MEMORANDUM
RM-5163/2-ISA/ARPA
MAY 1968
(ORIGINAL EDITION: MARCH 1967)

ORIGINS OF THE INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1954-1960: THE ROLE OF THE SOUTHERN VIETMINH CADRES

J. J. Zasloff

PREPARED FOR:
THE OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
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FOREWORD

This report is one of a series of Rand studies that examine the organization, operations, motivation, and morale of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that fought in South Vietnam.

Between August 1964 and December 1968 The Rand Corporation conducted approximately 2400 interviews with Vietnamese who were familiar with the activities of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. Reports of those interviews, totaling some 62,000 pages, were reviewed and released to the public in June 1972. They can be obtained from the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce.

The release of the interviews has made possible the declassification and release of some of the classified Rand reports derived from them. To remain consistent with the policy followed in reviewing the interviews, information that could lead to the identification of individual interviewees was deleted, along with a few specific references to sources that remain classified. In most cases, it was necessary to drop or to change only a word or two, and in some cases, a footnote. The meaning of a sentence or the intent of the author was not altered.

The reports contain information and interpretations relating to issues that are still being debated. It should be pointed out that there was substantive disagreement among the Rand researchers involved in Vietnam research at the time, and contrary points of view with totally different implications for U.S. operations can be found in the reports. This internal debate mirrored the debate that was then current throughout the nation.

A complete list of the Rand reports that have been released to the public is contained in the bibliography that follows.

(CRC, BJ: May 1975)

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PREFACE

Since July 1964, The RAND Corporation has been inquiring into the motivation, behavior, and morale of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers fighting in South Vietnam. A series of Memoranda based mainly on interviews with prisoners and defectors has focused on both strengths and weaknesses of the Communist side, and has included suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese and American war effort.

The present Memorandum deals with the group of revolutionary cadres who were left behind in the South after the cease-fire of 1954 to keep intact, and eventually to expand, the surviving Vietminh organization. For a profile of these "stay-behinds" and an account of their experience under the Diem regime the author draws mainly on 23 interviews that RAND's field team conducted with captives and defectors from among lower- and middle-level cadres. He goes on to speculate on how that experience is likely to influence today's Communist leaders as they weigh the possibilities of negotiation and settlement. The author, a RAND consultant with special competence in Southeast Asia, has spent much time in Vietnam in connection with this and earlier projects, and has published several studies based on the interviews he himself helped conduct.

This Memorandum was originally issued in March 1967.

SUMMARY

After the cease-fire in Indochina, most military men of the southern insurgency, in keeping with the Geneva Agreement, were "regrouped" in the North. The Vietminh cadres who remained in the South after 1954 consisted of two groups, who are designated for the purposes of this report the active and the inactive. The active responded to the discipline and control of the Vietminh leaders, who, after Geneva, had installed themselves in Hanoi. The inactive cadres had taken up civilian life and were no longer connected with the Vietminh organization. While the active accepted the direction of their Communist leaders, the sentiments of the inactive toward the Vietminh ranged from loyalty, through neutrality and indifference, to downright hostility.

The tasks of the active cadre were limited to the realm of organization and propaganda, and violence or sabotage initially had no part in them. Eventually, however, these civilian "stay-behinds," together with the military veterans who returned from the North, were to constitute the steel frame of the Viet Cong, or, as it came to be called in 1960, the National Liberation Front.

This Memorandum examines the role of the stay-behinds in the preparation of the present insurgency. Interviews conducted by RAND teams with 23 cadres from that group -- 17 prisoners and 6 defectors -- who came into government hands between May 1963 and August 1965 have been used in this composite picture of the experiences, activities, views, and motives of lower- and middle-level cadres who helped reconstruct the Vietminh apparatus in the years 1954-1960.

Aware of the potential threat from former members of the Resistance, the Diem government in 1955 embarked on a program designed to identify and control Communist enemies. As enforced at the local level, especially in the rural areas, its victims perceived it as a campaign of terror. Many former Vietminh and their families, whether they were active in the organization or had returned to the private sphere and lost contact with the Vietminh, found themselves harassed and persecuted, often the victims of arbitrary and spiteful local enforcement agents. Although the campaign did great damage to the Communist apparatus and its excesses may not have been intended by the central authorities (they were not evident in Saigon), it cost the Diem regime the goodwill and trust of many potential supporters among former Vietminh. In the climate of indignation that it created, the active Communists among the stay-behinds who survived the campaign, reinforced by the returning regroupees, were able to appeal readily to the previously inactive and reinvolve them in the movement, and to build up a country-wide revolutionary organization with an accompanying intelligence network. Their experience in the war against the French enabled them to make an effective contribution to maintaining and expanding the "secret zones" -- base areas in which recruits were indoctrinated and trained, and which later served as military jumping-off points.

This Memorandum speculates on the extent to which the fate of the stay-behinds in the years 1954-1960 may affect the thinking of Southern insurgent leaders today as they view the prospects of a settlement of the war. As they look back on the treatment of Vietminh veterans under Diem, they are likely to regard future promises of an

amnesty with cynicism. The Communist leaders in Hanoi, in turn, no doubt would be skeptical about any guarantees of amnesty for their supporters in the South that might be written into a settlement.

Their knowledge of the fate of Southern cadres between 1954 and 1960 and the ferocity of the present war would probably lead them to expect a bloodbath for their Southern supporters if the Saigon government were to gain complete control. Taking this thought a step further, they may fear that any solution leaving South Vietnam under GVN control would meet with the strongest objections from important segments of the Southern cadres. These cadres, convinced that any such settlement would be a threat to their lives, might at that point go so far as to disobey Hanoi's instructions. Thus, negotiating such a settlement with the Saigon government might strike the Northern leaders as risking the loss of their most valuable political investment: control over the Viet Cong movement in the South.

The author does not intend to convey by these speculations the impression that the Communist leaders cannot be persuaded to negotiate or to abandon their military struggle for the control of the South. He intends his thoughts to underline the fact that the impact of the earlier settlement on the Communists may have an important bearing on a future peace.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Following the armistice in Indochina that resulted from the Geneva conference of 1954, most of the Vietminh political and administrative personnel who had participated in the eight-year struggle against France remained in South Vietnam. The military men of the southern insurgents -- an estimated 90,000 -- were ordered by their political leaders to regroup in North Vietnam under the Vietminh leadership that established itself in Hanoi. In the next few years, the cadres of civilian "stay-behinds" -- whose number, though probably substantially smaller than that of the military personnel who went North, is not known -- kept the Vietminh organization in South Vietnam intact. Beginning in 1959, they were rejoined by "regroupees," the soldiers who had gone to the North and were now being reinfiltrated. Together, these Vietminh veterans constituted the "steel frame" of the expanding insurgent organization in the South, now known as the Viet Cong (VC) or National Liberation Front (NLF).

This Memorandum examines the role that the cadres[1] who had stayed behind in South Vietnam played during the preparation and at the beginning of the current insurgency.

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[1]The term "cadre" is used in this paper to designate any member of the Vietminh or Viet Cong who occupies a position of leadership in the political or military structure which would be the military equivalent of squad leader or above.

In exploring the origins of this "Second Resistance," as the Vietminh cadres term it, the author has focused upon the period from the cease-fire in 1954 to the year 1960, which marked the beginning of widespread, coordinated VC attacks against government positions throughout South Vietnam. Events will be described from the perspective of lower- and middle-level cadres who participated in the reconstruction of the Vietminh apparatus during this period.

The data for this study are drawn from interviews with twenty-three former cadres (six defectors and seventeen prisoners), all of them members of the Viet Cong who had defected or been captured between May 1963 and August 1965. The interviews were conducted by RAND research teams in South Vietnam as part of a continuing inquiry into the subject of Viet Cong motivation and morale.[2] Most of the men interviewed had worked at the district and village level. The highest cadre in the sample appears to have been a province-level propaganda specialist who directed the work of 120 subordinates. Only four were in the military -- two in district (local) forces and two in the village militia -- and one of these men had had an administrative assignment in his unit. The others were civilian cadres, of whom seven had been involved in propaganda activity, six in fiscal or economic affairs, and three in Party committee work, while two were intelligence agents,

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[2]Appendix 1 gives brief biographical data on the men interviewed, identifying them by numbers 1 to 23. (The relevant number, in parenthese, follows each quotation from an interview that is cited in the text.) Appendix 2 is a breakdown of the sample by various pertinent characteristics.

and one was a photographer. The twenty-three cadres in this sample operated in sixteen of South Vietnam's forty-four provinces.

Because of the small sample, it is important to note some of the limitations in the following analyses. Drawing upon the twenty-three interviewees, the author has attempted to construct a composite picture of the conditions that faced Vietminh personnel who stayed behind in the South and of their role in reorganizing the insurgency. The data, however, do not provide an adequate basis for estimating the number of persons who experienced the repressive conditions described in the following analysis or the extent to which these conditions applied equally to all areas of South Vietnam. Unfortunately, no reliable estimates are available as to total number of Vietminh who stayed in South Vietnam; the number who remained in an "active" status; the number who eventually joined the Viet Cong; or the positions these persons hold in the movement today.

Furthermore, being largely lower-level cadres, the men interviewed did not generally have access to communist leadership circles in either South Vietnam or Hanoi; at best, some of them had attended meetings at which they were briefed by higher echelons. Assessments of communist leaders' intentions in the following pages, therefore, are speculative, for they are based principally on information that the interviewees provided.

In the course of their long service with the Vietminh and the Viet Cong, the cadres had absorbed a great amount of communist political indoctrination. Nineteen had joined the Vietminh before 1950 (although not all of them served continuously until 1954), and sixteen of the total had more than five years' service with the Viet Cong. Eighteen

of the twenty-three had been Party members; four of these stated that they had been expelled. Given the length of their service and the high proportion of Party members in the group, it is not surprising that many of the interviewees' statements were colored by communist slogans. Nevertheless, from the mosaic of their individual stories there emerges an unusually clear picture of the conditions they faced in the South after partition and of their role in reorganizing the insurgency. Unlike the regroupees, whose denunciations of the Saigon regime reflect mainly what they were told in the North, where they lived throughout the first half of Diem's rule, these southern cadres spoke vividly from personal experience. Ranging in age from 30 to 53 at the time of the interviews, they tended to be spontaneous and relaxed in telling about their life during the first six years after the Geneva Conference. In citing their grievances against the Saigon government of that period -- as all of them did -- prisoners did not need to worry about offending their captors, as the Diem regime had been repudiated by all subsequent governments of South Vietnam.

The following is a composite of the remarkably uniform accounts of prisoners and defectors, loyal as well as discredited Party members, the hard core and the disaffected, in which they described the fate and the activities of former Vietminh personnel after the cease-fire in the South.

II. POST-GENEVA ATTITUDES OF THE VIETMINH CADRES, 1954-1955

The Vietminh cadres who remained in the South after 1954 consisted of two groups, who are designated for the purposes of this report the active and the inactive. The active responded to the discipline and control of the Vietminh leaders, who, after Geneva, had installed themselves in Hanoi. The inactive cadres had taken up civilian life and were no longer connected with the Vietminh organization. While the active accepted the direction of their communist leaders, the sentiments of the inactive toward the Vietminh ranged from loyalty, through neutrality and indifference, to downright hostility.

The loyal among the inactive were proud of their service in the Vietminh, which they regarded as a patriotic movement responsible for liberating Vietnam from French rule. They looked forward to the general elections in 1956 that were to reunify Vietnam, and they hoped for a Vietminh victory. The inactive who felt neutral toward the Vietminh had returned to their villages after the cease-fire to rejoin their families and take up a normal civilian life. Indifferent to politics, they were relieved to be able to disengage themselves from Vietminh activities and resume civilian work. Among them were those who had been unenthusiastic about their service in the Vietminh but had adjusted themselves to it and been promoted to cadre rank. Some had gone into the Vietminh ranks because of compulsion, social pressure, or the adventuresome impulses of youth, rather than from conviction. Many had joined to express their opposition to French colonial rule, and, with the

departure of the French, the reason for their participation had disappeared. As in any nation, a large number in the neutral range consisted of people who were simply prepared to obey whatever authority was in power. They had submitted to colonial control while the French still exercised power; they served the Vietminh once its authority was established in their villages; if the government in Saigon could make its power prevail, they would obey it in turn. Finally, there was a small group that was unsympathetic, and occasionally hostile, to the Vietminh. Some had seen members of their families killed by the Vietminh; some had had their land confiscated in the course of the Vietminh programs for land redistribution; some, especially among those classified as members of the landlord or bourgeois class, had suffered various forms of discrimination, indignity, and persecution at the hands of Vietminh authorities. Still others had joined the Resistance for nationalist reasons and resented the communist domination of the movement.

The active were ordered by the Vietminh leadership to return to their home provinces and were instructed, it appears, to limit their activities to organizational and propaganda tasks. There is no evidence in our interviews that violence and sabotage were part of their assignment in the early months after Geneva. Low-level cadres were told to campaign discreetly for the elections which under the Geneva Agreement were to be held in 1956. A loyal cadre, who had served the Vietminh from 1947 to 1954, told of receiving the following guidance:

> We were given training about the Geneva treaty. We were instructed to work normally with the peasants, to earn a living and to explain to them the clauses of the treaty. We pointed out that general elections would be held in 1956. (8)

Another cadre described his tasks as distributing leaflets, hanging posters, and organizing meetings to promote the election. (9) Still another reported that the Party secretary in a province capital had assigned him "to work as a core cadre exhorting the population to demand negotiations with North Vietnam for a general election." (1) One cadre spoke of his village "Movement for the Protection of Peace," which distributed petitions demanding general elections, trade relations with North Vietnam, and peace. (17)

In July 1955, President Ngo Dinh Diem announced that he would not agree to the holding of elections under existing circumstances, as "the regime of oppression" established by communist control of the North made free elections impossible.[3] The active as well as the loyal inactive among southern Vietminh cadres were disappointed to learn that elections would not be held; they had been taught, and apparently believed, that the Vietminh would be victorious in such a contest. Their disappointment, however, did not match in intensity the discouragement and anger of the regroupees in the North, for whom the suspension of elections meant that they could not return home. Those in the South, although at home, were apprehensive

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[3] Allan B. Cole (ed.), Conflict in Indochina and International Repercussions: A Documentary History, 1946-1955, Cornell University Press, New York, 1956, pp. 226-228.

about their fate. Recalling events of that period, one cadre said:

> While the North was demanding a general election, those in the South who did were arrested and accused of being Communists. That worried me. (17)

Another cadre reported:

> Before 1956, I still believed very strongly that the general elections would be held. The International Control Committee was still in Vietnam. But in 1956, our hopes for the elections were all lost. We started to worry very much and we went into hiding. (8)

III. THE DIEM GOVERNMENT AND THE SOUTHERN VIETMINH CADRES

In his effort to consolidate the power of his government throughout Vietnam, President Diem crudely attempted to eliminate the nationalist appeal of the Vietminh, which he saw as a challenge to his authority. Mass meetings were organized in villages throughout the countryside to promote loyalty to the government, and villagers were called upon to condemn the Communists. One witness described the rally in his village as "a solemn ceremony of denunciation of communist crimes, [at which] the Vietminh flag was publicly torn." (16)

The government in Saigon saw itself threatened -- not without justification -- by Communist Party members, and it therefore launched a campaign to identify and control them. Though this policy apparently was conceived in Saigon as a means of separating active Vietminh agents from the population, in its implementation it avalanched into what the former Vietminh, and other segments of the population as well, perceived as a "campaign of terror" against anyone who had once been associated with the Resistance. Not only the active Party members, but large numbers of the inactive, whether or not they were still loyal to the Vietminh, were harassed, persecuted, arrested, and in some cases executed. In many areas this local oppression also included the so-called "Vietminh families," that is to say, those who had sons among the regroupees in the North or relatives who were involved in insurgent activities in the South. Not only were local officials and police agents frequently incompetent at singling out the active Vietminh agents, but many were also

arrogant and venal in the execution of their tasks, and by their offensive behavior generated sympathy for the Vietminh. Many of these local officials had served the French colonial administration prior to independence, and some now used their power to settle old scores with former Vietminh enemies. The military forces enlisted in this campaign against the Vietminh often committed misdeeds that ranged from the stealing of fruit and chickens from villagers' gardens to wanton killing and plundering. Paramilitary forces, such as the Civil Guard and, especially, the local militia known as the Self Defense Corps, were frequently guilty of brutality, petty thievery, and disorderly conduct.

The campaign by which the Saigon government sought to neutralize the Vietminh network included instructions to local officials to classify the population into three categories, which would permit the screening out of the enemies. Category A was for Party members considered the most dangerous; Category B, for Party members of lesser importance; and Category C, for loyal citizens. It is not clear from the interviews what disposition the central government may originally have envisaged for those who were placed in Categories A and B. These twenty-three interviews show, however, that many former Vietminh cadres, even inactive ones, considered this program one of savage persecution. In villages where the local officials were corrupt, they frequently used their power over former Vietminh cadres to extract bribes and payoffs, and to exploit their victims in other schemes for personal profit. A cadre from Central Vietnam described the situation in his village as follows:

> Former Party members of both Categories A and B were concentrated in two large houses. All the rooms of these houses were crowded with men. They were supplied with food by their own families. They were prevented from visiting their houses even for a while during the floods. . . .
>
> Contracts for the construction of a school and the offices of the village committee were given by the government but had to be subject to a bid. All the bidders were either relatives of the village chief or his own men.
>
> We, one hundred and fifty men strong, had to work without salary as carpenters and masons for these projects. Afterwards, we were gradually released. Those whose families could bribe the village chief could go home first. In any case, all of us were released, but many were put under house arrest again when the first rumors of VC activities were heard. (16)

In areas where the persecution was particularly intense, Vietminh cadres were fear-stricken. One of them gave the following account of the terror in his village:

> My village chief was a stranger to the village. He was very cruel. He hunted all the former members of the Communist Party during the Resistance to arrest and kill them. All told, he slaughtered fourteen Party members in my village. I saw him with my own eyes order the killing of two Party members in Mau Lam hamlet. They had their hands tied behind their backs and they were buried alive by the militia. I was scared to death. (18)

Of those who felt most seriously threatened some fled to Saigon and other large towns, where they did not find the same persecution that pervaded so many of the villages. One cadre who had fled to Saigon said: "There was more democracy there. In order to arrest somebody, there had to be charges, papers, and evidence against

him." (7) Another cadre had gone to Saigon expecting to find security there in anonymity. He said:

> In 1956, after the refusal to hold elections, a great many cadres were arrested, and the ones remaining were extremely afraid. Anybody who had been in the Resistance was captured on sight. I fled to Saigon. Nobody knew I was a former Resistant there. I was trying to get away from my friends. (8)

Many former Vietminh cadres have been able to live peacefully in Saigon. In fact, the Saigon government includes high officials who formerly served the Vietminh. The relative security that Saigon offered suggests that the excesses committed against former members of the Resistance in the provinces may have been a product of the overzealousness, incompetence, or venality of local officials rather than a deliberate policy of the central government. The victims, however, did not only blame the local officials -- though these were the principal object of their hate -- but the Diem government as well. As one cadre put it, "It was Diem's fault for not controlling down to the village level." (7)

Some cadres in Central Vietnam who found the pressures on them unbearable fled to the nearby mountains. There they joined other former Vietminh and helped form the nucleus of the Viet Cong agents who later spread their influence from these regions. One such cadre gave this account:

> In 1956, the local government of Quang Nam started a terrorist action against old Resistance members. About ten thousand persons of the Resistance Army were arrested, and a good many of them were slaughtered. I had to run for my life, and I stayed in the mountains until 1960. I lived with three others who came from

> my village. We got help from the tribal population there. (13)

Many of those arrested apparently no longer had any affiliation with the Vietminh. One cadre, who maintained that he had not served the Vietminh since he was expelled from the Party in 1951, told this story:

> I was a [GVN] hamlet chief for twenty days, in August 1954, and then I was dismissed by the village chief. I worked at my farm until 1956, when there was an order from the province to arrest all Communist Party members in Categories A and B. I was in the B Category. (18)

After a year in prison, he returned to his village to live and then was recruited into the insurgency. Another cadre, who claimed he did not rejoin the insurgents until 1960, reported the following:

> I joined the Resistance in 1954 and attended a training course designed for workers and peasants. When the war was over, I returned to my village and lived with my family. In 1957 I was arrested and held for three years in the My Tho and Go Cong jails. Not only was I arrested, I was also tortured. (23)

Our data do not permit us to make a reliable estimate of the numbers who were imprisoned or killed in this campaign against Vietminh personnel. It is clear, however, that the campaign, while it hurt the Vietminh organization in South Vietnam badly, also created conditions which surviving Vietminh agents were able to exploit in rebuilding the insurgent organization.

IV. BUILDING THE INSURGENT ORGANIZATION: THE "SECOND RESISTANCE"

When President Diem announced in August 1955 that the elections for reunification would not be held, the Vietminh leaders in Hanoi vociferously denounced his decision. Once they realized that they would not be able to gain the southern segment of Vietnam through elections, as they had hoped to do when they signed the Geneva Agreement, they apparently decided to achieve that aim by subversion. Their goal throughout remained constant: It was to secure political control over a unified, independent Vietnam.

In its effort to subvert the Saigon government, the Vietminh leadership used as the framework for a newly-constituted insurgent apparatus the Vietminh cadres who had remained in the South; from 1959 on, these were reinforced by regroupees sent back from the North.

In the course of an anti-Vietminh campaign of the Diem regime, many of the movement's personnel were imprisoned and executed between 1955 and 1959. A Vietminh veteran who had been a Party member since 1936 characterized that period as among the most difficult years of the entire revolution. (12) Some of the Vietminh cadres, however, escaped the net thrown out to trap conspirators and worked assiduously to rebuild the insurgent organization. The personal story of a Vietminh cadre in our sample shows the method used to recruit followers in one village:

> I resumed my activities for the Communists in 1956. From 1954 to 1956, all the Communists regrouped to the North. In 1956, the Viet Cong cadres returned clandestinely to the village and reestablished their organizations. They

> made propaganda and educated the villagers on their aims and policies. They praised me for all the contributions I had made to the Resistance, and urged me to join their ranks to fulfill my duty towards the nation. I became self-awakened and joined them. (14)

In the newly-constituted and expanding organization, this cadre became a member of the district Party Committee, serving as head of its information section. Assigned to penetrate the information service of the Government of Vietnam (GVN), he secured a job as a government information official in a district of Central Vietnam, and used this position with the GVN to work as an agent of the Viet Cong and build up its local organization:

> I enlisted people in the VC ranks and collected information which I channeled to the VC. I made propaganda for the VC, tried to build up their prestige, and sabotaged GVN activities. My status remained legal. I investigated [for the VC] and closely watched the families whose members had regrouped to the North, or the dissatisfied elements, or the persons who were sympathetic to the VC, in order to enlist them in the VC organizations. If I found them to be reliable, I would assign small tasks to them at the start. Afterwards, I would entrust them with more important and difficult missions. (14)

The above statement shows how the active cadres went about singling out segments of the rural population with acute grievances against the Saigon government. Those "Vietminh families" and the inactive Vietminh cadres who were being harassed by the local GVN officials were highly susceptible to VC appeals. The network of propaganda and recruiting agents extended down to the hamlet,

the lowest administrative level in South Vietnam. An account by one interviewee gives the flavor of propaganda activities as they were carried on in many areas of South Vietnam:

> I became a hamlet cadre at the end of 1957. My work was simple. I received news and instructions from the village cadres and transmitted them to a few other persons. At the time my village was still under GVN control and I had to work underground.
>
> I informed the villagers about such news as a demonstration by the inhabitants of a nearby village. I also urged my friends and acquaintances to demand more schools, more fertilizers, and more drugs, or to demand a general election and normal trade relations with North Vietnam, or to demand exemption from the ten piaster tax paid on each Ancestor Worship ceremony. This was called "The Struggle for the People's Living." (17)

An important part of the active cadres' organizing work between 1955 and 1959 was carried on from base areas, also called "secret zones" by the Vietminh, which had been regions of Vietminh strength since the struggle with the French. Many of these areas -- for example, Zones C and D, the U Minh Forest, and the Plain of Reeds -- were marshy and heavy with jungle undergrowth; they had few roads and were difficult for GVN military forces to penetrate. Though life was arduous in these regions, there were enough fruits and berries, fish in the streams, and wild life to sustain the cadres who remained in them. They offered some measure of security to new recruits, who could there be trained and politically indoctrinated for their insurgent tasks. As the zones expanded with the influx of new personnel, they served, from 1960 on, as jumping-off areas

for attacks against government positions. One cadre recalled:

> In 1956, I left my wife and children and hid in a mountainous area. We called it "secret zone 100-K." The government has not seen it to this day. I collaborated with others. We cut wood and left it for the inhabitants who respected us for this and gave us food and shelter. Life was very hard but no one complained. Little by little our group was transformed into an organization whose primary mission was to start bases for propaganda in the area. We were not armed. By every means, above all propaganda, we tried to win the people. (10)

Another cadre, who had rejoined the movement in 1956 and worked from a base area, gave this account of his unit's increasing belligerence, therein describing a process that was taking place throughout the southern countryside:

> From 1956 to 1959 we lacked the right conditions: on the one hand, there were successive government troop operations; on the other hand, we cadres lacked means. Our small number of cadres had to live secretly in remote zones. We dared not mix with the population, nor even make ourselves known outside of the cell, or the committee. We were like fish out of water.
>
> Toward the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960, we received orders to enlarge the field of our activities, to attack military posts, to arouse the conscience of the people, to make ourselves known publicly. Two comrades and I, with the help of three volunteers from the militia to help us as spies, successfully attacked the village militia and seized one sten gun and five rifles. In February 1960, profiting from this success, we penetrated the village and made contact with P . . ., who joined us with a typewriter. We, the fish, were now in the water. (9)

Thus, while the crackdown by the Diem regime had damaged the organization of the remaining Vietminh members in the years 1955-1959, the active cadres who survived the persecution now were able over time to tap the larger group of those inactive Vietminh who, in their growing anger at the regime, were susceptible to recruitment into what the cadres called "the Second Resistance." Beginning in 1959, the still small group of active cadres was reinforced by the regroupees being infiltrated from the North. Together, these two former Vietminh elements formed the "steel frame" of a new insurgent organization, which in 1960 began to call itself the National Liberation Front and to expand at a remarkable rate by recruiting the younger generation of southern peasants.

During those early years of the insurgency, from 1955 to 1960, the active Vietminh cadres assigned great importance to person-to-person appeals. Some recruiting cadres developed great skill in what defectors later called "sweet talk," the persuasive arguments which recognized the grievances of the candidate. Two powerful appeals, often intertwined, were to nationalism and social justice. The main theme was that "American imperialism" had replaced colonialism in Vietnam. As one cadre put it, "The Americans took advantage of the collapse of the French to put the country under a new, more modern, tyranny, an economic and political, rather than military, tyranny." (10) The American imperialists were denounced, furthermore, for supporting the "feudalism" of the Diem regime, which was described as a puppet of the United States. The denunciations of the Diem regime were focused upon people's grievances over their mistreatment at the hands of haughty and corrupt local functionaries and exploited examples of gross misbehavior of local

security officials. Appeals that capitalized on injustices in the immediate surroundings appear to have had wide acceptance among new recruits.

A cadre who had rejoined the Vietminh in 1957 revealed how the nationalist appeal was put to him:

> First, a Front cadre came to see me. He said that we were supposed to be living in a peaceful and unified country, by then; that the government of Ngo Dinh Diem under the advice of Americans prevented general elections and trade relations between the North and the South. He said if I wanted my country to be at peace and unified, I should join the Front. (17)

Another, who had been in prison from 1957 to 1960 and had been tortured, was persuaded to rejoin the Vietminh because of his resentment against his tormentors in prison and his bitterness toward the local functionaries who mistreated him upon his return to the village:

> I was set free at last. When I came back to my hamlet, the way the hamlet policeman treated me infuriated me again. Whenever I reported to him, as required, his first act was to curse me. I felt depressed and hated the GVN.
>
> I made up my mind to join the Front. I wanted to find the reason for my existence. I could not bear the oppression of the GVN officials on the villagers and on myself. The propaganda of the Front seemed quite right to me, and I also believed that the Front would win over the GVN. I did not know much about Communism. I followed them because I felt that the society needed a revolution. I was young and willing to fight for an ideal, and the Front, in my eyes, represented the ideal indeed. (23)

One interviewee, who still spoke in the style of a loyal communist cadre, told this story:

> In October 1956, I had a visit from a cadre who came from the mountains to see me. He told me that he had learned that I had been an active cadre in the Resistance and asked me to join him. I thought, on the one hand, that the region where I lived was not secure and that, if I joined him, I would risk arrest. On the other hand, my love for the people and the revolution had remained strong. The actions of the government authorities violated both the Geneva Agreements and human conscience. I accepted his proposition after several days of reflection. (10)

Our composite story of the fate and activities of the former Vietminh was enriched by the testimony of this same cadre, who revealed how a loyal Communist perceived the growth of his organization:

> From the period after Geneva until 1958 or 1959, there was a denunciation campaign against the Communists and a large majority of the former Resistants were tracked down. Only a minority were able to survive the measures that the government had resorted to. The people's groups were completely disorganized. Add to this the government's military campaigns against the "secret zones."
>
> But you should know that during this period the people believed that the Revolution still lived. In 1959 and 1960, the Liberation movement reasserted itself and developed for several reasons:
>
> ---Former cadres renewed their relations and showed the masses that the men of the Revolution were not all dead. They exposed the misdeeds of the government authorities. Our program to kill the collaborators and destroy the traitors appealed to the psychology of the people and we created our bases among the population.

---Victories were won by the popular troops over the government forces.
---From 1961 on [regroupees actually began returning in 1959--JJZ], we had the return of a great number of cadres regrouped to the North in 1954. (10)

Recruitment for the insurgency between 1954 and 1960 was not, of course, limited to former Vietminh cadres, although these were the most likely candidates, but extended also to other dissatisfied villagers. Discontent was undoubtedly widespread, and the active Vietminh cadres were successful in mobilizing some of it for the growing insurgent apparatus. This is how one respondent summed up this revolutionary activity:

> From 1957 to 1960 the cadres who had remained in the South had almost all been arrested. Only one or two cadres were left in every three to five villages. What was amazing was how these one or two cadres started the movement so well.
>
> The explanation is not that these cadres were exceptionally gifted but that the people they talked to were ready for rebellion. The people were like a mound of straw, ready to be ignited. (7)

He believed that the history of the Front would have been different if the government had adopted other policies:

> If at that time the government in the South had been a good one, if it had not been dictatorial, if the agrarian reforms had worked, if it had established control at the village level, then launching the movement would have been difficult. (7)

The above evaluations fail to reveal the coercive side of Vietminh recruitment methods. The communist

organization in Vietnam has always combined persuasion with coercion, and former Vietminh members who were reluctant to rejoin found that they now faced intimidation from the Vietminh as well as from the government. Particularly after 1959, when the insurgents' strength permitted them to proceed more and more boldly, propaganda agents and recruiting cadres paid visits to GVN-controlled villages to bring back new adherents. The story of the poor peasant who, like so many of the rural population, seemed inclined to accommodate himself to whatever power controlled his area, is indicative of the fate of many former Vietminh members. He lived in a GVN-controlled village near the U Minh forest, a long-time communist base area, and, despite his complaints about the arrogance of the military and the corruption of the government officials in his area, he accepted a minor hamlet post in 1959. This led him into difficulty with the Vietminh:

> At the end of 1959, the Front came to arrest me because I was a sub-hamlet chief. They bound my eyes, took me to the field, said I was a criminal, that I worked for the Nationalists, that I forced the villagers to carry out orders, that I made trouble for them. They did not beat me. They said: "Now we have warned you. We fight for peace. We are returning to abolish the dictatorial Diemist power. You, brother, work for this power. We forbid you. If you continue, you will commit a crime." There were three or four men. One had a rifle -- he stood to the side. Another did the talking. He spoke to me for two hours. I made promises and they released me. (5)

Not long after this encounter, the Front killed the chief of the neighboring hamlet, and our informant soon joined the movement.

In contested areas, VC agents were even more ruthless in the pressure they applied to former Vietminh cadres who had not yet joined their ranks. A case in point is the story of a former Party member who lived near the Plain of Reeds, an area long controlled by communist forces. The visit of an old friend from the Resistance who urged him to go back into the movement placed him in a dilemma:

> I was between the hammer and the anvil. Had I refused to follow the advice of my friend, the Party would not have spared me. My property would have been confiscated and I would perhaps be condemned for treason and "eliminated" by the VC. On the government side, I was being sought by the police (because I was a former Party member) and couldn't leave for town without an identity card. My only chance to escape arrest was to accept the risk of fighting against the government. (2)

He pointed out that there were six or seven others who were as reluctant as he to rejoin the communist movement, but that none could resist the pressure. Thus, by shrewdly combining persuasion and coercion, the Vietminh were able to rebuild an insurgent organization that could move to the offensive in 1960.

V. OBSERVATIONS ON THE "STAY-BEHINDS" AND SOME POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A revolution, to be successful, presupposes, among other important conditions, (1) some measure of social discontent (due to economic grievances, social inequality, or unfulfilled nationalist aspirations), and (2) a revolutionary apparatus that can effectively operate in that milieu and is able to mobilize the people, and especially the discontented, for a movement powerful enough to subvert the government.[4] As the foregoing shows, the Vietminh "stay-behinds" played an important part in fulfilling the second requirement by providing an organization of disciplined, committed personnel who worked zealously to enlist the larger population in the revolutionary cause. Although we have not here been able to deal in detail with all the factors that entered into the creation of a revolutionary climate, there can be little doubt that it existed, and that the Diem government's treatment of former Resistants contributed to it.

WEAKNESS OF DIEM'S POLICY TOWARD VIETMINH CADRES

Another look, therefore, at the effect that the Saigon government's treatment of the Vietminh "stay-behinds" had upon the growth of the insurgent apparatus may point the way to more effective counterinsurgent practices in the future.

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[4] Such other assets for promoting successful revolutions as the availability of weapons and aid from an outside source have not been dealt with in this paper.

(1) The Diem government had reason to see a threat to its power from the active Vietminh cadres who remained in the South. However, its program for identifying and controlling them was woefully deficient. It did not effectively discriminate between active and inactive Vietminh, who were frequently lumped together by incompetent or corrupt local officials ready to persecute both categories with equal ruthlessness. Outside the cities, the government provided among former Vietminh cadres -- the active as well as the inactive -- with no feasible alternatives to opposition. (That decent treatment to former Resistants in the provinces would have served the government's cause is borne out by the fact that in Saigon many Vietminh veterans gave their loyalty to the new government and worked for it willingly and peacefully.) Moreover, though many of the active Vietminh agents were apprehended and either imprisoned or executed, the GVN's administrative system, especially at the level of the local functionaries and police agents, was not efficient enough to capture all of them. And whatever damage this campaign was able to inflict upon the insurgent apparatus was at least partly compensated for by the infiltration of regroupees from the North and, even more so, by the climate of moral indignation in which the surviving active Vietminh agents were able to win new recruits.

(2) The mistreatment of Vietminh veterans brings sharply into focus the great damage that a new government may suffer through the inadequacy of its local officials. The attitude of the Vietnamese peasant toward the central government -- as is characteristic of rural populations in emerging nations -- is shaped less by what the men in

the capital decree than by the behavior of local officials. The incompetence, arrogance, and venality of selfish local functionaries was so widespread in rural Vietnam that the Diem administration was greatly compromised. There were, of course, many local officials who were honest and dedicated public servants, but the undesirable elements were numerous enough to become the source of significant protest. The Saigon government, which was badly misinformed about conditions in the countryside, was at fault in not adequately checking the abusive behavior of these men.

(3) The conduct of the GVN security forces, especially of the Self Defense Corps and the Civil Guard, was another severe liability to the central government, as the testimony of the Vietminh veterans reveals. The brutality, petty thievery, and disorderliness of which the forces were frequently guilty was a source of great annoyance to local communities, and the Vietminh cadres who promised to eliminate the security forces and local officials responsible for these indignities found many sympathetic listeners.

(4) The new government in Saigon had come to power with certain inherent historic disadvantages. The Vietminh, having gained widespread popular respect as the nationalist force responsible for expelling French rule, was charging the Saigon regime with being simply a continuation of colonial rule, and cited the fact that many of the new government's military and civilian personnel had served the earlier colonial government. It was important for the Diem government, therefore, to disabuse the southern population

of those concepts and to build up an image of a truly nationalist regime that legitimately represented all the Vietnamese people. However, the treatment that was meted out to so many Vietminh veterans detracted from such an image: Those associated with the Vietminh had reason to resent the new government, while others, who respected the Vietminh as a nationalist movement, came to question the motives of the regime.

THE SOUTHERN VIETMINH CADRES: AN EFFECTIVE REVOLUTIONARY APPARATUS

The active Vietminh who had remained in South Vietnam after 1954 were a group who conformed well to Lenin's prescription for the makers of revolutions: They were a small group of dedicated men who, at the risk of their lives, were committing all their time and energies to making the revolution succeed. When the Vietminh leaders decided to conquer South Vietnam by subversion, they did not have to repeat that phase in their earlier struggle against France when they recruited and trained the personnel that became the core of their organization. The Vietminh cadres in South Vietnam provided a ready-made apparatus with long experience.

(1) Given their former political and administrative functions with the Vietminh, these "stay-behinds" had qualities that were exceptionally appropriate to the task of rebuilding a revolutionary organization. The active cadres included experts in propaganda and recruiting who had learned to operate as underground agents in a hostile environment. In the South Vietnam of the late 1950's, they were not outside agents; living in their home

provinces, they were familiar with the local situation and were regarded by the populace as native sons. Although the repressions of the Diem regime had depleted their numbers, the surviving active cadres, trained to accept Party discipline and heavily indoctrinated during their service with the Vietminh, were reinforced by the Party in their hostility to the Saigon regime, and they added to their numbers by recruiting the inactive as well as others with like grievances.

(2) Distributed as they were over all the provinces of South Vietnam, the Vietminh cadres provided a network of agents for a leadership seeking to collect intelligence and rebuild a political organization. The active cadres made a great contribution to future political and military operations by maintaining and expanding the "secret zones" in which new recruits were offered security and given training and political indoctrination. These base areas proved extremely important in 1960, when the Viet Cong mounted its offensive.

(3) The propaganda themes of nationalism and social protest, so assiduously spread by the Vietminh propagandists and recruiters, were shrewdly adapted to local grievances. The Communists, in alleging that the Americans had replaced the French as the imperialist rulers, took advantage of the susceptibility of the Vietnamese to anticolonialist appeals. Poor peasants who had built up a great resentment against local officials and against the government in Saigon whom these officials represented did not find it psychologically difficult to accept the myth of the foreign invader. The tendency to blame all shortcomings of the national regime on neocolonialism is a common

phenomenon in nations that have recently emerged from colonial rule, and in Vietnam it was especially strong. Even at a time when Americans were not visible in the countryside, the villagers could see that the Vietnamese army was equipped with American weapons, and they were told that it was generally being supported by U.S. funds. Few of them had either the education or the opportunity for personal experience with which to test the statements of propagandists and recruiters regarding the empire-building role of the Americans in Vietnam. This, and the "venality" of the Saigon government, became the main themes that recruiters used to engage once more the inactive Vietminh who had fled to the mountains and the base areas, to approach those who were now living in relative immunity in Saigon, and to work on former Vietminh prisoners who were generally resentful about the treatment they had suffered under the southern regime.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Though our data do not show how high the Vietminh who stayed behind in the South rank in today's National Liberation Front or how many are still active in the movement, these veterans undoubtedly constitute an element of leadership within South Vietnam. It may be worthwhile, therefore, to speculate on how their experience from 1954 to 1960 could influence their thinking about a possible settlement of the present war.

After the signing of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, the Vietminh veterans returned to their homes with the dual promise of an amnesty and elections. But there were no elections, and the amnesty was a farce in the eyes of those

who are now in the Viet Cong. As a result, those former Vietminh who remain strongly committed to the NLF are likely to be suspicious of any settlement which would bring to power any but a communist government. They have reason both because of their experience after 1954 and the ferocity of the present war to regard promises of amnesty with cynicism, and to fear for their lives if their side is not victorious. The argument that the leadership in communist North Vietnam treated its opponents with even greater brutality than did the government in the South is likely, if anything, to reinforce the fears about their fate in a future settlement. This does not rule out the possibility, of course, that other considerations could induce them to accept a compromise or even simply to stop fighting; but it does point up their probable skepticism toward any proposals for settlement.

A related question is how the experience of the Vietminh veterans in South Vietnam is likely to affect the thinking in Hanoi, the center of command of the southern insurgency. Knowledge of the fate of southern cadres between 1954 and 1960, combined perhaps with recollections of their own behavior toward segments of the population in North Vietnam that they regarded as hostile, is likely to make the leaders in Hanoi skeptical about any guarantees of amnesty for their supporters in the South that would be written into a settlement. They would probably expect a bloodbath for their supporters in the South if the Saigon government were to gain complete control.

This, in turn, leads us to the next step -- a more tentative one -- in our speculations on how the perception of past events may affect the chances for a future settlement.

Conceivably, the leaders of North Vietnam believe that any movements toward a settlement which would leave the GVN in control of the South would be unacceptable to important segments of their southern cadres. These cadres, out of fear that they would be sacrificing their own lives in a settlement, might disobey Hanoi's instructions. Thus, entering into negotiations under such circumstances might mean to Hanoi that it would be risking a highly valued political investment: its control over the Viet Cong movement in the South. On the other hand, the northern leaders might feel they would obtain compliance with any settlement they negotiated from their NVA regiments and from the well-disciplined main force units of the Viet Cong. In this case, any remaining resistance from other southern Viet Cong probably could be handled by American and South Vietnamese fighting forces. Still, the idea of abandoning many of its southern supporters in such a manner could hardly appeal to the DRV.

Again, the above observations are not meant to convey the impression that communist leaders cannot be persuaded to negotiate or to abandon their military struggle for control of the South. They are intended to underline the fact that the impact of the earlier settlement on the communists may have an important bearing on a future peace.

Appendix I

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON 23 SOUTHERN VM CADRES

No.	Status	Year of Birth	Province of Birth	Social Class	Year of Entry into VM	Entry Into Front	Rank/or Function	Province of Operation	Party Member	Date of Capture of Defection
1.	POW	1923	Saigon	Middle	1945	1955	Agent in Province Town Underground Committee	Binh Thuan	Yes	May 1964
2.	Def.	1919	Long An	Rich farmer	1945	1961	Financial Committee of District	Long An	Yes	May 1963
3.	POW	1920	Kien Phong	Small landowner	1945	1955	Photographer	Kien Phong	Yes	July 1964
4.	POW	1934	Kien Giang	Poor farmer	1952	1955	Squad Leader	Kien Giang	?	Aug. 1964
5.	POW	1924	Bac Lieu	Poor farmer	1948	1959	Adjutant and Political Officer	Bac Lieu	No	Oct. 1964
6.	POW	1905	Nam Dinh (NVN)	Poor farmer	1948	1963	Purchaser	Binh Long	Yes	Sept. 1964
7.	POW	1910	Dinh Tuong	Bourgeois	1945	1961	Financial Secretary, Propaganda Cadre	Dinh Tuong	No	May 1964
8.	POW	1917	Gia Dinh	Poor trader	1947	1961	Propaganda Cadre	Gia Dinh	Yes	Sept. 1964
9.	POW	1930	Kien Phong	Landowner	1945	1956	Secretary of District Committee	Kien Phong	Yes	June 1964
10.	POW	1923	Bac Ninh (NVN)	Rich	1946	1956	Intelligence Cadre	Saigon	Yes	June 1964
11.	POW	1929	Go Cong	Rich landowner	1945	1957	Intelligence Cadre	Go Cong	?	Sept. 1963
12.	POW	1908	Ha Nam (NVN)	?	1936	1955	Training and Propaganda at District	Rach Gia	Yes	Oct. 1964
13.	POW	1928	Quang Nam	Middle farmer	1954	1960	Co. Commander, Local Force	Quang Nam	No	Dec. 1964
14.	Def.	1932	Binh Dinh	?	1949	1956	Hq. District Propaganda Committee	Binh Dinh	Yes	1964
15.	POW	1918	Binh Dinh	Poor farmer	1945	1964	Platoon Leader	Binh Dinh	Yes	March 1965
16.	POW	1930	Phu Yen	Poor farmer	1945	1961	Village Financial Cadre	Phu Yen	Yes	Jan. 1965
17.	POW	1929	Gia Dinh	Middle farmer	1948	1957	Chief, Youth Propaganda Section	Gia Dinh	Yes	Nov. 1964
18.	POW	1912	Phu Yen	Middle farmer	1947	1963	Treasurer, Economy Section	Phu Yen	Yes	Nov. 1964
19.	Def.	1931	Kien Giang	Middle farmer	1949	1961	Chief of Staff	Gia Dinh	Yes	Apr. 1965
20.	POW	1922	Kien Hoa	Middle farmer	1949	1960	Propaganda Cadre	Kien Hoa	Yes	Apr. 1965
21.	Def.	1925	Vinh Binh	?	1946	1963	District	Vinh Binh	Yes	Apr. 1965
22.	Def.	1935	Dinh Tuong	Poor farmer	1952	1964	Deputy Secretary, Village	Dinh Tuong	Yes	July 1965
23.	Def.	1931	Dinh Tuong	Middle farmer	1954	1960	Financial Cadre	Dinh Tuong	Yes	1965

Appendix 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE OF 23 SOUTHERN VM CADRES

1. Status

Defectors	6
POWS	17
Total	23

2. Age at time of capture or defection

30	2
31-35	7
36-40	3
41-45	5
46-50	2
51-55	2
56-60	2

3. Province of birth

Saigon	1	Dinh Tuong	3
Long An	1	Gia Dinh	2
Kien Phong	2	Go Cong	1
Kien Giang	2	Binh Dinh	2
Quang Nam	1	Kien Hoa	1
Phu Yen	2	Nam Dinh (North VN)	1
Vinh Binh	1	Bac Ninh (North VN)	1
Bac Lieu	1	Ha Nam (North VN)	1

4. Area of operation

Binh Thuan	1	Saigon	1
Long An	1	Go Cong	1
Kien Phong	2	Rach Gia	1
Kien Giang	1	Quang Nam	1
Bac Lieu	1	Binh Dinh	2
Binh Long	1	Phu Yen	2
Dinh Tuong	3	Kien Hoa	1
Gia Dinh	3	Vinh Binh	1

5. Social class of parents

	POWs	Defectors
Poor farmer	5	1
Rich farmer	1	1
Middle	5	2
Bourgeois	1	
Rich landowner	1	
Landowner	1	
Small landowner	1	
Poor trader	1	
Not given	1	2
Totals	17	6

6.

Date of entry into VM		Date of entry into Front	
1936:	1	1955:	4
1945:	8	1956:	3
1946:	2	1957:	2
1947:	2	1959:	1
1948:	3	1960:	3
1949:	3	1961:	5
1952:	2	1963:	3
1954:	2	1964:	2

7. Date of capture or defection

	POWs	Defectors
1963 Jan-June		1
July-Dec	1	
1964 Jan-June	4	1
July-Dec	9	
1965 Jan-June	3	2
July-Dec		2