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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 re-named 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."<sup>(1)</sup> 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."<sup>(2)</sup>

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."<sup>(3)</sup>

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." (4) 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. (5) 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." (6)

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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.

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

4. CDEC 02-1854-67 and 04-3379-67.

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6. NIC 680/67, 3 August 1967.

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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 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. 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.(7)

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." (8) 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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8. CDEC 08-2684-67.

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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." (9) 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...."(10)

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

9. CDEC 08-1744-67.

10. CDEC 09-1373-67.

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.<sup>(11)</sup> 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.<sup>(12)</sup> 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.

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,

11. CDEC 11-2062-67

12. FBIS Daily Report, 20 November 1967.

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." (13) Another key document contains notes on a reindoctrination course apparently held in September 1967. (14) 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."

13. CDEC 10-1558-67.

14. CDEC 10-1995-67.

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...." (15) 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." (16)

9. The unrealistic military goals of this "winter-spring campaign" were tied to the establishment of a coalition government in a report

"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." (17) Another mid-November report

15. CDEC 10-1995-67.

16. CDEC 11-2552-67.

17. Field Information Report, Kien Hoa Province, 10/167467, Dated 28 October 1967.

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." (18) 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.

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." (19)

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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. (21)

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. (22) 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.

20. Ibid.

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22. CDEC 02-1846-67.

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.

14. In addition to the documents cited in the footnotes above, the following documents (all CDEC log (numbers) wereconsulted and contain background information or references similar to those cited on coalition government and negotiations--

01-3226,67, 04-3379-67, 08-1744-67, 08-1805-67, 09-1983-67, 10-1657-67, 11-1209-67, 11-1935-67, and 11-2272-67.

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