

MEMORANDUM

INFORMATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, December 16, 1967 -- 3:15 p.m.

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

SUBJECT: Are the Next Four Months Decisive?

I asked Saigon to collect and analyze all the captured documents they have on the present winter-spring offensive and negotiations, including the coalition government.

They did a good, long paper.

I then asked CIA to reproduce it and comment on it. The comment and the Saigon paper are attached.

Taken together, they reveal an interesting difference of emphasis and judgment between Saigon and CIA Washington.

The Saigon people read these documents as saying (see p. II, 5-8, paper clipped):

-- the Communists are simultaneously making a maximum military effort and preparing their people for an early negotiation;

-- if they achieve some tactical success, they are likely to negotiate in the late winter or spring;

-- if they do not, they are likely to scale down the war;

-- "the war is probably nearing a turning point and the outcome of the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign will in all likelihood determine the future direction of the war."

Our CIA people (as you can see in the marked passages of the covering note) are inclined to believe the present military campaign, combined with emphasis on a negotiated coalition government, is less "decisive" than Saigon. They see the war going on for several years.

At the end, however, they accept an important point: having gotten the Viet Cong to accept these months as "decisive" and moving towards peace and victory "this situation could have serious effects on Viet Cong morale and lead to a substantial increase in defections" if the campaign fails.

In any case, I thought you'd like to know the terms in which experts are debating the present evidence.

~~SECRET~~**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

15 December 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT : Papers on Viet Cong Strategy

1. Per your request, we are sending you the attached clean copies of three papers recently prepared by the Saigon Station:

- (1) "Overview of Viet Cong Strategy"
- (2) "The Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Winter-Spring Campaign"
- (3) "The Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Position on Coalition Government"

We understand that these papers were written at Ambassador Locke's request and constitute, in effect, his response to a personal request you levied on him.

2. The attached papers constitute a field study and should not be read as the considered opinion of this Agency. Although these papers provide a useful and provocative preliminary analysis of a number of recently captured documents and intelligence reports, they omit reference to other important materials bearing on the subject. Moreover, the basic thrust of the papers is predicated on certain assumptions whose validity seems questionable from our perspective here in Washington. For these reasons, we are inclined to draw interpretations which differ somewhat on major points with those of our colleagues in Saigon.

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3. In sum, while we agree that there has been a recent upsurge in Communist military activity -- a new tactical departure -- we do not find it inexplicable or mysterious. The current activity pattern follows the strategic line laid down in the 1967 Truong Son and Giap articles and is very similar to the Communist activity pattern of 1963 and, again, of early 1965. We agree that there is a renewed emphasis on coalition government. We also consider reasonable the hypothesis that the Communists plan a period of intense military activity, designed to increase US frustration, and then to follow this with a play for negotiations and a "coalition" settlement, i.e., dangling bait which the Communists feel the US will find tempting in an election year. Our main point, however, is that one can subscribe to this explanation of near-term Communist strategy without adopting or accepting the additional hypothesis that this strategy (quite a sensible one) is necessarily a last-ditch desperation gamble or proves that the Communists are on the verge of collapse.

4. Among the principal reasons for our drawing conclusions different from those of our Saigon colleagues is the fact that our reading of captured documents on Viet Cong strategy and attitudes on negotiations and a coalition government is conditioned by other evidence on Hanoi's outlook. This evidence is contained in diplomatic reports -- many of them sensitive and thus perhaps not available to analysts in Saigon -- and in other materials which reflect Hanoi's official policies and viewpoints. These materials provide the essential context within which the fragmentary information contained in captured documents must be interpreted. Most captured documents contain doctrinal jargon whose wording cannot always be taken literally, particularly when couched in what may be imperfect translations. Moreover, many are no more than handwritten notes taken by students at low-level political indoctrination courses, which often simply amplify basic policy lines already available to us in more comprehensive form from other sources. Where several such documents agree on certain points, we can be reasonably sure that they validly reflect the

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basic Viet Cong line. When they contradict each other on key matters, however, or when some contain nuances not reflected in others, we cannot be sure whether these represent basic policies, or merely local elaborations by political cadre, or embellishments or misinterpretations on the part of the note-taker. In any event, any such deviations or embellishments not supported by other evidence must be analyzed with caution. Unfortunately, some of the more dramatic points cited in the attached papers represent such unsupported elaborations on what we otherwise know to be basic enemy policy.

5. Substantively, we question the thesis that the Communists may be about to make "crucial" new decisions on the course of the war. We believe their basic course has been set since early 1966, when Hanoi realized that an early military victory was no longer feasible, and therefore shifted to a policy of eroding our will to pursue a protracted war. We believe the factors cited in the first paper as evidence that Communist strategy may be in a state of flux -- i.e., the new Liberation Front program, the documentary references to negotiations and a coalition government, and the current winter-spring campaign -- are instead manifestations of basic decisions already made. We believe Hanoi's fundamental aim in the current winter-spring campaign is not to "alter the balance of forces" in an absolute sense, but rather to demonstrate "decisively" that they can frustrate what they construe to be our basic goals -- destruction of Communist main forces and pacification of rural areas. The Communists are confident that by checking our momentum, they will create conditions favorable for political-psychological maneuvers, both within Vietnam and within the United States, which might end the war on their terms.

6. It is in this context that they are giving new emphasis to preparing the groundwork for the contingency of negotiations through which they would seek to gain their interim objectives -- withdrawal of U.S. troops and creation of a Front-dominated coalition government. As the field

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papers correctly point out, the Communists view the South Vietnamese political situation as being still quite fragile and offering new possibilities for political agitation and subversion. Moreover, although they seem to be uncertain about the impact of the war on the coming U.S. elections, they apparently hope to be ready to exploit any favorable opportunities which might arise from them. Their apparent readiness to negotiate does not imply any change in their basic aims; there is ample evidence that they intend to negotiate only when and if we are ready to compromise on their terms.

7. The field papers are predicated on the assumptions that the present rate of attrition is not acceptable to the Communists, and that they are incapable of checking or reversing the basic trends in the war. We question the validity of these assumptions. In our 8 December review of the situation in Vietnam, we concluded that despite manpower difficulties, the Communists remain capable of replacing their losses and of maintaining the basic military force structure in the south at roughly its present strength. Although Communist losses this year have reached record levels, we believe Hanoi is prepared to pay this price in an effort to reverse the unfavorable trends of the past two years. We see little likelihood that they will change their minds over the next year or so.


8. We believe the situation has developed unevenly this year, with both sides experiencing successes and failures. Our military offensives have lost some momentum over the past six months, and the Communists have regained the initiative in some key areas. While our forces almost certainly will continue to inflict disproportionately heavy losses on the enemy and deny him tactical victories in almost every case, we do not perceive any decisive weakening of the Communist military potential in the coming year. We do expect some slow progress in pacification, and hence some further decline in the enemy's position, but no early turning point seems likely.

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9. In the final analysis, we believe the Communists view their military effort in a political-psychological context that is not always compatible with Western precepts. "Victory" for them can be simply avoidance of defeat, if by doing so they frustrate -- and thereby "defeat" -- the aims of their opponent. They believe that if they can demonstrate that the war is in an indecisive stage -- and this is their aim -- this will open new possibilities for political instability in South Vietnam and the United States. While their confidence may be misplaced, in their eyes it is based on historical precedents, and it should not be underrated.

10. If the Viet Cong fail completely in their objectives, and the current campaign ends without their being able to claim that they have effectively checked our momentum and hence have imposed a conditional stalemate, they will be extremely vulnerable to psychological attack. It is evident that some local Viet Cong cadre may have embellished the basic party line by promising an early "decisive" and victorious end to the war. If this fails to materialize, a major psychological campaign exploiting this situation could have serious effects on Viet Cong morale and lead to a substantial increase in defections. In this sense, the Communists are taking a potentially serious risk in gambling for major near-term gains.

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George A. Carver, Sr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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8 December 1967

I. OVERVIEW OF VIET CONG STRATEGY

1. Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese (NVN) strategy appears to be approaching a crucial period where basic decisions concerning the future conduct of the war must be made. This is evidenced by the promulgation of the new program of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) on 20 August 1967, by increasing references in captured enemy documents to the necessity of establishing a "coalition government" and the possibility of negotiations, and by VC/NVN plans for launching an all-out military and political offensive during the 1967-68 "winter-spring campaign" designed to gain decisive victory.

2. The VC/NVN position in South Vietnam has steadily deteriorated over the past two years, and so far the VC have shown no signs of being able to reverse this trend. They have, however, successfully maintained their basic organizational integrity, militarily, politically and economically, in the face of very heavy allied pressure. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that at present rates of attrition the VC/NVN will be able to maintain the present scale of the conflict for very much longer without a radical change in the balance of forces.

3. Since the promulgation of the 12th resolution of the NVN Lao Dong party in December 1965, the war in South Vietnam has been characterized by the VC/NVN leadership as a "local" war which is to be fought by a combination of military, political and economic means designed to result in "victory in the shortest possible time" if feasible, or to be conducted as a "protracted" war lasting 10-15 or 20 years if necessary. The ultimate objective remains the forcible takeover of South Vietnam by VC/NVN forces, leading finally to communization of the South and reunification with the North.

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4. The possibility of an interim solution to the war, involving the establishment of a so-called "coalition government" in South Vietnam between the VC/NVN forces and some non-Communist elements was recognized in the original program proclaimed by the NFLSV in 1960 and was stated though not stressed in the 12th resolution. This particular solution is viewed as a tactic designed to ease the way towards final Communist takeover and is not regarded as a final solution. In VC terms it is defined as a "decisive victory" and a step short of "complete victory."

5. The new program of the NFLSV promulgated on 20 August 1967 calls for all major elements of Vietnamese society to join together in driving out the Americans and overthrowing the current Government of Vietnam (GVN). While the text of the front program does not specifically call for the establishment of a coalition government as such, it is very strongly implied. And the communiqué accompanying the text of the new Front program does call for a coalition government.

6. In order to bring about this "coalition," the possibility of negotiating or "talking" with the Allies was recognized by the VC/NVN as a possible tactic to be undertaken provided the VC/NVN could do so from a position of sufficient strength. This position of strength however could only be achieved by victories on the battlefield.

7. Since the beginning of the year, and especially within the last two months, the VC/NVN have been talking more and more frequently in their internal documents about the possibility of the "coalition government," even though they do not possess the position of strength they require to impose such a government.

8. The 1967-68 winter-spring campaign as described in enemy documents is intended to bring about a fundamental change in the balance

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of forces in South Vietnam. The winter-spring campaign is apparently an attempt to win decisive victory "in the shortest possible time" and is intended to result in the withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam and the establishment of a so-called "coalition government" which will, in effect, be under VC/NVN control.

9. The goals established by the VC/NVA for the winter-spring campaign are clearly far beyond their capability to accomplish, and it is doubtful if the VC/NVN leadership seriously expects to be able to achieve all that they have promised their troops. From this standpoint, the real objectives of the campaign are still obscure, and several explanations for VC actions are possible. One is that the VC are trying to establish as strong a negotiating position as possible before talks begin.

10. It seems unlikely, however, that the VC/NVN would agree to serious negotiations without having achieved the position of strength they have established as their goal for the winter-spring campaign. In this event it is more likely that this campaign represents a supreme effort by the VC/NVN high command to make use of what assets remain to them, both military and political, to reverse current trends before being forced to reduce the level of intensity of the conflict.

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8 December 1967

II. The Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Winter-Spring Campaign

1. Numerous recently captured documents have brought into focus Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese (NVN) plans and ambitions for their 1967-68 winter-spring campaign. This campaign is to consist of three phases: a first phase from October to December, 1967; a second phase from January to March 1968; and a third phase from April to June 1968. [redacted] The campaign entails military and political ambitions which surpass anything previously attempted in such a relatively short period of time by the VC/NVN in South Vietnam. Moreover, thus far VC/NVN activity indicates that they are indeed attempting to implement these plans at their intended levels of intensity. For example, there has been a definite increase in coordinated attacks on GVN and Allied installations. The most notable of these thus far have been at Loc Ninh and Dak To. In these attacks, the VC mounted sustained assaults despite very heavy casualties, and apparently with less preparation than is normal for VC operations of such size, in an only partially successful attempt to "coordinate" the two attacks. In brief, the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign is described by the VC/NVN as the "decisive" phase of the war, crucial to its ultimate outcome.

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2. In their assessments of the current situation, the VC state that they are in a very favorable position. Strategically, the American military forces are described as having been forced into a defensive posture as a result of the widespread VC/NVN attacks, especially in the DMZ. Moreover, according to the VC/NVN, the combat strength of the U.S. forces has been reduced and their attacking power limited, thereby leaving the over-all U.S. position weakened. [redacted] In addition, the U.S. is viewed as being increasingly isolated politically abroad and torn by mounting dissension from within. The VC/NVN state that the present U.S. administration feels itself under pressure

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to end the war before the 1968 elections in order to guarantee its political survival. [redacted]

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3. Within South Vietnam, the VC/NVN also view their position optimistically. They describe the Government of Vietnam (GVN) as corrupt, increasingly unpopular, and inefficient. They also apparently believe that the GVN is becoming weakened by internal disagreements within the Vietnamese society, such as those represented by the militant Buddhists and the disgruntled candidates in the recent national elections. Furthermore, the GVN military forces are now described by the VC/NVN as playing only a minor role in the war, a situation that the VC/NVN believe will lead to increased anti-U.S. sentiment in the GVN armed forces and in the Vietnamese body politic as a whole. In any event, the VC/NVN consider these forces as incapable of fighting effectively, as having failed to protect the pacification program, and, most important, as incapable of being improved.

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4. The VC, on the other hand, consider themselves in a strategically offensive posture with the initiative firmly in their hands. While admitting "certain difficulties" such as recruitment and manpower problems, food shortages, and war-weariness, which have given rise to hopes or "illusions" of peace among "some" troops, [redacted] the VC/NVN describe the over-all situation as offering a significant opportunity for gaining great military and political victories in the forthcoming winter-spring campaign. [redacted]

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5. Viet Cong pronouncements concerning the significance of upcoming periods of activity (winter-spring, summer-autumn, etc.,) traditionally stress the importance of impending campaigns. Descriptions of the current 1967-68 winter-spring campaign, however, are placing unusually heavy emphasis on its historic significance and decisive nature. A letter, dated 31 August 1967 from the Central Office for South Vietnam to party chapters and members throughout South Vietnam exhorts its addressees to "make all-out efforts to achieve unusual and historical

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successes during the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign."

[redacted] A letter dated 18 September 1967 from one military cadre to another in Long Khanh Province states that "the period of late 1967-early 1968 is being regarded as a "historical phase."

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[redacted] A directive outlining the missions and objectives of the winter-spring campaign issued by the current affairs section of VC Military Region 3, dated 21 October 1967 and classified Top Secret, describes VC/NVN missions in the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign as "militarily and politically decisive to the achievement of our (VC/NVN) objectives." [redacted] Numerous other references to the decisive nature of this winter-spring campaign have been noted in enemy documents, circulars, notebooks and letters.

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6. These same documents call for all-out, coordinated attacks throughout South Vietnam utilizing both military and political means to achieve "ultimate victory" in the near future. [redacted] Although the exact date by which this "ultimate victory" is to be achieved is not specified, it is strongly implied that it will be some time in 1968.

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7. VC/NVN strategy for this campaign is described as an "all-out attack." This is a departure from the traditional VC/NVN three-phase strategy "of resistance, general offensive, and general uprising."

[redacted] The immediate objective is to step up military and political offensives "on all battlefronts" and to create favorable conditions for a "turning point" which will result in "a general counter-offensive and general uprising."

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[redacted] A notebook captured in Kontum states that "we must carry out large-scale and continuous attacks" and "coordinate activities with other areas of operations throughout South Vietnam."

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[redacted] A directive captured in Dinh Tuong Province describes the winter-spring campaign as a "campaign of large-scale and continuous attacks conducted evenly on all battlefields (in South Vietnam)."

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8. Viet Cong/North Vietnamese military and political missions for the winter-spring campaign can be broken down as follows--

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A. Military:

- (1) Conduct large-scale continuous, coordinated attacks by main force units, primarily in mountainous areas close to border sanctuaries.
- (2) Conduct widespread guerrilla attacks on large U.S./GVN units in rural/heavily populated areas.
- (3) Attack key U.S./GVN agencies and rear service bases.
- (4) Destroy lines of communications.
- (5) Conduct terrorist activities in the cities by special action and sapper units.

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B. Political:

- (1) Consolidate and strengthen VC/NVN organizations at province, district, and village levels throughout South Vietnam.
- (2) Coordinate military actions with political activities to promote political turmoil and struggle movements.

9. Through these tactics, the VC/NVN hope to force the redeployment of major Allied military units to the border areas where the VC/NVN enjoy sanctuary and will be able to inflict heavy casualties on them. According to the VC/NVN plan, this will tie the Allied forces down in static defensive positions and, equally important, will relieve the pressure on the VC/NVN activities in the populated areas. Elsewhere, the VC/NVN intend to accomplish the systematic destruction of the GVN's administrative apparatus in the rural areas, and to "liberate" most of these areas. A final goal of the VC/NVN is to launch the long-promised "general uprising." To accomplish this, the VC/NVN have set themselves the task of occupying

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and holding some urban centers in South Vietnam and of isolating many others.

10. The VC/NVN state that if they are successful in the above activities, the conditions will have been created for the overthrow of the present GVN and its replacement by a regime which will consent to form a coalition government with the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) and will follow the program of the NFLSV. Moreover, in these circumstances, the VC/NVN state that they would assume control of the country's armed forces and would ensure that they exercised control at the local administrative level. [REDACTED] 3.5(c)
The second major expectation on the part of the VC/NVN is that if they are successful, this will break the "aggressive will" of the Americans and force them to agree to withdraw from South Vietnam in a short period of time. [REDACTED] 3.5(c)
[REDACTED]

Conclusions

11. VC/NVN strategy toward the war appears to have reached a crucial phase in which changes in the tempo and scale of the war are envisioned. In which direction these changes will go probably depends very much on the success or lack thereof of VC/NVN efforts during the next few months. Based on the position that the VC/NVN have taken in this campaign so far, they appear to have committed themselves to unattainable ends within a very specific and short period of time.

12. Despite the apparent lack of realism in their goals, it would be illusory to assume that the higher VC/NVN echelons have no realistic objectives in this campaign. These real objectives are still obscure, but based on present information, it appears that VC/NVN strategy in the winter-spring campaign involves the following three related strategic options--

- A. A serious effort to inflict unacceptable military and political losses on the Allies regardless of VC casualties during a U.S. election year, in the

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hopes that the U.S. will be forced to yield to resulting domestic and international political pressure and withdraw from South Vietnam. This would probably involve the commitment of at least some elements of the NVA's reserves to South Vietnam.

- B. Negotiations after a major military and political effort to place themselves in as advantageous a position as possible.
- C. Reversion to a relatively low-intensity stage of warfare after having inflicted maximum casualties on the Allies and pre-empting any major allied offensive campaign.

These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the degree of success attained by the VC/NVN in the winter-spring campaign will probably determine which strategy will be emphasized.

13. In this context, the winter-spring campaign appears to be an attempt to utilize to the maximum possible extent current VC/NVN resources in North and South Vietnam in an attempt to place maximum pressure on the Allies to come to an agreement on terms favorable to the Vietnamese Communists. It is doubtful if the higher VC/NVN echelons seriously expect to be able to accomplish all of the tasks they have enumerated for their troops. They may feel, however, that at current rates of attrition the present scale of the conflict cannot be continued for much longer in any event, and that a retrenchment to a lower-intensity form of struggle will probably be inevitable unless there is a major change in the situation. Any such retrenchment would probably involve the dismantling or scaling down of many present VC/NVN organizational components -- military, political and economic -- since they would not be necessary for support of a much reduced level of activity.

14. If the VC/NVN view the situation in this light, it is probably to their advantage to use their

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present apparatus to the fullest extent in hopes of fundamentally reversing current trends before attrition renders such an attempt impossible. This could explain the risk they are taking in promising their followers and cadres victory within a short period of time. This tack has the effect of bolstering morale in the short run for an all-out effort. It does, however, run a high risk of engendering serious disillusionment and disaffection among the VC/NVN rank and file when the promises are not fulfilled. Even if the VC/NVN fail in this endeavor, however -- so the reasoning goes -- they would hopefully have at least inflicted serious damage to Allied military units and the GVN infrastructure, pre-empted any major offensive plans the Allies may have had for the current dry-season, and placed themselves in a better position to continue a long-range struggle with a reduced force. The cost to themselves would be substantial, but one they would ultimately have to pay anyway.

15. If this speculation is correct, then opportunities for negotiations would be most likely if the winter-spring campaign enjoyed unexpected successes and would be designed largely to facilitate acceptance by the Allies of the VC/NVN's major objectives -- withdrawal of U.S. troops and organization of a so-called "coalition government" under the control of the NFLSV. Barring this, the prospects of negotiations to settle the war would depend on the situation prevailing at the particular time, and the VC/NVN assessment of it. We are unable to estimate what this might entail, but both external and internal factors would be involved. We do believe, however, that it is unlikely that the VC/NVN would opt to negotiate unless they could do so with some aura of success, or at least the semblance thereof, to place before the world and their followers. They have already paid too high a price to negotiate a defeat. We believe that they would prefer instead to let things drag on and on at reduced levels, rather than to negotiate under such adverse conditions.

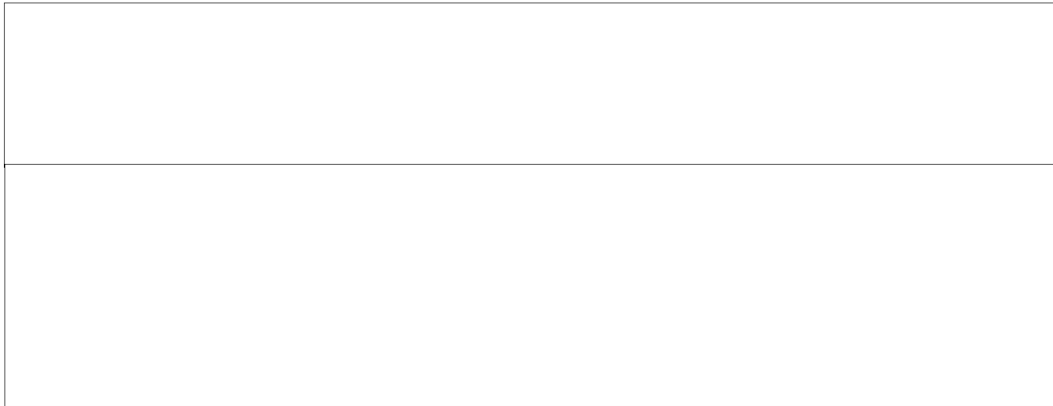
16. In sum, the one conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that the war is probably

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nearing a turning point and that the outcome of the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign will in all likelihood determine the future direction of the war.



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8 December 1967

III. The Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Position On
Coalition Government

1. The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) called for the creation of a coalition government in its original 10-point manifesto at the time of its creation in 1960. At the beginning of 1962, the Communist Lao Dong Party renamed its component in South Vietnam the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) and stated that the immediate task of the PRP was to unite the forces struggling to liberate Vietnam and "to set up a broad democratic coalition government that will achieve national independence and democratic freedom."⁽¹⁾ Although the emphasis on coalition government waxed and waned during 1963, immediately prior to and following the fall of the Diem regime the coalition theme was again stressed. On 11 September 1963, for example, the NFLSV sent a three-point peace plan to the United Nations which called for "an end to American military assistance, withdrawal of American forces, and a coalition government of political and religious organizations."⁽²⁾

2. In retrospect, it appears that Hanoi read the failure of the NFLSV to take over South Vietnam at the time of Diem's overthrow as the failure of political and diplomatic tactics. The "general uprising" and "coalition" government themes went into eclipse, and the military road was taken. Hoc Tap, North Vietnam's authoritative army journal, stated in July 1964: "It is necessary to smash the administrative machinery...This revolution can and should be settled only by the use of revolutionary acts and the force of the masses to defeat enemy force. It absolutely cannot be settled by treaties and accords...It is impossible to count on 'talks' and 'negotiations' as advocated by the modern revisionists."⁽³⁾

1. Douglas Pike: Viet Cong--The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

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3. In 1965, however, U.S. military support for South Vietnam changed the character of the war. The 1966 resolution of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) -- the Lao Dong 12th Resolution -- while emphasizing protracted military struggle, kept the "coalition" option open in its references to the need to intensify "the front for national unity" and by calling for a struggle to "demand the withdrawal of American troops, to overthrow the lackey regime, and to establish a national democratic coalition government." [] As early as October 1966, there were reports of interest in reviving the democratic party in anticipation of a general attack and a general revolt, then scheduled for early 1967, which would result in the formation of a coalition government in liberated provinces. [] Courses on the 12th Resolution for North Vietnamese Army personnel in September 1966 in Quang Ngai Province included the disclosure by a lieutenant colonel, political officer for the school, that "If combat did not result in a complete VC/NVN victory, it would at least give the VC/NVN an upper hand when entering negotiations for a coalition government, to be held in 1967." []

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4. Ba Tra, deputy chief of intellectual proselyting for VC Military Region 4 at the time of his arrest on 26 May 1967, explained that the PRP had abandoned the notion of forming a resistance government and, instead, was concentrating on a coalition government which would depend to a large extent on the cooperation of sympathetic individuals outside of the NFLSV. He claimed that the idea of a coalition government mentioned in the 1966 PRP central committee resolution was disseminated to all levels from province committee up, but was not mentioned to lower levels. Ba Tra said that the policy of neutralist peace was, according to the VC/NVN "in keeping with the balance of forces in the world and in the country between the two parties." He also added that the

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NFLSV was no longer enough but would give way to a coalition front wider than the NFLSV which would back up the coalition government. The important problem for the VC/NVN, he emphasized, was to control the lower levels of government, especially "to tightly grasp the hamlet council which is the base." The line described by Ba Tra, referred to below as the 13th Resolution, was formulated in the fall of 1966 and discussed with the Soviet Union and Communist China in January 1967. It was disseminated to COSVN in February 1967. The major additional clarification of policy was that North Vietnam formalized its neutral stand in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and that volunteers would not be accepted from either the Soviets or the Chinese. According to Ba Tra, the Lao Dong delegation to Moscow gained immediate Soviet approval of the resolution, but the delegation to Peking ran into strong Chinese opposition to North Vietnam's acceptance of negotiation as a contingency policy.

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5. In May and June 1967, a series of political reorientation courses were held throughout South Vietnam on the 13th Resolution. At some of these, guarded references were made to negotiations and coalition government. There were also oblique references to the conditions under which the new policy would be implemented. A notebook captured in July 1967, for example, describing a study course held from 7 to 21 May 1967 at which the COSVN directive was discussed, indicated that the ultimate objective was a general counter-offensive and a general uprising. This would be done even if U.S. troop strength was raised to 600,000 men, but "changes will be made if the number of U.S. troops surpasses this limit." Similarly, there was mention of coalition government, in the sense of local VC administration linked to non-VC administration in Saigon -- a common theme as is reflected in a captured VC/NVN notebook containing notes of a June 1967 training course: "Our

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strategy involves the simultaneous conduct of war and negotiations....Victory will be achieved through a general offensive uprising....Despite the existence of a central government, the governmental infrastructure should be in our hands.... Even in the event of peace negotiations, our efforts must be directed toward creating military and political conditions which favor our subsequent general offensive and uprising. If a peace table materializes, our political attacks will be targeted at the U.S. and the puppet governments. Our efforts will then be devoted to the isolation of the U.S. and acquisition of the sympathy of the countries of the world. It is imperative that we hit the enemy harder before engaging in any negotiations." [redacted] A document captured on 27 August 1967, otherwise undated, stated: "There may be a turning point in 1967 because peace negotiations may take place....In order to come to peace negotiations and negotiate successfully, we should kill more enemy soldiers, coordinate the three-pronged attack, and increase diplomatic activities. That is the only way to obtain peace. On the other hand, we should admit the fact that negotiations by no means satisfied our basic purpose. We only regard it as a victory in diplomacy, a sort of stratagem in support of our three-pronged attacks and activities of our legal agents...." [redacted]

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6. The communiqué published by the extraordinary congress of the NFLSV, which adopted the new program of the NFLSV on 20 August 1967, called for a "National Democratic Coalition Government," and seems in retrospect to have initiated a new phase in the treatment of coalition government. The new program itself did not mention coalition government as such. In terms of ultimate goals, insisting on the absolute monopoly of the NFLSV, it is a "hard line" program, but it did attempt to broaden the appeal of the Front, with specific

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attention to the sensitivities of "capitalists," landlords, intellectuals, and religious communities. Ralliers questioned about its significance, however, found little that was new in the program, and internal, cadre-oriented propaganda concerning the program has been relatively low key in South Vietnam itself. The "reindoctrination" courses stress Party resolutions and directives. Documents captured in November 1967, dated 2 October 1967, still speak of "lack of complete information" on the new political program of the NFLSV. [] According to these documents, however, the new program should be studied since it calls for an "anti-American struggle for national salvation," promotion of peace and neutrality, and confirmation of the NFLSV as the legitimate and sole representative of South Vietnam. These documents also refer to the mission of the NFLSV in establishing a democratic coalition government and state that the "NFLSV political platform" should be studied in preparation for the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign. In this regard, it is interesting to note the recent comments of NVN Premier Pham Van Dong to Le Nouvel Observateur concerning the requirements for negotiations. (12) Pham Van Dong stated that NVN's four points of April 1965 were still in effect, as a basis for a political settlement, and that unconditional cessation of all acts of war against NVN was the condition for initiating talks. To the question, "And what is the position of the Front?" he replied, "It has been expounded in a fundamental and comprehensive manner in its political program made public last August," and he referred to its effect on world opinion and to its mobilization of "all strata" in South Vietnam.

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7. Beginning about September 1967, the concept of a coalition government has been heavily emphasized by the VC/NVN in the context of their impending "winter-spring campaign." The breadth of the appeal and the depth of the indoctrination concerning it seemed to make a qualitative leap. A letter dated 18 September 1967 (apparently between unit commanders -- commo-liaison, command,

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12. FBIS Daily Report, 20 November 1967.

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and political problems are also discussed) outlined the VC/NVN's goals in late 1967 and early 1968 by stating that: "This is a historical phase, and the immediate goal for the entire Party during this phase consists of the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the forming of a People's Democratic Coalition Government." [] Another key document contains notes on a reindoctrination course apparently held in September 1967. [] The notes of the course, which covered a 1967 COSVN resolution, began with the disarming observation that "The guidelines of the 12th Resolution remain unchanged; only the situation is new." The basic appeal enunciated during the course was that the VC should "concentrate forces to defeat the enemy in his limited war and force the establishment of a People's Democratic Coalition Government with members of the Front as the nucleus." Apparently the VC/NVN found grounds for optimism in the course of the war and the troubles confronting the U.S. at home and abroad. In any event, the VC/NVN stated that "From these points, we judge the enemy to be defeated." During the course, the VC/NVN spelled out in considerable detail the nature of a coalition government. The most striking feature was that the VC/NVN held that "The coalition government may include a non-revolutionary element as president. But he must follow the essential line of action as stipulated by the Front." The VC/NVN appear to have gone to some length to explain to the cadres that a coalition government was not a sell-out: "A coalition government opens the way to attaining our revolutionary goals. What is important is that we must have tight control over the government, the laborers, and agricultural workers. It does not matter if there are a few notables at the top. The main lines of the Front's policy must be followed." In short, the VC stated that "Our party will exercise overall control over it, and if our agents are firmly established and if they properly carry out the principal lines of action of the Front, the Party will lead the revolution to the final objective...." It was noted that "At first, the cadres felt anxious when hearing about the coalition government, but after the study, they became aware of its importance and appeared to be full of confidence."

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8. The VC/NVN also appeared to modify their stand toward the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the creation of a coalition government. They stated that: "The immediate objectives as set forth by the Party at this time are 'suitable' because the Americans are being defeated and the puppet forces are deteriorating. But we are not strong enough now to deal them a lethal blow." Moreover, the COSVN resolution discussed at the reindoctrination session exhorted that: "The people's democratic revolution must not draw a line between its short range objectives and its long range ones, because neutrality is close at hand. From democratic independence we move to socialism....We must take risks and form a coalition government without having to wait until the Americans have completely pulled out...." [redacted] 3.5(c)

A troop indoctrination lesson dated 1 September 1967 and captured 25 November 1967 stipulates that the VC "do not appreciate a neutral regime which is usually regarded as the third political solution by capitalists." Rather, the goal is to attain "not any type of coalition government, but a conditioned one, a coalition government with the key role to the NFLSV after the withdrawal of U.S. aggressors. Only such a coalition government will be able to reunify the country and implement socialism in both parts of the country." [redacted] 3.5(c)

9. The unrealistic military goals of this "winter-spring campaign" were tied to the establishment of a coalition government in a report from an official Vietnamese Security Service field office in Kien Hoa Province, based on a "penetration agent" who had obtained the information on 24 October 1967: "During this phase, military victories should be won to change the actual balance of force and to expand our scope of control in the countryside. Three quarters of the actual GVN-controlled areas should be liberated, and 30 percent of ARVN posts and guard houses should be crushed in order to enforce the withdrawal of Allied forces and the establishment of a coalition government." [redacted] 3.5(c)

Another mid-November report from an official Vietnamese Security Service field office in Tay Ninh Province, from a "regular informant" who had studied the documents

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concerned and discussed them with his superiors, states that only the first phase of the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign, for October 1967 to March 1968, has been prepared so far. Plans for the second phase, from April to June 1968, will be drawn up later "in accordance with the situation." [] This report describes the two immediate targets of the struggle as follows: (1) To use all forces to weaken the Americans' will to invade South Vietnam and to force them to pull out of SVN, and (2) To force the U.S. to accept the Front as the only representative of the South Vietnamese people and to form a coalition-democratic-peaceful-neutral government in which the NFLSV is the principal element. American troops must be withdrawn, the report continued, and "The internal problems of South Vietnam must be resolved by the South Vietnamese people." Admitting that the VC cannot completely destroy the American troops, the report stated that causing the U.S. "heavy failures" will force withdrawal and recognition of the Front.

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10. On the subject of negotiations, the VC/NVN characteristically engaged in a question-and-answer approach. Thus, they asked: "If the Americans recognize the NFLSV, do we negotiate with them?" The answer was: "The NFLSV will negotiate, but we will not neglect our objectives -- the withdrawal of the American troops during a fixed short period of time and the formation of a coalition-democratic-peaceful-neutral government of which the NFLSV is the principal element....At the central level, the coalition government will include elements of all religions and may include a number of puppet elements. At zone level there will be limited coalition. At province level, the coalition government authorities may include, according to the local situation, representatives of the people. At the village level the authority must be entirely elected by the people. The Party must hold the people's organizations at this low level in order to back up the high level in the correct implementation of Party policy...." In part, the above report seems to describe in a believable fashion the "layered" nature of the coalition envisaged by the VC/NVN. The report, however, then goes on to repeat the unrealistic military goals of wearing down the U.S., destroying ARVN, and bringing about a general uprising, adding that these "three conditions...outline the policy of the Party... drawn up a year ago." []

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11. Despite public statements that the upcoming U.S. elections make no difference in their war plans, the VC/NVN appear to put some weight on the elections in timing their moves. For example, the report from Tay Ninh states that "Johnson wants to settle the Vietnam problem soon so that he can win the election." (20) This theme is repeated in a recent report from Long Khanh Province which states that the VC/NVN's purpose in the winter-spring campaign is to force the U.S. to approve VC/NVN conditions toward peace negotiations. The report goes on to add that the VC/NVN believe that President Johnson will lose in the next election and that the new President will not dare continue the war in Vietnam.

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12. It appears that the VC/NVN emphasis on coalition government is, at least in part, preparation for a potential negotiating move. Should they reach a point, through intensified military action, where they have made gains -- particularly if they have inflicted substantial casualties on Allied forces and expanded VC/NVN control in the country-side -- the VC/NVN might conclude that they were in an advantageous bargaining position. Then, in effect, the VC would be applying the strategy described in a speech given by North Vietnamese Army General Nguyen Van Vinh, Deputy Chief of Staff of the NVA, to a meeting of the COSVN Congress in April 1966. From Vinh's vantage, the war would proceed through (a) the fighting stage; (b) the stage of fighting while negotiating; and (c) negotiations and the signing of agreements. After this, the question of whether war would resume would depend on the balance of forces. If Communists could dominate the situation without war, they would not resort to military tactics anew; if they could not, they obviously would return to military action. On the basis of captured documents, and on the basis of tactical and strategic considerations as viewed by U.S. military observers, the "choice point" now seems to be on or before March 1968.

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20. *Ibid.*

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13. If talks were held, the minimum initial demands to be made by the VC/NVN would, on the basis of the above, probably include (a) a time-table for the withdrawal of significant portions of U.S. troops; (b) the continued control of the VC/NVN administrative apparatus at local levels where it exists; and (c) recognition of some members of the Front in Saigon. In return might be a cessation of hostilities, a withdrawal of a portion of NVA troops (probably without public admission inasmuch as there has been no public admission of their presence), and a qualified avowal of allegiance to the office, if not the person, of GVN authorities above the province level. In making these concessions, the VC/NVN would probably feel that in the ensuing period, and probably in a relatively brief time, they could bring about civil disorder of sufficient magnitude to bring in a government which they could completely dominate.

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