneuver an unwary government commander into a potentially decisive military confrontation. However, this need not happen. Moreover, it should be remembered that the French decision to withdraw from Indo-China in 1954 was dictated by many considerations other than purely military factors.

Given the present balance of forces, the Viet Cong's best hope would appear to lie in continued guerrilla warfare and terrorist pressures in a dual effort (a) to undermine the South Vietnamese government's ability and
will to resist, and (b) to harass Washington into an early withdrawal of U.S. support. There is reason to believe the Communist insurgents actually view their situation and opportunities in these terms. While it would be hazardous to attempt a precise estimate of their intentions, several important clues stand out in their previous statements and behavior.

Notwithstanding their protracted, costly and indecisive efforts thus far, the Viet Cong have enormous patience and a firm belief in the power of "people's revolutionary war" to defeat all the forces arrayed against them. Recent statements exude confidence and indicate that no solution short of the full Communist program for Vietnam will be acceptable. The immediate hope probably is to keep up guerrilla attacks and terrorist pressures until the Saigon regime becomes so weakened, demoralized, and, ultimately, divided that it -- or its successor -- will accept a political settlement on Communist terms. Progress toward this goal could be speeded considerably by the withdrawal of American personnel and equipment. Thus the Communist-led National Liberation Front, as early as its First Congress in February 1962, called for: the termination of hostilities, withdrawal of all American military personnel, and establishment of a broad coalition government dedicated to

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44 According to a recent French prisoner of the Viet Cong, "The Communists are convinced that time is on their side. They are gaining ground steadily and winning the sympathy of social classes who were once suspicious of them." Georges Penchiner, "Close-up of the Viet Cong in Their Jungle," New York Times Magazine, September 13, 1964.
a policy of "peace and neutrality." More recently, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese spokesmen have espoused a stereotyped formula for settling the war attributed to Ho Chi Minh. Its key provisions are not unfamiliar: cessation of U.S. participation in the conflict, withdrawal of all American troops and weapons, and freedom of "the Vietnamese people" to settle their internal affairs "according to the NLF program." By means of a political settlement the Communists would expect to see the American presence removed from South Vietnam and a new coalition government of "patriotic parties" established in which the NLF would play the dominant role. Initially this provisional government would probably follow a nominally neutralist policy but,


46 Quotations are from Premier Pham Van Dong's report to the North Vietnamese National Assembly on June 27. This general position was reaffirmed more recently by Nguyen Huu Tho, leader of the National Liberation Front, in reply to questions put to him by the French Communist newspaper, L'Humanité. See FBIS Daily Report (Far East) June 29 and August 18, 1964. For Ho Chi Minh's celebrated "only correct way of settling the question of the South," see his "Report to the First Special Political Conference of North Vietnam" (April 6, 1964) in Current Background, 730, U.S. Consulate General, Hong Kong, April 17, 1964, p. 6.
under NLF guidance, would likely soon negotiate an agreement with Hanoi for reunification of Vietnam under a Communist "people's democracy."

Recent developments have had a mixed but generally favorable impact on Viet Cong hopes of undermining South Vietnamese resistance and securing a U.S. withdrawal. On the negative side, there has been in the last few months a reaffirmation of American determination to stay in Vietnam and fight as long as necessary. This was indicated both in the U.S. decision reached at Honolulu in June to increase substantially American military assistance to South Vietnam (announced in late July), and in the swift, decisive U.S. retaliation to North Vietnamese naval attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August. However, the impact of the growing American resolve has been offset by the shattering of the internal unity and stability of the South Vietnamese government. The urban demonstrations of late August and the abortive military coup of September 13 have severely undermined its capability to resist the Viet Cong insurgency. If the political crisis is not solved soon -- and, as noted in the previous section, this cannot now be forecast with any certainty -- the present fluid military situation could end in a Communist victory by default.

It has been estimated that the direct military repercussions of the political crisis have not been conspicuously strong. According to Ambassador Taylor:

The activities in the provinces where the war is being conducted show no visible sign of retardation. This is a small-unit war -- the
war of the squadron, the platoon and the
c company. So, by the very nature, it does
not require the centralized governmental
direction which would be the case in a
so-called conventional war.47

The August lull in Viet Cong activities continued into
ey early September, briefly reaching close to the lowest
level recorded for the entire year. However, this almost
certainly did not reflect either Viet Cong weakness or
government strength. Rather, the Communist guerrillas,
surprised by the depth of political chaos in Saigon,
probably preferred to let the opportunity for a neu-
tralist take-over ripen rather than risk action which
might tend to unite the various warring political
elements.

There now are indications that beneath the quiet,
hopeful surface of events possibly serious deterioration

has been indirectly supported by nonofficial sources.
For example, Los Angeles Times correspondent Ed Meagher
concluded, after a trip to three Mekong Delta provinces
just prior to September 13, that the Saigon political
crisis had not caused a worsening of the situation in
the provinces. He quoted "intelligence reports" to the
effect that "an increasing number of villagers" were
organizing to resist the Viet Cong and expel infiltrators.
Vietnamese officials and U.S. advisers were said to believe
"the general situation in the three provinces [had]
improved greatly in the past 6 months," government forces
and village militia having taken the military initiative
from the Viet Cong. However, Meagher questioned whether
the currently successful military and civilian efforts
could long be maintained in the absence of stability in
has begun to occur in the military situation. While pacification measures in the provinces have a general, built-in momentum tied to local conditions, they can only withstand a temporary disruption of direction and support from the center. During the urban uprisings of late August many officials directly responsible for the government's pacification program were reported to have left their jobs and returned to Saigon, presumably to protect their personal career interests. On September 14 an ambitious, well-planned offensive against the Viet Cong in the Mekong Delta around Vi Thanh (Chuong Thien Province) had to be called off at the last minute when promised troops and air support were diverted by the abortive Saigon coup -- led, ironically, by 4th Corps Commander Duong Van Duc. In recent weeks there have been disturbing rumors -- difficult to prove true or false -- of a growing practice among small, exposed units of government troops to conclude local \textit{de facto} cease-fire arrangements (usually tacit) with the Viet Cong. These various indirect and \textit{sub rosa} developments have undoubtedly hurt the pacification effort, though their general impact evidently has not been serious as yet.

Perhaps the greatest harm done the war effort thus far by Saigon's successive political crises has been in matters of command and morale. The wholesale reshuffle of military commanders and administrators that has occurred in recent weeks has almost certainly slowed military operations against the Viet Cong by creating confusion, delays in implementing orders, and preoccupation with political maneuvering -- as happened after both the November 1963 and January 1964 coups. Moreover, ambivalent
statements by Buddhist leaders have suggested that the government, as well as the Viet Cong insurgents, slow down the tempo of fighting. Under these circumstances there is distinct danger that soldiers and civilians alike, already lacking adequate political and ideological motivation, may completely exhaust the remaining will to fight an aggressive, persistent counterinsurgent war.

Meanwhile the Viet Cong, rested and strengthened after weeks of inaction, appear to have undertaken a major new campaign. On September 14, the National Liberation Front ordered a general military offensive to exploit Saigon's "extremely grave state of confusion and decadence." It called for an attack on all fronts to destroy strategic hamlets, end U.S. intervention in Vietnam, and expand the "liberated areas." Urban residents, soldiers, and officials of the South Vietnamese government were urged to rise up against the "puppet" regime demanding democratic freedoms and an end to "enemy" control. This new call to arms probably means the Viet Cong have abandoned hope that the Saigon regime will collapse solely from its own present internal political contradictions. Accordingly, the Communist insurgents can be expected to intensify operations, resuming or perhaps surpassing the high rate of activity they mounted in July. However, their strategic objectives will likely remain the same: (1) to undermine Saigon's capability and will to resist, and (2) to force the United States to withdraw.

\footnote{FBIS Daily Report (Far East), September 16, 1964.}
The main danger facing the South Vietnamese regime is not Viet Cong military power which, though formidable, is in itself under present circumstances incapable of winning a decision in the war. Barring a dramatic change in Communist tactics to substantially escalate the military effort -- always possible but not indicated by present evidence -- the main peril comes from within rather than without. It is that prolonged political instability and popular demoralization will make it impossible to maintain an aggressive, effective resistance to the Communist insurgency. While numerous improvements could be made to strengthen the pacification program, the key to its success -- indeed, the prerequisite even to maintain the present military stalemate -- is the establishment of a strong, efficient, and reasonably popular national government. If this can be achieved, the chances of bringing the Viet Cong insurgency under control within a tolerable time will be good. It is not impossible that the present crisis could produce a healthy ferment that would result both in a stronger government and in heightened popular morale. As the Philippine insurgency demonstrated, popular motivation can be an extremely important military asset.

Unfortunately, as the previous section shows, present evidence is inadequate to permit a reliable estimate of

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49 There is a distinct danger that after nearly a score years of virtually uninterrupted fighting the accumulated war weariness of the Vietnamese people -- aggravated in recent months by heavy casualties, increased governmental demands, and fading hopes of victory -- may seriously undermine all efforts to maintain an effective
South Vietnam's chances for recovering political stability. It is simply too early to predict with any confidence whether General Khanh and his associates will be able to compromise their differences, overcome the ineptitude and corruption of earlier governments, and rally "the hearts and minds" of a war-weary people. With the continuation of U.S. assistance the present regime in Saigon appears to be militarily capable of thwarting any general defeat by force of Viet Cong arms.\(^{50}\) Certainly there is nothing in the present situation, difficult though it is, which indicates either an inevitable political or military deterioration. However, there is equally no assurance that South Vietnam will be able to meet the challenge of

government or a vigorous prosecution of the war. Warnings of this incipient danger were given even before the fall of the Diem regime by James Farmer in his Counter-Insurgency: Viet-Nam 1962-1963, The RAND Corporation, P-2778, August 1963.

\(^{50}\) There is, of course, the danger that the South Vietnamese government, torn by dissension and weary of fighting, may develop an over-dependence on U.S. support. In light of the recent effective American air strikes against North Vietnam and talk in Washington of "carrying the war to the North," it is altogether possible that a strong tendency may develop in Saigon to turn away from the tedious and demanding job of pacification and to relax aggressive prosecution of operations against the Viet Cong. This might be publicly justified on grounds that army units were needed elsewhere to repel an expected invasion from the North. Privately South Vietnamese leaders might argue that since the United States has now directly joined battle with North Vietnam, these two external powers should be left to fight the conflict out by themselves. Such a rationale would not be new in Asian warfare; it has been succinctly expressed in the familiar Chinese idiom Tso-shan-k'an-hu-tou -- "to sit on a mountain to watch tigers fight."
transferring power from an interim administration -- with roots still deep in the previous military and Catholic-oriented regimes -- to a permanent government which is broadly-based and reasonably democratic. It is doubtful that a prolonged caretaker leadership or a weak, indecisive permanent government would be able to provide the necessary military impetus in the field to counter the increasingly strong Communist insurgency.

In the long run, victory over the Viet Cong will require much more than an upturn in the military statistics of engagements won and casualties inflicted. It will depend on the gradual extension of effective governmental control to more and more areas. Such control necessarily implies physical security, just and effective administration, economic and social welfare programs, fair and efficient tax collection, cleared roads and other communications, and the host of ties binding communities together.

According to some unofficial estimates, Saigon today controls over 30% of the country, the Viet Cong 20%, and the remaining 50% remains a kind of no-man's-land. If so, any regime that comes to power after the present transitional government will face a long and arduous path to victory. The ever-present possibility of assassination, military coup, or popular uprisings will pose a constant danger of some irreparable setback. The war can only be won by a demanding combination of political, military, psychological, and economic efforts. While it can only be finally won in the rice paddies and jungles of the countryside, it can quickly be lost in
the pagodas, universities, and streets of the city. In the long run, as former Ambassador Lodge once observed, victory will depend on "persistent and patient execution of existing civil and military plans" and upon containment of "hostile external pressures."  

Second Contingency: Overt Invasion or Massive Infiltration from North Vietnam or China

The military estimates made above have been based on the assumption that the Viet Cong insurgency will continue with no drastic increase in external support. The outlook, of course, would be quite different if Hanoi or Peking should decide to escalate the conflict by massive infiltration or an overt invasion of South Vietnam. It is not feasible within the limited scope of this paper to spell out the many possible consequences for South Vietnam of this second contingency. The variables are too numerous. The outcome would depend both on the scale of the Communist escalation and the determination of the U.S. response. However, within the limits of this analysis it is possible to consider whether, in the light of present Communist capabilities and long-range interests, a significant external military escalation is likely to occur.

This could take the form of (1) an invasion by regular North Vietnamese military formations, or (2) a large-scale overt infiltration of "volunteers," including

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51 From Ambassador Lodge's letter of resignation as quoted in the Los Angeles Times, June 24, 1964.
small regular tactical units. The former would most likely come across the 17th Parallel, the latter, perhaps, through Laos. Either of these courses of action would differ substantially from Hanoi's previous policy of limited and covert infiltration by individual cadres or small groups. Although individual North Vietnamese troops have occasionally been captured in the South, they have not been found to retain organic ties with their former Northern units. Rather, they have come as individuals to join existing Viet Cong detachments or to organize new guerrilla bands. Thus, presently accepted evidence still does not bear out the cry of "invasion" raised by General Khanh in July.

52 In mid-July, well before the Tonkin Gulf incidents, U.S. military spokesmen in Saigon warned that significant new North Vietnamese infiltration had been detected in the four northern provinces of South Vietnam. Concomitantly there was a marked increase in the scale and ferocity of Communist attacks, terrorism, and sabotage. There is no evidence thus far that the organized combat units in South Vietnam have been infiltrated. However, former regular officers from the North Vietnamese Army, up to the rank of major, have been identified as commanding and fighting in Viet Cong battalions and subordinate formations.

On September 19 two companies of unidentified troops (about 200 men) attempted to infiltrate into the coastal areas just south of the 17th Parallel (six miles north-east of Quangtri). A large-scale engagement followed, involving units of the South Vietnamese First Infantry Division supported by artillery, and naval and air forces. Before withdrawing the infiltrators lost 64 killed and 17 captured. Subsequent intelligence evaluations concluded that no integral elements of the North Vietnamese army were involved in the incident. New York Times, July 15, September 22 and 24, 1964.

53 In a written reply to a question by Australian
Stepped up guerrilla activity had been expected in the comparatively dry and mountainous northern provinces after the onset of the summer monsoon in the southern Delta area. However, the new evidence suggests several important things. An estimated 30 per cent of the total personnel in Viet Cong units formed in the eight months after the Diem regime was overthrown are believed to have infiltrated from the North. The apparent increase in the number of North Vietnamese military personnel entering the South indicates that the long used pool of southern natives who temporarily went north for training in 1954 may now be drying up. Moreover, it suggests that Hanoi is now sufficiently determined to maintain and even intensify the tempo of fighting that it is willing to run a limited risk of escalating the conflict by sending its own regular military personnel to organize and lead Viet Cong elements.

If intensified Viet Cong activity or large-scale, but covert, infiltration should not be enough to satisfy North Vietnam's recently wounded pride and broader aspirations, Hanoi might resort to overt invasion across the 17th Parallel. For such an action it could call upon a 250,000 man regular army backed by a militia numbering correspondent Denis Warner, Khanh claimed that 28,000 to 29,000 of the present Viet Cong strength had infiltrated from the North this year. These figures are not confirmed by U.S. sources and appear to have been grossly exaggerated to serve Khanh's former policy objectives. This was strongly hinted in his further remark to Warner that "the war will go on" for "as long as it is not solved at its source -- that is to say, Red China." Denis Warner, "Vietnam: General Taylor Faces An All-Out War," The Reporter, August 13, 1964.
over one million as well as special security police and border patrol units. One observer calls this "probably the largest and best-trained native military force in mainland Southeast Asia." In contrast with the poor showing made by the weak naval force in the Tonkin Gulf incidents, the tough, well-trained North Vietnamese ground force could be expected to give a good account of itself in conventional military operations. If committed to an all-out offensive effort, it is doubtful that anything short of massive U.S. intervention could prevent its conquest of South Vietnam.

Evidence over recent months of a large North Vietnamese build-up in the Laotian panhandle suggests at least the possibility of a future attempt at large-scale infiltration, followed by reassembly of North Vietnamese units after crossing the border. Such a move could permit the launching of a major attack on the central highlands, designed to draw government forces away from the critical Saigon-Mekong area. Vo Nguyen Giap has indicated in his writings that a decisive

54 See article by Bernard Fall in the Washington Post, August 9, 1964.
55 According to Robert Brunn, writing in the Christian Science Monitor for July 6, 1964, "Western intelligence has uncovered new trackable roads capable of carrying hundreds of troops daily, instead of the handful of Communists which used to infiltrate daily along the paths of the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail." He noted that "large cantonments for troops have been spotted" and that "roughly 3,000 North Vietnamese are probably camped along the South Vietnamese border in staging areas."
victory could be scored in the highlands at a time when fighting in the Delta had reached a crescendo.

Despite these impressive capabilities and the recently accelerated rate of infiltration into the South, there would seem to be compelling reasons against Hanoi's initiating a policy of military escalation at this time. To exchange the present policy of small-scale covert infiltration for a program of undisguised invasion by substantial regular forces would clearly risk provoking a damaging American military response. The U.S. has recently demonstrated that it is fully capable of delivering such a blow. This risk would appear to outweigh any tangible gains that Hanoi might reasonably anticipate in any move to escalate. Moreover, in view of the recent course of the war in the South, it would seem to be an unnecessary gamble. By contrast with a policy of invasion or large-scale overt infiltration, intensified Viet Cong efforts (e.g., increased terrorism, ambushes, a mortar attack on suburbs of Saigon) could be mounted without a drastic rise in the level of external support and with substantially lower risk of provoking serious U.S. or South Vietnamese countermeasures (e.g., bombing of North Vietnam).

While these would appear to be persuasive arguments, there is no guarantee, of course, that Hanoi will heed them. The North Vietnamese leaders, for example, could underestimate (particularly in an election year) the firmness or swiftness of an American response to large-scale infiltration and attacks on South Vietnamese units -- in contrast to U.S. warships in the Tonkin Gulf. One
should never forget how badly the Soviets miscalculated American intentions in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.56

The curious and, at times, inexplicable behavior of the North Vietnamese during and after the recent crisis in the Gulf of Tonkin inevitably lends a disturbing note of uncertainty to estimates of Hanoi's future military intentions. While the initial torpedo-boat attack of August 2 on the U.S. destroyer Maddox may be explained as a misunderstanding on the part of North Vietnamese naval commanders, there still is no clear or satisfying explanation for the subsequent deliberate attack of August 4 on the Maddox and the C. Turner Joy.57 If

56 See Klaus Knorr, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles," World Politics, April 1964.

57 According to American officials, the destroyers were carrying out a "routine" surveillance patrol -- not a "covering" operation for South Vietnamese coastal raids -- in international waters (never less than 12 miles from the North Vietnamese coastline) as had been done without challenge for nearly two years. Hanoi, however, claimed (a) that the Maddox had intruded into "territorial waters" on August 2 when she was "chased out" by three torpedo boats, and (b) that the incident of August 4 never occurred, being fabricated by Washington to justify "aggressive" air strikes against North Vietnam. Among the various theories which could be advanced to explain Hanoi's initiative are the following: (1) Punitive Operation -- North Vietnam, stung by recent South Vietnamese coastal raids, determined to punish the offenders (with whom the Maddox was presumed to be associated), grossly miscalculating the likelihood of serious retaliation; (2) Probe of U.S. Intentions -- jittery over recent talk in Saigon of carrying the war "to the north," Hanoi decided to test American strategic intentions; (3) Probe of U.S. Reactions -- the incidents were deliberately staged to test American response to a projected
Hanoi thought by this initiative to demonstrate that American forces would not fire on a "privileged sanctuary," they were probably surprised and shocked. If they were

North Vietnamese escalation of military operations in the South -- e.g., massive infiltration of "volunteers," resumption of Pathet Lao May offensive. (If the United States had proved unwilling to commit its own forces to battle, Hanoi would have been encouraged to throw the troops into the fight in the hope of speeding victory. Also, the incidents provided an international smoke screen behind which Hanoi could more easily justify increased intervention in the South before world opinion.); (4) Counterintelligence Operation -- the attacks were launched to create an international commotion that would force U.S. withdrawal of naval patrols; (5) Propaganda Gambit -- Hanoi wished to score a quick propaganda victory by an embarrassingly successful surprise attack on America's vaunted naval power, assuming thereby (a) to lend weight to Peking's argument that the United States is a "paper tiger," and (b) to place a bellicose and bumbling Washington in a most unflattering international light; (6) International Force Majeure -- wearied of fighting an indecisive war in the South and fearing an expansion of American military effort, Hanoi provoked an international incident with the United States to demonstrate the presence of its warships in the Tonkin Gulf and to create a general war scare in the hope that Washington could be forced to the conference table under the present unfavorable bargaining terms. (Presumably, if the conference failed, guerrilla warfare could always be resumed.); (7) Test of Soviet Reactions -- Hanoi, spurred by Peking, wished to test Moscow's willingness to provide support in the event of hostilities with the West and, perhaps, also to dramatize the Russian dilemma over the competing goals of "peaceful coexistence" and unqualified support for armed Communist revolution; (8) Move to Gain Greater Assistance -- North Vietnam deliberately provoked a direct U.S. military reprisal in hopes of obtaining greater Chinese and, possibly, Russian support for the increasingly costly wars in Vietnam and Laos.

Not all the above explanations are mutually exclusive. Thus Hanoi may have acted initially for punitive, propaganda,
looking for a pretext to escalate the conflict in the South or in Laos, they were warned of the probable U.S. response. If they were attempting to probe American strategic intentions, they discovered -- perhaps with relief -- that these are indeed limited under present conditions to operations in the South. If they had hoped to force the United States to participate in an early international conference, they have been disappointed. If they sought increased support for their war efforts from China and the USSR, they have probably been at least mildly disillusioned.

If, despite Washington's numerous categorical denials, the North Vietnamese believe they acted by accepted international standards to defend their territorial waters against alleged U.S. intrusion and attack, they must be extremely frustrated over the outcome of their action. 58

and probing purposes alike, but also with the expectation that U.S. retaliation, if strong enough to caution against Communist military escalation, could help speed progress toward an early international conference.

58 Even before the August 4 torpedo boat attack, North Vietnamese propaganda had blamed the United States for an alleged naval bombardment of Hon Ngu and Hon Me Islands on July 30 and for air raids on a border post (Nam Can) and village (Noong De) near the Vietnam-Laos border on August 1 and 2. The latter were said to have been launched by American aircraft from bases in Thailand and Laos. It was further charged that on August 1 and 2 a U.S. warship (presumably the Maddox) cruised between Hon Mat Island (Nghe An Province), and Hon Me Island (Thanh Hoa Province) "openly infringing upon...territorial waters" and intimidating fishing boats until chased out by North Vietnamese patrol boats. See FBIS Daily Report (Far East), August 4, 5, and 6, 1964.

As noted above, top-level U.S. military and political officials have denied American involvement in these alleged
In such a mood they might throw caution to the winds and embark on a hazardous, belligerent course. However, Hanoi's restrained and somewhat uncertain propaganda response thus far does not indicate that frustration has produced a dangerous or unbalanced mental state. According to early diplomatic reports Hanoi remained "surprisingly calm" and low-keyed after the outbreak of the August hostilities. 59

Present indications are that Hanoi's response to the retaliatory U.S. air strikes will not take the form of overt military moves against South Vietnam. Insofar as it is directed against South Vietnam (as opposed to the United States Navy), the North Vietnamese response will probably consist of stepped-up, but covert and limited, support for the Viet Cong. Despite alarming but unsubstantiated warnings by General Khanh, there has been no solid evidence of important troop movements in North Vietnam or China in the wake of the crisis. (In what amounts to a very minimal response, China has sent some 12 or 15 subsonic MIG-15 and MIG-17 jet fighters to North Vietnam.) On the international scene, Hanoi's response will undoubtedly involve intensified anti-American propaganda and demands for an immediate U.S. withdrawal from the area. Moreover, it may include limited and

actions and have even denied that the Maddox had knowledge of or provided cover for South Vietnamese commando raids. See statements of Secretary of Defense McNamara, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, and General Earle Wheeler, New York Times, August 7, 1964; also remarks of a Pentagon spokesman on August 11 in New York Times, August 12, 1964. 59 See Saigon dispatch to the New York Times, August 10, 1964.
relatively low-risk naval harassment of U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin.\footnote{On September 18 two high-speed, unidentified naval craft approached U.S. destroyers patrolling in the Tonkin Gulf about 42 miles from the coast of Hanoi. The destroyers, regarding this as a "menacing" maneuver (and erroneously assuming, from duplicate radar images, that there were four or more vessels approaching) opened fire at long range. The unidentified craft -- which had never closed sufficiently for visual sighting -- subsequently disappeared from radar view without making any attempt to attack the destroyers. As in the August 4 engagement, North Vietnam and China claim that the entire incident was fabricated to justify an American attack on the North. Considering the unusual swiftness of their propaganda response, it is not impossible that the two vessels were sent toward the destroyers in a deliberate feint to create another incident (but without serious risks of a damaging U.S. retaliation). If so, this may portend a new and relatively low-risk policy of harassment of U.S. destroyers patrolling in the Tonkin Gulf. Such a policy would be calculated to raise international tensions periodically and provide Hanoi and Peking with a further propaganda weapon against the American presence in Southeast Asia.}

Regardless of North Vietnam's present military intentions toward the South, it is possible, of course, that external pressures from China or the USSR might at some future date impel a change of tactics. It is extremely doubtful that Hanoi would venture to initiate a substantial military escalation without the support of Peking and, possibly, Moscow as well. There have long been signs that the USSR would strongly counsel against an offensive move of this sort. Moreover, China has thus far shown no disposition to back such an initiative.

Despite the bellicose image conveyed in ideological polemics, Peking has in recent years pursued a notably
cautious role in external military policies, exercising realism in the calculation of risks. 61 Troubled by chronic economic problems since 1959 and severe setbacks in military modernization following the cessation of Soviet aid in 1960, the Chinese, in initiating actions (as opposed to responding to Western initiatives), have shown no disposition to risk a general war with America. 62 With all their crusading zeal, the Chinese have persistently argued that left-wing revolutionary movements can defeat all the forces arrayed against them by means of protracted "people's struggles" -- which do not necessitate a direct military confrontation with the United States.

61 For further development of this particular point see Alice Hsieh, "China's Secret Military Papers: Military Doctrine and Strategy," China Quarterly, April-June 1964.

62 It has been argued that the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1958 constitutes an exception to this generalization. Recently a leader of the Costa Rican Communist Party published a sensational account of a conversation he had with Mao Tse-tung on March 3, 1959 -- several months after the crisis. Mao allegedly declared: "In the past year we have learned a great deal from Foster Dulles....His 'brink of war' policy was directed precisely at us. But we also learned [it]...and we are applying it over the island of Quemoy....When U.S. ships came within 3 miles of our line of fire, we fired on them; we were 'on the brink of war.'" Despite the apparent recklessness of the Chinese leader in this statement several considerations should be borne in mind in evaluating it: (1) The Straits crisis was a special case, involving Peking's specific claim to Chinese territory (certainly not an issue in Laos or Vietnam); (2) It is entirely possible that the Costa Rican author's recollection was faulty or that he deliberately exaggerated Mao's words to serve Moscow's purpose in the increasingly bitter Sino-Soviet dispute. See Eduardo Mora Valverde, "The Words and Deeds of the Communist Party of China," Izvestia, June 19, 1964, quoted in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, July 15, 1964, p. 6.
Chinese caution has probably been reinforced recently by pointed Soviet hints that Peking could count on no help from Moscow if it recklessly became involved in a general war in Southeast Asia. Writing in Pravda on June 21, Yury Zhukov implied that the effectiveness of the Sino-Soviet treaty of mutual defense had been put under doubt by Peking's "dirty anti-Soviet campaign." A week later Deputy Foreign Minister Valerian Zorin intimated in an authoritative Izvestia article that the USSR could not support China's "special purposes" with its military power.

China's military limitations were not suddenly overcome by the detonation of a low-yield nuclear device on October 16 in the Lop Nor lake region of Sinkiang Province. This event, while marking a major scientific advance,

62 Yury Zhukov, "The Chinese Wall," Current Digest of the Soviet Press, July 15, 1964, p. 4. The salient passage reads: "...the Peking leaders are still from time to time making bombastic and hypocritical pronouncements to the effect that 'in the terrible hour of trial' the CPR and the USSR will always be together. But any sensible person will tell them: How do you intend to ensure this in circumstances when a dirty anti-Soviet campaign is being conducted in China...? Is this dangerous political game...not excessively risky?"

63 He pointedly quoted Moscow's statement of September 21, 1963: "The very idea of the need to provide themselves with nuclear weapons could occur to the leaders of a country whose security is guaranteed by the entire might of the socialist camp [i.e., Soviet nuclear-missile forces] only if they have developed some kind of special aims or interests that the socialist camp cannot support with its military force." Current Digest of the Soviet Press, July 22, 1964, p. 11.
does not necessarily provide China with an immediate nuclear weapons capability. Although Peking will undoubtedly seek to exploit the immediate political and propaganda advantages occasioned by the test explosion, it is very unlikely that the present Chinese leadership will abandon its previous realism and caution in taking new external military initiatives. Despite ideological fanaticism and bellicose propaganda, the Chinese leaders will probably wish to avoid driving Japan or India to opt for an independent nuclear capability of their own -- or to seek an American nuclear presence on their soil. Moreover, Peking will probably be acutely sensitive to the likelihood of a massive U.S. retaliation in the event of a Chinese nuclear attack on neighboring non-Communist countries.

The recent dramatic achievement in Chinese nuclear technology is not likely, in itself, to alter Peking's reluctance to escalate the conflict in South Vietnam. However, to the extent that the ominous long-range prospect of a Chinese nuclear threat intimidates South Vietnamese leaders or encourages the general rise of neutralist sentiment, the October 16 test could have some effect on the situation.

As shown above, China, under present circumstances, would seem to have no reason to abandon her previously cautious, low-risk role in Vietnam. However, this estimate provides no assurance that Peking would react with restraint or realism in the event of a major U.S.-South Vietnamese move to escalate the war (e.g., by initiating direct, overt attacks on North Vietnam). In mid-July Peking summarized its position as follows:
Despite the fact that the United States has introduced tens of thousands of its military personnel into southern Vietnam and Laos, China has not sent a single soldier to Indo-China [overtly, at least]. However, there is a limit to everything. The United States would be wrong if it should think that it could do whatever it pleases in Vietnam and Indo-China with impunity. We would frankly tell the United States: the Chinese people will by no means sit idly by while the United States extends its war of aggression in Vietnam and Indo-China.\(^{64}\)

On August 6, following U.S. retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese naval facilities, Peking appeared to strengthen the wording of this general warning somewhat by declaring that "aggression by the United States against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) means aggression against China" and that "the Chinese people will absolutely not sit idly by without lending a helping hand."\(^{65}\) Nevertheless, after a week of frenzied popular demonstrations


\(^{65}\) The statement also asserted that because of the U.S. attacks, North Vietnam had "gained the right of action to fight against aggression" and "all countries upholding the Geneva agreements" had the right to assist Hanoi in its fight. An accompanying editorial in \textit{Jen-min Jih-pao} served notice that "...Should U.S. imperialism at any moment invade the DRV's territorial waters and airspace, the Chinese people will be honor-bound to give resolute support to the Vietnamese people in their just war to resist U.S. aggression." FBIS \textit{Daily Report} (Far East), August 6, 1964.
(involving an estimated 20 million people) and large-scale militia exercises in Kwangtung and Fukien, Chinese threats abated.

More recently, following the September 18 naval incident in the Tonkin Gulf, Peking reiterated the warning that aggression against North Vietnam would be considered aggression against China. On September 29, after extensive Western press speculation about Washington's alleged authorization of "hot pursuit" by American military aircraft into North Vietnamese or Chinese airspace, Peking warned that if the United States ventures "to extend its adventurous acts just as it pleases, then it will have to pay an extremely high price for its dangerous experiment." In conclusion, although China's actions thus far have not always appeared to match the intense bellicosity of her words, it would seem most imprudent, if not dangerously rash, to assume that Peking would not react militarily to any major U.S.-South Vietnamese move to escalate the war.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, present indications are that there will be no drastic increase in military support to the Viet Cong insurgency from external Communist sources. Neither China nor the USSR has shown any inclination to underwrite such an initiative. North Vietnam, while militarily capable of overrunning the South (in the absence of U.S. interdiction), has no reason to assume the serious risks this would entail. Moreover, Hanoi, despite recent peculiarities in behavior, has shown no intention of undertaking any fundamental shift to the high-risk tactics of massive infiltration or overt invasion of the South.

Present signs point toward at least a temporary intensification of Viet Cong action following the lull occasioned in August and early September by the Tonkin Gulf crisis and Saigon's political turmoil. This will probably entail an even higher rate of terrorist activities than heretofore since the latter are particularly effective in the present environment -- besides being less costly to the insurgents than regular military attacks. As opportunities arise, however, the Communists will probably unleash from time to time guerrilla campaigns that involve simultaneous large-scale attacks in widely separated areas. By these means the Viet Cong will probably attempt to regain the impressive momentum they built up in July -- and, in the process, help to repair the damage to Hanoi's prestige inflicted in the Tonkin Gulf crisis by U.S. air and naval power.

To provide the necessary support for the renewed Viet Cong effort (well-prepared after weeks of inaction),
North Vietnam will probably maintain the current high levels of covert infiltration and supply, because of the limited risk this entails. External Communist support is not likely to go beyond this unless there is a further U.S. or South Vietnamese move toward escalation. The recent Chinese nuclear detonation is not likely, in itself, to alter Peking's reluctance to initiate a military escalation in South Vietnam. (However, Peking might, with some success, embark upon a propaganda initiative to intimidate the South Vietnamese leadership or to encourage the growth of neutralist sentiment.)

As shown above (pages 52-55), stoppage of all external aid to the Viet Cong (theoretically possible, but very unlikely in practice) would not deal a mortal blow either to their capabilities or intentions. Moreover, the process of securing cessation or interdiction of external supply, though able to promise Saigon substantial long-term advantages in pacification, would pose extremely serious short-term risks in present circumstances.

The Viet Cong, given their present military limitations and political advantages, probably hope to win the war along previously-established tactical lines. It is likely that they will continue to rely on a high, but periodically fluctuating, level of guerrilla warfare and terrorist pressures, seeking thereby (a) to undermine the South Vietnamese government's ability and will to resist, and (b) to harass Washington into an early withdrawal of U.S. troops and assistance.

The main danger facing South Vietnam today is not the Viet Cong military threat -- which, though formidable, is currently insufficient by itself to win a decision in
the war. Rather, the main immediate peril comes from within. It is that prolonged political instability and popular demoralization will make it impossible to maintain an aggressive, effective resistance to the Communist insurrection. The ultimate success of South Vietnam's military and pacification efforts will depend on whether a strong, efficient, and reasonably popular national government can be established in the near future.

However, in the current atmosphere of rapid political change and newly emerging forces it is impossible to estimate with any confidence the chances for a restoration of governmental stability in South Vietnam. Some factors in the current scene, hopefully, suggest that the worst may be over and that South Vietnam may now be making a start toward building a stable government. However, numerous unsolved problems and serious uncertainties loom on the horizon, casting a dark cloud over the political future. In the long run, the attainment of internal stability will require more than the avoidance of past mistakes; it will necessitate the development of a new, higher order of leadership and a positive program capable of eliciting the support of religious groups, intellectuals, minorities, and the military. Meanwhile, experimentation and adjustment are likely to be the facts of life from some time to come, with a continuing possibility that extremism or miscalculation by one group or another may result in assassinations, military coups, or popular uprisings.

If the political crisis is not solved soon -- and this cannot now be reliably forecast -- the present fluid military situation could end in a Communist victory by
default. Progressive weakening and fragmentation of the Saigon regime could lead to a negotiated settlement on Communist terms. However, such a political and military deterioration is certainly not inevitable. If General Khanh and his associates are able to compromise their differences, overcome the ineptitude and corruption of earlier governments, and rally "the hearts and minds" of a war-weary people, the chances of bringing the Viet Cong insurrection under control within a tolerable time will be good.