

10 April 1990

NORTH VIETNAM'S POLICY AND STRATEGY

TON THAT THIEN

OUTLINE OF LECTURE

- Precisions concerning the terms "North Vietnam" and "North Vietnamese policy and strategy".
- Post-1954 policy and strategy viewed by North Vietnam as continuation of policy and strategy used against the French.
- Influence of Ho Chi Minh and Lenin on North Vietnam's policy and strategy via the Communist International.
- Strategic aim set by Comintern: world revolution.
- Ho's tactics: making people confuse tactical aim - independence - with strategic aim - communism and world revolution-.
- CPV's strategic thinkers: Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap.
- Definitions of strategy by Truong Chinh: ordinary Clausewitzian definition, and revolutionary Leninist definition. Importance of identifying the main enemy.
- Dialectical approach to military theory: war is politics and politics is war.
- Meanings of war of liberation, revolutionary war, and people's war. Hiding communist aims behind national democratic revolution. People's war is total war.
- Strategy of prolonged war. Truong Chinh analysis of French and Vietnamese strong points and weak points. Analogy with bases in baseball.
- Using same tactics but modified strategy against Americans. Defeating U.S. considered historic mission of CPV. Manipulating American public opinion through use of media and diplomacy. Playing on personal ambition of key people. The diplomatic front. Diplomacy as war by other means.
- The new strategy: first, forcing U.S. withdrawal through prolonged war, then knock out South Vietnam by a lightning campaign. Carrying war into the cities for American TV and media coverage. Inflicting heavy casualties on U.S. forces to intensify anti-war sentiment in U.S.
- Change in international situation after 1960, Chinese and Soviet support, and establishment of third base.
- Price of North Vietnam's strategy: paralysis of Vietnam since 1975.

NORTH VIETNAMESE POLICY AND STRATEGY

TON THAT THIEN

North Vietnam is the name commonly used to designate the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), as opposed to the State of Vietnam, or South Vietnam, following the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954. Before 1954 the DRV was known popularly also as the Vietminh, and after 1954 as Communist Vietnam, by opposition to Nationalist Vietnam. To speak of North Vietnamese policy and strategy is therefore to speak of the post-Geneva period, that is the period of Communist Vietnam's confrontation with the United States.

However, since the Vietnamese Communists viewed the struggle they waged against what they called the My-Diem (US-Diem) after 1954 as a continuation of their struggle against imperialism, the policy and the strategy they adopted were a continuation of their pre-1954 policy and strategy, that is the policy and strategy they had adopted against the French from 1945 to 1954. Of course, the Americans were not exactly like the French, and this was duly taken into consideration by the leaders of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). A number of refinements were consequently added to their earlier policy and strategy. I shall talk about policy first.

What kind of policy did the CPV adopt in their confrontation with the French? To answer this question, we must keep foremost in mind the basic fact that the Vietnamese Communists had been thoroughly indoctrinated by Ho Chi Minh, who from the moment he

embraced communism in 1920 until his death in 1969 had consistently maintained that he was an unconditional believer in Lenin and in Leninism.

What does being an unconditional Leninist mean? This is a very crucial question, and the correct answer to it would be a condition for understanding Vietnamese Communist policy. For a Communist to accept Leninism unconditionally is to renounce nationalism and to accept world revolution as the strategic aim of his life. These are the two most important rules laid down by Lenin when he established the Russian professional revolutionary Bolshevik party in 1903, and then the world professional Bolshevik revolutionary party, the Communist International, in 1919. These rules were enforced strictly, as a main feature of a Bolshevik party is acceptance of iron discipline by its members and strict enforcement of such discipline by the party.

The Communist International was organised exactly on the pattern of the Russian Bolshevik party. It was considered an international revolutionary army directed by a general staff, and the national Communist parties were only national sections of this party. Strategic decisions were made by the general staff, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), which was controlled by Russians; the national sections were to carry out these decisions unconditionally in the name of democratic centralism and proletarian internationalism.

Ho Chi Minh became a "Cominternchik" - a reliable Communist cadre of the International - right from the moment he arrived in Moscow in 1923, and all his life he remained faithful to Leninism and demanded the same of his followers. It follows from his

unconditional acceptance of Leninism that the strategic political aim of the Vietnamese Communists was world revolution. National independence was only a tactical aim. This was spelled out clearly in the resolutions of the CPV.

However, the political tactics of Ho and the CPV was to make the French, the whole world, and especially the Vietnamese people, believe that they were primarily nationalists fighting fiercely for the national independence and unity of Vietnam, that is, to generate confusion in people's minds regarding their real objective. As a result people mistook their tactical objective - national independence - for their real but carefully concealed strategic objective, which was communism and world revolution. This was the absolutely necessary condition for success in their military strategy. This is the aspect which I shall now consider.

The CPV military strategy during the French period was formulated by Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap. Truong Chinh was secretary general of the CPV until 1956, and Vo Nguyen Giap was minister of defense and commander-in-chief of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) until 1975. Truong Chinh was the foremost Vietnamese Communist strategist with his essay "The resistance will win" published in 1946.¹ Vo Nguyen Giap began writing much later, in 1959, but he has become better known because he was the commander of the PAVN at the time of the famous battle of Dien Bien Phu, was more glamorous and more eager to talk to the western press. His two basic works are People's War, People's

¹. Truong Chinh, "The resistance will win" in Selected Writings, Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House, 1977.

Army,² and Banner of People's War, The Party's Military Line.³

Truong Chinh had two definitions for strategy, one for strategy in the ordinary Clausewitzian sense, and one in the revolutionary Leninist sense. In the ordinary sense Truong Chinh defined strategy as "the art of war directed at winning victory in a given war", and tactics as "the art of fighting to defeat the enemy in a given battle".⁴ In the Leninist sense, Truong Chinh defined revolutionary strategy as

"determining the principal enemy on whom to concentrate our forces in order to overthrow him at a given stage of the revolution.....It discerns the allies of the working class at each stage, and elaborates a plan to align the revolutionary forces, win over allies, correctly use direct and indirect reserve forces and utterly isolate the enemy. It consists in aiming the main blow at the main enemy..."⁵

The main enemy here was identified as "the French colonialists", and after 1950, the American imperialists.

Truong Chinh's definition fit the CPV leadership's constant claim that in their approach to war, they always sought to "apply Marxism-Leninism", that is dialectics, to military theory. In this dialectical approach, war is just one part of revolution. War is armed struggle, and armed struggle is only one form of struggle besides political struggle. And armed struggle and

² Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War, People's Army, Hanoi, Foreign Language Publishing House, 1960.

³ Vo Nguyen Giap, Banner of People's War, The Party's Military Line, New York, Praeger, 1970.

⁴ Truong Chinh, "The resistance will win", Selected Writings, p.174.

⁵ Truong Chinh, "Forward along the path chartered by Karl Marx", Selected Writings, p.618.

political struggle are two forms of revolutionary struggle of equal importance and constitute an integrated whole. Depending on the situation, war or politics will be the dominant form used against the main enemy. But war is never separated from politics, and politics is never separated from war. In the CPV's dialectics, war is politics by other means, and politics is war by other means, two forms of struggle directed at the carefully identified main enemy.

Lastly, if to the CPV leaders war is just one part of revolution, the Vietnamese revolution is an integral part of world revolution. "Our people, said General Giap, has in the past as well as the present contributed to the common cause of world revolution", and, he added, "it is in the forefront of the struggle of the world against imperialism".⁶ This, we can see clearly, is quite in keeping with the CPV's policy stemming from their unconditional acceptance of Leninism.

Citing Lenin's views about just wars and about the necessity of involving the masses, the CPV leaders decided from the start that their a war would be a war of liberation, a revolutionary war, and people's war. What does all that mean?

A war of liberation would obviously aim at the achievement of national independence. However, there was more to it. Because Ho Chi Minh had suffered great poverty and humiliation in his youth, he developed an intense hatred for French colonialism. This hatred was intensified and extended as a result of his

⁶. Vo Nguyen Giap, La guerre de liberation nationale du Vietnam, Hanoi, Editions en langues etrangeres, 1970, pp.33 and 81.

observations in other colonies of Africa, and thus Ho wanted not only to rid Vietnam of colonialism, but also to bring down the the whole French empire. After his adoption of Leninism, he went a step further and wanted the destruction of imperialism all over the world. He considered it a historical mission of the Vietnamese working class to take an active part, even a vanguard role, in the fight against imperialism, and he constantly impressed upon his followers that they had the internationalist duty of doing their utmost to ensure the success of this mission.

I have stressed this point because few writers on Vietnam have been aware of this aspect and have treated the unusual combativeness of Ho and of the other Vietnamese Communist leaders simply as a natural manifestation of Vietnamese intense nationalism, against France then against the United States, and not as a manifestation of Leninist fanaticism.

The second term to be explained is "revolutionary". In the early years of the war, what Ho and his followers did seemed to be a nationalist revolution whose aim was the achievement of national independence. But again, as with much else connected with Ho and the Vietnamese Communist Party, there was dualism in their professed policy. The CPV's real aim was the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it was realised that to secure the best chances of fighting the French superior forces successfully, especially at the beginning, when the Communists were not yet in full control, the cooperation of all Vietnamese - that is the broadest national front possible - was necessary. To ensure this, the CPV leadership had to soft-pedal their real Communist revolutionary aim. Realisation of this aim was left to

the second stage, when victory over the French had been assured.

Meantime, the CPV proclaimed that their aim was the achievement of a national democratic revolution - that is national independence and bourgeois democracy - through the defeat of French colonialism, and nothing more. They were, as many of their defensors asserted, "nationalist first, communist second", and all Ho Chi Minh wanted was the national independence of Vietnam. Thus, by keeping the Communist flag in reserve and waving only the nationalist flag, and appearing as radical nationalists themselves, they succeeded in capturing control of the nationalist movement after 1947 after the French left the non-Communist nationalists no other choice than taking up arms, which means joining the Communists who were already deeply engaged in the fighting. This made possible the people's war, the form of war favoured by General Giap and the CPV leadership.

In People's War, People's Army General Giap said that "the most precise and the most complete answer" to the question asked by many surprised people: why Vietnam was able to defeat France backed by the United States was that "The Vietnamese won because their war of liberation was a people's war".⁷ The term "people's war" does not convey the full meaning of the Vietnamese term chien tranh toan dan, which means a war in which the whole population and the totality of this population's energies and resources are committed, that is total war.

Liberation revolutionary people's war was the conceptual foundation of the war waged by North Vietnam. Now, from the

⁷. Vo Nguyen Giap, La guerre de liberation nationale au Vietnam, p.27.

operational point of view, what kind of strategy did the CPV leaders adopt? The strategy they adopted was prolonged war. This was explained as the best strategy for Vietnam after analysing the conditions under which the Vietnamese forces would have to fight.

The CPV leaders analysed these concrete conditions very thoroughly before deciding on the party's military line. Here they drew inspiration as much from Vietnamese history as from Marxism-Leninism. They recalled that historically Vietnam is a small country with a small population and limited resources which frequently had to fight against invaders from a much larger and more powerful country, that is China. Next, they took into consideration the existing conditions and made a careful assessment of the balance of forces.

In this assessment they stressed that unlike China, which was a feudal and backward country, France was a modern country with a modern and well equipped and experienced army. The French army was therefore much stronger than that of either China or Vietnam. However, if France had strong points, it had also weak points, just as Vietnam had not only weak points but also strong points. The weak and strong points of France and Vietnam were analysed carefully by Truong Chinh in his famous essay "The resistance will win" mentioned earlier.

In chapter XII on "the balance of forces" Truong Chinh listed four points working in favour of the French and seven working against them. The strong points were: 1) abundant supply of modern weapons, 2) a large and well trained army, 3) a high level of organisation, and 4) a well orchestrated propaganda

abroad. These were offset by seven weak points, which were: 1) waging a reactionary war, 2) internal division, 3) low morale of the troops, 4) waging a war of aggression, 5) having many enemies and few friends, 6) exhausted finances and economy, 7) lack of man-power and scattering of the French forces throughout the French Union.

The Vietnamese had four weak points: 1) scarcity and poor quality of weapons, 2) a small and poorly trained army, 3) low level of military organisation, and 4) weak propaganda abroad. But these were compensated by five strong points: 1) waging a just war, 2) unity among the people, 3) high morale of the troops, 4) fighting on one's own soil, and 5) having many allies.

Comparing the weak and strong points of each side, Truong Chinh pointed out that on the one hand France had more weak points than strong points, and most of its strong points were military ones, while Vietnam strong points were political ones; and on the other hand, Vietnam's strong points were fundamental whereas France's strong points were secondary and would be thus of little benefit to them.⁸

On the basis of that analysis, Truong Chinh concluded: "From the strategic point of view, we must prolong the war; but in every individual campaign and from the tactical point of view, we must achieve quick results."⁹ He argued:

"if we prolong the war, our forces will grow stronger, the enemy forces will become weaker, their already low morale will become still lower, their already poor finances will become still worse. The more we fight, the more united our

⁸. Truong Chinh, "The resistance will win", Selected Writings, pp.158 and ff.

⁹. - ibid.-, p.109.

people at home will be, and the more the world democratic movement will support us".

On the other hand, he said:

"the more the enemy fights, the more the anti-war and democratic movement in France will hold him back; the rising revolutionary movement in the French colonies will oblige him to spread his forces; and he will himself be in a position of isolation in the international arena".

So, Truong Chinh concluded, to defeat the French

"the war must be prolonged, and we must have time. Time is on our side - time will be our best strategist, if we are determined to pursue our resistance to the end."¹⁰

The strategy of prolonged war was a mixture of drawing from Vietnamese past experience and of borrowing from Mao Tse-tung, for Truong Chinh was a great admirer of Mao (His name is a Vietnamese translation of "The long march") and the first Vietnamese Communist guerilla textbooks were translations of Chinese works by Ho Chi Minh.

It is therefore natural that the DRV's concept of prolonged war envisaged a strategy in three stages: 1) defensive stage; 2) stage of equilibrium of forces; 3) stage of general counter-offensive. There is no set time for the passage from one stage to the next. Depending on the situation, one may even slide from one stage back to the previous one.

Using the analogy with baseball, we can say that the CPV leadership would try to establish what we could call first base, second base, and third base. First base will be the guerilla base, located in some inaccessible place deep in jungles far away from the cities and the roads. There they will remain absolutely

¹⁰. - ibid. -, p.108.

invulnerable. But if the guerillas do not have popular support, they can be holed up in this first base indefinitely. This is what happened to Ho Chi Minh and his few companions between 1946 and 1948. Pham Van Dong, a close companion of Ho and prime minister of North Vietnam from 1946 to 1955, disclosed in a speech in 1948 that during the previous years, when they still "lacked a popular base", Ho had to live in damp caves in remote parts of the jungle, in total discomfort and insecurity, always ready to move at a few minutes' notice at the slightest alarm signal.¹¹ In these conditions there was little hope of defeating the French.

However, if the guerillas could win popular support, they would have a second base - food, recruits, intelligence, safe hiding -, and their chances of winning are greatly improved. This would happen if the French provided them with the first class emotional/political ammunition they needed. In this case, this ammunition was France's definite refusal in September 1947 to concede immediate independence and unity to Vietnam to other Vietnamese nationalist groups competing with Ho for popular allegiance. Yet, the establishment of this second base by itself was not enough for Ho and his forces to defeat the French. They did not have enough means, especially modern weapons in large quantities, for mounting large scale operations against the French forces. The best Ho could obtain was a stalemate.

In order to defeat the French decisively, Ho would need to establish third base by having access to a big power with common

¹¹ Pham Van Dong, Ho Chu Tich, hinh anh cua dan toc, tinh hoa cua thoi dai, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1974, p.9.

This would provide him
 borders with Vietnam + thus providing ~~he~~ and his men with an
 absolutely safe sanctuary,² *as well as* and ~~willing to give~~ *to make large-scale operations* total diplomatic *and more decisive*
 support and massive military aid to the DRV. This occurred in late
 1949, when the Chinese Communist forces, after defeating the
 Chinese Nationalist forces decisively, reached Vietnam's borders.
 With the establishment of third base, Ho could now move into the
 third stage, go on the counter-offensive from 1950 onward and
 defeat the French decisively at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in
 May 1954. Without this third base, such a victory would have been
 impossible.

I have so far said almost nothing about tactics, as the
 topic of this lecture concerns only policy and strategy. But I
 have to say something about this aspect now because it provides
 the main connection with the DRV's confrontation with the United
 States.

If the strategy adopted by the CPV leaders was that of
 prolonged war, the tactics they favoured was that of lightning
 attacks. By applying the tactics of lightning tactics, said
 Truong Chinh, "we can destroy the enemy sector by sector", and
 "after many battles, the enemy's forces will be weakened and
 demoralised, while our forces will increase and our fighters'
 morale will be strengthened".¹² This tactics requires constant
 offensives in all stages of the war, and a multiplicity of
 simultaneous small attacks in all theatres of war. The purpose of
 this is to exploit the main weakness of the enemy, his lack of
 man-power, force him to disperse his forces and prevent him from

¹². Ecrits, p.109.

exploiting his superiority in equipment and fire power. This tactics also requires the inflicting of the maximum of casualties on the enemy in order to deplete his forces, and especially to force him to seek reinforcements and thereby intensify anti-war sentiment at home.

In their confrontation with the Americans the CPV leaders found no need to change the tactics they had employed against the French in 1946-1954 because these tactics remained just as effective as previously, but in policy and strategy, they introduced a number of modifications, or rather refinements. This was clear from the writings of General Giap, and more particularly, of Le Duan, who became secretary general of the CPV in 1960 and replaced Truong Chinh as North Vietnam's chief strategic thinker. He retained this position until 1986.

The modified policy and strategy applied by the CPV against the Americans were spelled out in Le Duan's letters to the Communists in South Vietnam. These were published in Thư_Vào_Nam (Letters to the Comrades in the South) in 1986,¹³ which, unfortunately, has not yet appeared in translation so far.

In regard to policy, the CPV made it very clear that their aim was the defeat of the United States at all costs in order to weaken its global strategic position and force it to adopt a defensive posture. This was viewed by the Vietnamese politburo as the historical mission of the CPV and its contribution to the maintenance of world peace - the Vietnamese Communist jargon for defense of the Soviet Union -. This has been a major theme in

¹³. Le Duan, Thư_Vào_Nam, Hanoi, Su That, 1986.

pratically every major statement by the CPV leaders since 1960, before as after 1975. Of course, these leaders also used the slogan "chong My cuu nuoc" (fight the US to save the country), but this was more for internal consumption and aimed at the Vietnamese population in general.

In regard to the South, Le Duan had to convince his comrades, who were uneasy about having to face the American giant, that accomplishing their historic mission was perfectly possible. He told them that if they persisted in their efforts, the Americans would be defeated in the end because their attitude at the Geneva Conference in Laos (May 1961-July 1962) proved that their determination to hang on to Indochina had obviously weakened. He was referring to the U.S.' acceptance of an agreement on Laos clearly favourable to the Communist side, and especially to the fact that Averell Harriman, the chief U.S. delegate, had been authorised by President Kennedy to contact the Hanoi delegation secretly to inquire whether North Vietnam would accept for South Vietnam a solution similar to the Laotian solution, i.e. a coalition government including Communists.

Another refinement of policy was the systematic manipulation of American public opinion through the media and diplomacy. This was done in various ways, the most important one of which was the inflicting of heavy casualties on the American forces and the staging of spectacular military as well as political operations which they knew would be dramatized by the American media and would have a demoralizing and divisive effect on the American public. They also played on the American journalists' desire for prestige by admitting certain of them to North Vietnam very

selectively - those considered friendly to Vietnam or strong anti-war activists -.Mieczyslaw Maneli, former head of the Polish delegation to the International Control Commission in Vietnam, has told some interesting anecdotes on this in his memoirs.¹⁴ In particular the North Vietnamese propaganda organs used the converted prisoners of war directly, or put them in touch with American journalists to have the latter relay their messages. In Thu_Vao_Nam, Le Duan had this significant instruction to the commanders in the South: "Take as many American prisoners as possible".¹⁵ The purpose was naturally to work on them, convert them and use them to influence American opinion.

Lastly, the CPV would play on the desire of people who harboured the ambition of playing a key role in restoring peace to Vietnam. Mai Van Bo, North Vietnam's ambassador in Paris, who was in charge of the first contacts with Henry Kissinger, has told in his memoirs how for months he systematically played on Kissinger's ambition of being the first man to have made direct contact with the North Vietnamese, to draw him into a begging posture and force the United States to negotiate from a position of weakness.¹⁶ In addition to Kissinger, there were other prominent people: Senator McGovern, general de Gaulle, Harold Wilson (British prime minister), U Thant (UN Secretary general), to mention only a few prominent ones.

¹⁴. Mieczyslaw Maneli, War of the Vainquished, New York, Harper and Row, 1971, p.160-161.

¹⁵. Le Duan, Thu_Vao_nam, p.160.

¹⁶. See Mai Van Bo, Tan cong ngoai giao va tiep xuc bi mat (Diplomatic Offensive and Secret Contacts), Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, 1985.

The use of people like Kissinger was part of a larger political scheme, which was to add a diplomatic front to the war. If to the CPV war was politics by other means and politics was war by other means, then diplomacy was also war by other means. They accepted to start negotiations with the United States not so much because they wanted a compromise settlement of the war, but because they used negotiations as a weapon to divide and demoralise the Americans: secret negotiation as psychological warfare, and public negotiation as a means of forcing the Americans to negotiate, or rather to fight, among themselves, as Kissinger has pointed out in his memoirs.¹⁷ And, as General Giap has told Oriana Fallaci that "while the delegations are discussing, we go on with the war".¹⁸ So, now, instead of two, they had three fronts - political, military, diplomatic - converging on a clearly identified enemy.

The enemy was My-Diem (later My-Thieu). This appellation was highly significant, for it indicated a strategic refinement introduced by the CPV. The main thrust of the strategy was forcing out the American first through a prolonged war, then finishing off the South Vietnamese government and army in a lightning drive.

The objective now was not the defeat of the American forces in the field, which was practically impossible considering the formidable means at the disposal of the American commanders, but

¹⁷ Henry Kissinger, White House Years, Boston, Little Brown, 1979, and Years of Upheaval, same editor, 1982.

¹⁸ Oriana fallaci, Interview with History, Boston, Houghton and Muffin, 1976, p.86.

the creation of a situation which would force the Americans to withdraw "without losing face", as Le Duan put it.¹⁹ This was done in two main ways.

First, by waging war not only mainly in the mountains, as before 1954, but also in the plains, and especially in the cities. Thus, war in all the three strategic theatres. The inclusion of the cities had two purposes: placing the war directly in front of the American TV cameras, i.e. in every American home; and provoking unrest in the rear of the enemy, to overthrow the government and have a Communist dominated one proclaim neutrality and invite the Americans to leave, or failing that, to provide American journalists with dramatic stories about political instability in Saigon and the South Vietnamese major cities and undermine public support for South Vietnam which looked like a hopeless cause. The Tet offensive in 1968 and the constant Communist-incited unrest in the cities during those years were concrete manifestations of this strategy.

Second, by multiplying attacks in major operations to inflict as many casualties as possible on the American forces, and to put strains on American man-power and force the American commander to ask for reinforcement. Both of these moves aimed at intensifying anti-war sentiment in the United States, and increasing the pressure on the American president to get the US out of Vietnam at any cost, including the abandonment of South Vietnam to its own fate. This objective was achieved through the conclusion of the Paris peace agreement in January 1973.

¹⁹. Le Duan, Thu_Vao_Nam, p.75.

Once the Americans were out, or winding down the war, the South Vietnamese government and armed forces, as well as population, would be demoralised as well as crippled. That would be the time for the CPV to launch all its forces against South Vietnam for a knock out blow in a lightning campaign. This would have to be done very quickly to forestall a possible return of the Americans, or intervention by China. Le Duan revealed that to carry out this plan North Vietnam committed the totality of its forces, including the reserves. This made it possible for the CPV to reach the desired objective - the conquest of South Vietnam - in April 1975.

Earlier, I have referred to the necessity for the CPV to establish first base, second base, and third base. I would like now to say something more on this aspect, which is a very important one.

After 1954, in their confrontation with My-Diem, the CPV had a better first base than in their confrontation with the French. This first base was not some remote place in the jungle, but the whole of Vietnam north of the 17th parallel. This base was at the same time second base, since it contained some 20 million people. However, since the war was in South Vietnam, they needed a second base there, and also a third base in order to win. Until 1960, they could not establish these bases, because American policy under Mr John Foster Dulles was clear and firm, Mr Diem was enjoying popular support, and especially both the Soviet Union and China abstained from encouraging, allowing, or supporting North Vietnam's pursuit of a forward policy, especially a military one, in the South.

The situation changed fundamentally after 1960, however. There were activists who wanted U.S. disengagement, and engaged in maneuvers to influence American public opinion as well as the Administration in that direction. In Vietnam, they encouraged opposition to Mr Diem, forcing him to adopt tough unpopular measures, which, in the long run, will cumulatively cause him to lose American support. This led to his overthrow and chaos in South Vietnam, an ideal condition for an insurgent movement to make a determined bid for power.

The most important factor was the change occurring on the international scene from 1960 onward. The Soviet Union and China modified their policies. Moscow, although reluctantly, allowed the CPV to resume the war in the South on condition that the scale would be carefully controlled to avoid escalation into a general war. China encouraged and strongly supported North Vietnam, thus providing it with a third base. This base was strengthened considerably when Khrushchev was overthrown in 1964 and replaced by Brezhnev, who gave all out support to North Vietnam, at a time when the anti-war activists were intensifying their action in the United States. This created the ideal conditions for a North Vietnamese successful insurgency.

Of course, North Vietnam's victory was possible largely because the CPV leaders were fanatics who were prepared to make the Vietnamese people pay any price for such a victory. How high this price was, we can see from examining what has been happening to Vietnam and to Vietnamese people since the Communists took control of the whole country in 1975. It is a story of incredible poverty, hardship, and despair because the country, devastated and

crippled by long years of war, has been unable to recover. But this is another long story which it is not my job to tell today.

Thank you.

10 April 1990