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**THE COMMUNIST STRUCTURE
IN
SOUTH VIETNAM
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At first blush, the crazy quilt of Vietnamese Communist Party organisations, structures, and their relationships to each other appears almost inscrutable. There is a plethora of Hanoi-controlled organs, such as the People's Revolutionary Party, National Liberation Front, Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN)—and, most recent of all, the Provisional Revolutionary Government, the creation of the NLF and its creature Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces. Though all of them seem on the surface to exercise the same function, COSVN is particularly esoteric, with great mystery surrounding its make-up, location, and even existence.

What is most important, however, is not the particular names given to various parts of the Communist structure in South Vietnam, but the recognition of who has control over operations in the South. All available evidence indicates that, behind the facade of the confusing pattern of organisations, real power over Communist affairs in South Vietnam is exercised by the Lao Dong (Communist) Party of Vietnam.

Directing all Communist activities, political and military, in the southern half of South Vietnam is a group of thirty or forty men commonly called the Central Office for South Vietnam. (It is uncertain what authority, if any, COSVN has over the northern half of South Vietnam. Apparently, Communist activity there is largely controlled directly by North Vietnam's Politburo and Army High Command.) The ten most powerful members of COSVN form its Current Affairs, or Standing Committee. This group has day-to-day authority over Communist political and military activity in the South. It must tailor its decisions to basic policies which are determined in the North, but these policies are arrived at in consultation with COSVN. Occasionally COSVN may also receive direct orders from Hanoi. The most important link with North Vietnam, however, is the personnel who make up the Current Affairs Committee; all are members of the Lao Dong Central Committee or Politburo, thus representing the highest party councils in Hanoi.

COSVN also serves as the bridge between the Communist leadership in Hanoi and the Party in the South. Officially, the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) is the independent and autonomous Communist Party for South Vietnam. However, COSVN, which is in effect the regional committee for the Lao Dong Party in the South, also is the Central Committee for the PRP. The question then arises as to why it is neces-

sary to have the PRP at all. Apparently it was set up to give the impression that there is an indigenous Communist Party in South Vietnam, separate from and not subordinate to the Lao Dong Party. The Communists themselves appear seldom to differentiate between the two sections of the Party or to use the term "People's Revolutionary Party".

This leaves us with the National Liberation Front (NLF), or, more properly, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. The NLF is distinct from the PRP in that it includes non-Communists in its membership. It originally was formed by the Communists as a federation of farmer, women, youth, labour, religious and other associations. The purpose of the NLF is to organise the South Vietnamese populace for the fight against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam and to represent the "revolution" to the outside world. In this sense it resembles earlier fronts such as the Viet Minh and the Lien Viet, which were set up during the war against the French. The Central Committee or highest leadership committee in the NLF is made up of the heads of the various constituent organisations and members of COSVN. The NLF appears to be completely subordinate to COSVN direction though certain of its members may be non-Communists. In any case, it has no independent chain of command. Orders go through the COSVN chain of command to NLF committees at the village and hamlet level. Therefore, should an NLF leader disagree with COSVN policy there would be no way for him to make his protest effective.

The first appearance of COSVN as such was in 1951, just after the creation of the Lao Dong Party as successor to the former Indochinese Communist Party. COSVN replaces the Nam Do Regional Committee, which had directed Communist operations in the southernmost part of South Vietnam. Le Duan, who has since become the First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party, was named Secretary of the new organisation. The declaration of the Lao Dong Central Executive Committee creating COSVN specified, "As of the publication of this notice, the Central Office of South Vietnam will be in Cambodia." Later in 1951, however, COSVN reportedly moved to Ca Mau Peninsula, the southern tip of Vietnam.

COSVN was dissolved after the Geneva Accords of 1954, and its functions were returned to the Nam Bo Regional Committee operating with a reduced staff. As the fighting and infiltration in the South intensified in 1961 and 1962, COSVN was reactivated. The area of

its jurisdiction was extended to include Nam Bo (Southern Vietnam) and part of neighbouring Trung Bo (Central Vietnam) region, so that COSVN was responsible for the southern half of South Vietnam.

The NLF was proclaimed in December, 1960, before COSVN was reconstituted. At the outset the NLF may have had some small degree of independence from the Lao Dong Party. Its leadership comprised the existing hard core of Viet-Minh Communists and prominent non-Communists who opposed the Diem Government.

The PRP was not established until 1962. From the beginning, COSVN was the Central Committee of the PRP and its highest leaders made up the PRP Standing Committee. South Vietnam apparently has never had a Communist party independent of Hanoi. Shortly after defecting in 1968, Colonel Tran Van Dac, former political officer of COSVN's sub-region and a veteran of 22 years of VC and Viet-Minh experience, said that "There is no such organisation as a PRP with a Central Committee, a Standing Committee, etc.; this organisation only exists in name."

COSVN headquarters has not stayed permanently in the same place. Late in 1956, for instance, a former cadre reported that COSVN had been located in Tay Ninh, nine miles north of Katum village. He added that the headquarters and the trails leading to it were camouflaged and that the top COSVN leaders had separate houses with underground shelters and escape tunnels. After its reorganisation, COSVN was located north-east of Saigon, in the early 1960's, but more recently it has moved about the Tay Ninh Province or just across the border in Cambodia. Another defector said that, as of December, 1968, COSVN occupied a site in Cambodia six square kilometres in area. Built in a very thick jungle, it was bounded on the east and west by two streams, on the north it extended to Bathloam village, and its southern extremity was almost at the Vietnamese border.

As mentioned above, the most crucial factor ensuring North Vietnamese control over Communist affairs in South Vietnam is the make-up of the COSVN leadership. The career of the most powerful COSVN figure Pham Hung, Chairman of the Current Affairs Committee, illustrates how the top commands of the North and South Vietnamese Communist parties are interlocked.

Pham Hung has been the number one Communist in South Vietnam since his arrival in 1967. He replaced Army General and Politburo

Central Committee and Secretariat of the Lao Dong Party. He generally is considered the fifth most powerful man in North Vietnam. He was seen by a defector at COSVN headquarters as recently as December, 1968. He is not known to have made any public appearances in North Vietnam since coming south.

Pham Hung is a native of the South; he was born in Vinh Long Province in 1912. He joined Ho Chi Minh's Revolutionary Youth League in the 1920's and was a founding member of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930. The French imprisoned him in 1931 for sedition. After his release in 1945 he held various posts in the Viet Minh party organisation. In 1951 he became a Central Committee member of the Lao Dong Party with special responsibility for the party's activities in the South. In connection with this, he reportedly was named one of the original six members of the committee directing the newly-formed COSVN. From 1952 to 1954 he simultaneously was secretary of the party organisation in the eastern area of South Vietnam, Chairman of the Resistance and Administrative Committee of the Eastern Zone, and a member and political commissar of the military command in the region.

In 1954 and 1955 he was chief of the People's Army of Vietnam's mission to first the Joint Armistice Commission and then the International Central Commission, while at the same time directing underground operations against the Government of the Republic of Vietnam.

Hung left the South for Hanoi in 1955 and was appointed Minister in the Premier's Office, again dealing primarily with South Vietnamese affairs. Two years later he was named to the Lao Dong Politburo, and in 1958 he became a Vice-premier. He was elected to the Lao Dong Secretariat and named Chairman of the Agricultural Board in 1960. After three years he was replaced in the latter position and received the new assignment of Director of the Financial and Trade Board. He also headed up the State Price Commission when that ministerial-level agency was formed in 1965. He left these last two posts in November, 1966, and has since devoted his energies to affairs in the South.

According to Colonel Dac, Hung holds all the top positions in the South—i.e., head of COSVN, Secretary of the PRP and commander and chief political officer of the Liberation Army.

COSVN's second in command for party affairs is Deputy Secretary NGUYEN Van Cuc, also called Pham Cuc, Muoi Cuc and Muoi Ut. He

is a native of North Vietnam, but his career has mainly been in the South. Cuc was chief of COSVN from 1962 to 1964. There is speculation that he is a secret member of the Lao Dong Central Committee and Politburo. He is now in his fifties.

Pham Hung's main deputy for military affairs is Lieutenant-general Tran Van Tra, also called Tu Chi and Tran Nam Trung. He apparently has served as Chairman of the COSVN Military Affairs Committee since his arrival in the South in 1963. Tra is an alternate member of the Lao Dong Central Committee and a deputy chief of staff of the North Vietnamese Army. He was born in 1918 in Quang Ngai Province of what is now South Vietnam.

Another important figure in COSVN is Hai Van, also known as Nguyen Van Dang and Pham Xuan Thai, who has been identified as a Deputy Secretary of COSVN since 1962. He was born in the South and apparently has been continuously active there since 1945. It is reported that party organisation, security and propaganda affairs are his fields. Van is a member of the Lao Dong Central Committee and is Chairman of the NLF Liberation Trade Union Association.

Despite COSVN's lack of notoriety compared with other Communist organisations in Vietnam, it is thoroughly organised to direct every aspect of Communist political and military activity in the South.

The PRP Central Committee, which is in reality COSVN, is, in form, elected by the PRP Party Congress, which is theoretically at the apex of the Communist Party structure in South Vietnam. The Central Committees are only required to meet once every six months, however. It is the Current Affairs Committee of COSVN which meets continuously and, in addition, includes the most powerful COSVN members, which is the highest Communist authority in South Vietnam.

Subordinate to the Current Affairs Committee are several functional sections which advise the former and oversee the execution of relevant policies.

The Organisation Section handles all administrative matters relating to civilian cadre of the COSVN organisation. Also coming within its purview are problems of Party recruitment and assignment of personnel at the higher levels of PRP/COSVN.

The Propaganda, Culture and Indoctrination Section supervises the propaganda, education and training operations of the entire VC infra-

structure. It also is responsible for the Liberation Press agency, Liberation Radio, and various Communist newspapers.

The Finance and Economy Section is in charge of budgeting, taxation and spending.

The Security Section administers VC intelligence, counterintelligence, police activities and security in general for the COSVN area. At last report it was located in Tay Ninh Province, across the border from the main COSVN headquarters.

The Civilian Proselyting Section recruits civilian personnel for the organizations connected with COSVN and the NLF. In addition, it seeks to infiltrate non-Communist groups.

The Military Proselyting Section encourages soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces to defect to the Viet Cong or to stay within the former as fifth columnists or agents.

The Civil Health Section provides medical care to COSVN personnel.

The Front Committee maintains liaison with and control over the NLF and its affiliated mass organizations. It is reported that the Chairman of the Committee is Major-general Tran Luong, alias Hai Hau, a member of the COSVN Current Affairs Committee and the Lao Dong Central Committee. The Deputy Chairman is Nguyen Huu The, alias Tu The, who also serves as a member of the Presidium of the NLF. The other member of the Committee is Nguyen Huu Tho, Chairman of the NLF Central Committee.

The Military Affairs Committee is separate from the civil sections but is still subordinate to the COSVN Current Affairs Committee. It is, in effect, the military command of COSVN and also serves as the Headquarters of the South Vietnam Liberation Armed Forces. It exercises command of main forces, local forces and guerillo units. The military organization is under COSVN, which in turn receives its orders on military matters from the Politburo in Hanoi, or, more often, from the North Vietnamese Army High Command. However, the Military Affairs Committee also may communicate directly with the North Vietnamese Army High Command.