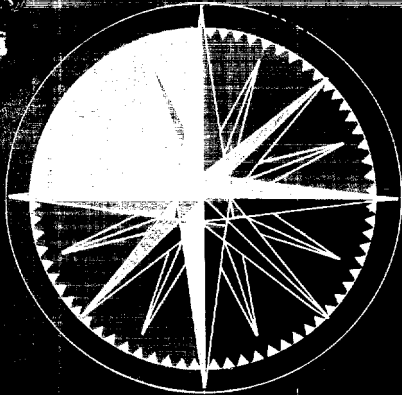


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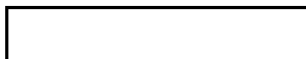
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# SPECIAL REPORT

TRENDS OF COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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17 January 1964

**TRENDS OF COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM**

During 1963 Communist insurgency in South Vietnam regained the momentum which it had lost after mid-1962. The Viet Cong were altering their tactics to cope with the Diem government's vigorous pacification programs and were progressively intensifying their guerrilla effort. Following Diem's overthrow in November, the Viet Cong, demonstrating a high capability for widespread coordinated activity, made significant gains in the countryside. They have proven adept in countering new government efforts with improved combat techniques of their own, are mounting an intensive political effort, and are receiving a steady supply of weapons and trained guerrilla specialists from North Vietnam. While the new government in Saigon is aware of the seriousness of this Viet Cong challenge, it is moving slowly in revamping its pacification tactics and programs, and the war promises to be a prolonged contest of attrition, endurance, will, and morale.

Operational Trends in 1963

The recrudescence of the Viet Cong insurgency is apparent in operational statistics from Saigon. Trends which appeared to be favorable to the government forces after mid-1962 seem to have been reversed by mid-1963. After mid-July, the rate of Communist-initiated incidents and attacks increased by one third over the first half of 1963, and exceeded the average level of such activity sustained during 1962. While the number and scale of armed attacks declined in 1963, this probably reflects in part an increased emphasis on small-scale terrorism and propaganda activity by guerrilla troops.

Since July also, the gap between government and Viet Cong casualties has narrowed significantly. Casualties among

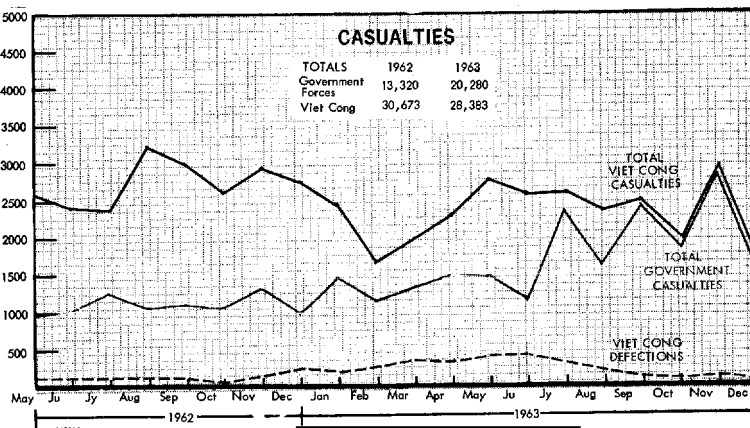
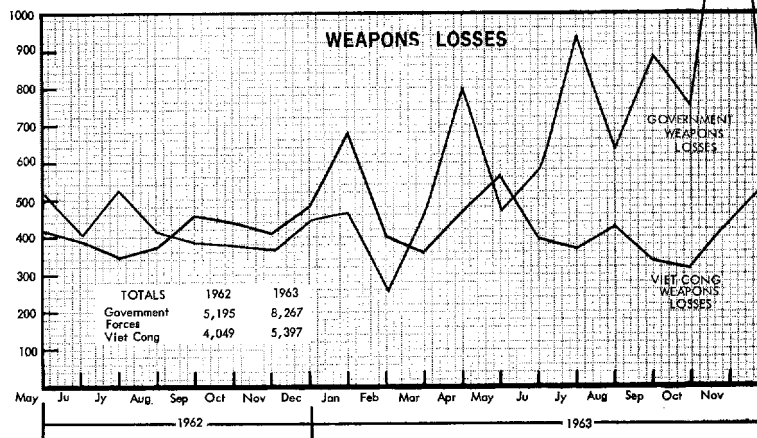
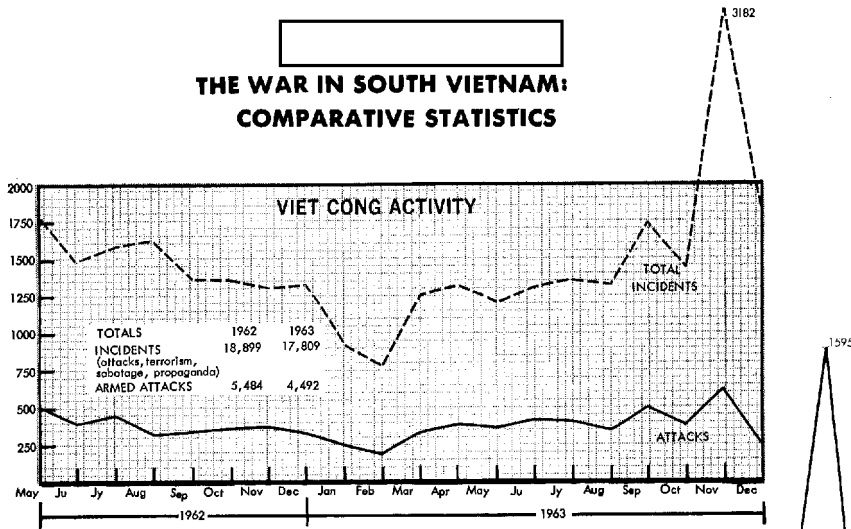
Viet Cong forces have remained at about the same levels, but government casualties as reported from Saigon increased by more than one third after mid-year, and the total for the year was almost two thirds above that for 1962 (see chart). In addition, desertions from the government forces during the first ten months of 1963 numbered 27,000, mostly from among paramilitary troops. It is not known how many of these joined the Viet Cong. There were some 3,000 military defectors from the Viet Cong for all of 1963.

The ratio of weapons losses turned dramatically in favor of the Viet Cong in the latter part of 1963. For the year as a whole, the Viet Cong in effect gained some 3,000 weapons, a threefold increase over their gain in 1962. On the basis of equipment normally held by Viet

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**THE WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM:  
COMPARATIVE STATISTICS**



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Cong forces, this would arm as many as 12 regular battalions, 40 district guerrilla companies, or 150 local "self-defense" platoons. Captured weapons are the major source of equipment for the Viet Cong.

#### Hanoi Revamps Policies

The slackened pace of Viet Cong guerrilla activity in the latter part of 1962 and early 1963 reflected Communist concern over the new situation created by the vast increase in US military assistance in South Vietnam. There is evidence that morale among the Viet Cong sagged, their cadres became confused and disheartened, and their efforts lost momentum in the face of the difficulties posed by this new dimension in the war.

By early 1963, however, Hanoi apparently had developed new policies and programs. Gearing their plans to a long and arduous struggle and emphasizing as always its political aspects, the Communists modified their combat techniques and accelerated the development of the Viet Cong military forces, while pushing political and psychological warfare programs aimed at strengthening their "popular base" in South Vietnam. Their policy seems, in effect, to have entailed the launching of a direct counteroffensive against the government's key pacification effort--the strategic hamlet program.

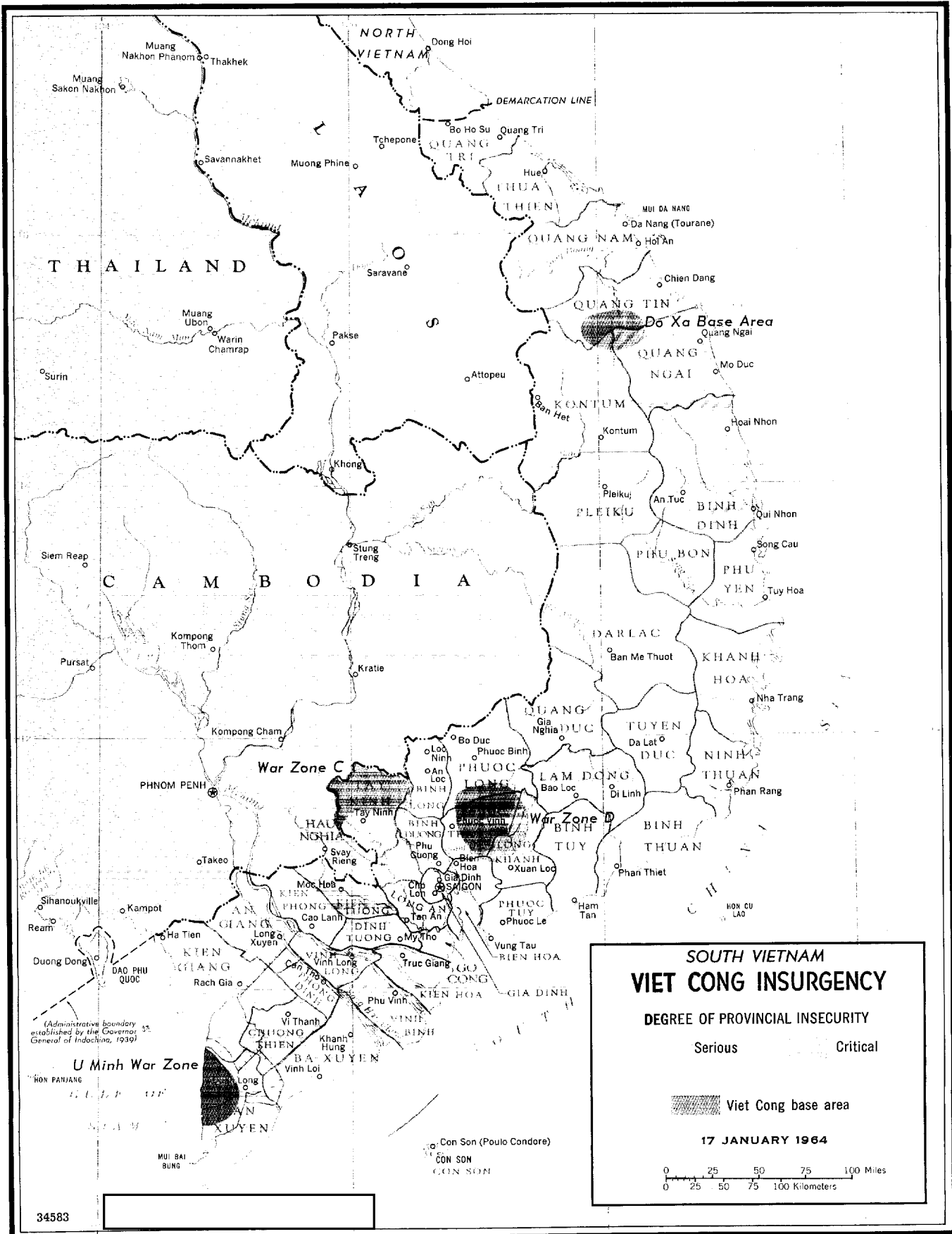
#### Viet Cong Strength

There has been a marked growth in the organizational strength and firepower of their tactical units. The regular forces are estimated at about 23,000 to 25,000, and irregular forces at 60,000 to 80,000. Some 15 new regular battalions averaging about 400 men each were identified during the year.

The Viet Cong evidently have been able to offset their combat losses by an effective replacement system. Relying only in part on infiltration from the North, the Viet Cong levy replacements from local guerrilla units, which in turn make up their losses by recruitment among the peasantry. In areas under their control, the Communists have relatively unrestricted access to half a million physically fit males of military age. The Viet Cong are also able to recruit to a considerable extent in villages ostensibly controlled by the government, and from among the large number of deserters from the government forces.

The gradual evolution of larger and better equipped regular Viet Cong forces is reflected in the confirmed creation of five regiments, each with a strength of 1,500 to 2,000 troops. Three of these units are in the northern highlands near the coast, and two are in Viet Cong base areas north of Saigon. There is

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evidence that two others are being formed in the Mekong Delta area. These regiments, which appear to be destined for an increasing scale of mobile warfare, include signal, engineer, intelligence, and other specialized support units. In addition, they possess heavy weapons battalions equipped with 57-mm. and 75-mm. recoilless rifles, 90-mm. bazookas, mortars, and anti-aircraft machine guns. Some of these weapons are of bloc manufacture.

The improved capabilities of the Viet Cong regular forces have also been apparent in the continuing refinement of their military command structure. Captured documents provide evidence of this.

#### Infiltration

The development of Viet Cong military capabilities is made possible by the continued influx of cadres and heavy weapons from North Vietnam. Intelligence on infiltration is spotty, but there is firm evidence that at least 1,700 personnel arrived from the North during 1963. Others may also have infiltrated, but as in past years, it will be months before all the evidence is in. The confirmed arrivals consist largely of unit cadres--platoon, company, battalion, and higher level command and staff elements--heavy weapons specialists, and other technicians.

These personnel are virtually all former southerners who have been serving with the North Vietnamese Army, have received special training courses, and have been sent south in apparent response to specific requirements formulated to develop a planned force structure. In several instances, new battalions have been formed by integrating an infiltrated cadre group of about 130 men with existing local guerrilla units.

Although the Communists continue to rely largely on captured or locally manufactured weapons and ammunition, increasing numbers of bloc-manufactured weapons and ammunition are being found in all areas of South Vietnam. Large quantities of explosives have been seized on river craft while being smuggled to Viet Cong bases from Cambodia. Supplies to the Viet Cong are brought in overland through Laos and Cambodia, as well as by sea. The scope of this logistical support was illustrated in the seizure in December of a Viet Cong ordnance dump south of Saigon containing almost 300,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition, mostly of Chinese Communist manufacture.

#### Combat Techniques Modified

While strengthening their military forces, the Communists have sought to modify their combat techniques both as to

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perfect their attack capabilities and to reduce their vulnerability to government military operations. Armed attacks now are focused almost exclusively on "soft" targets such as strategic hamlets and small outposts manned by paramilitary forces. Simultaneous attacks on adjacent government positions, aimed at disrupting mutual support arrangements, have been effectively combined with ambushes of reinforcing troops.

At the same time, Viet Cong regular units are fortifying their operational bases to reduce their exposure to government air and artillery attack, while increasing the cost in casualties to government forces engaged in clearing operations. They have also progressively improved their antiaircraft techniques, particularly for defense against helicopter-borne assaults. The improved combat effectiveness resulting from these tactical shifts is evident in the narrowing of the casualty ratio. A boost in guerrilla morale resulting from this new posture is suggested by a marked reduction in Viet Cong defections since mid-1963.

Political Effort Intensified

The Viet Cong have not ignored the strengthening of their "political base," which they regard as the most important factor in their insurgency. Although intelligence on this phase of the struggle is meager, captured documents provide evidence that the Viet Cong expend

more energy on political and psychological warfare than on military operations, and probably obtain more decisive results.

A Communist provincial committee document captured in late summer clearly reflected an intensified effort to expand the various mechanisms through which the Viet Cong strive to mobilize the masses behind their war effort. The "Liberation Youth" movement and various peasant associations, women's leagues, guerrilla veterans, and groups--in addition to the Communist Party apparatus--are all components of the broad Viet Cong political front, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam. This apparatus provides political administration of Communist-held areas and reaches clandestinely into those held by the Saigon regime. Covering only a single month, the document revealed an impressive rate of activity, even if its details are exaggerated.

Through a wide range of propaganda activities--meetings, conventions, demonstrations, "whispering campaigns"--the Viet Cong seek to gain the sympathy and support of the masses. They have their own civic action programs, such as a campaign to encourage planting of fruit trees to increase peasant income, designed to demonstrate their interest in the peasants' economic livelihood. The Viet Cong endeavor to identify the peasants with the insurgency by organizing their

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energies in producing simple war implements, digging trenches, sabotaging roads, establishing informant nets, and other such tasks.

The Communists also maintain an intensive proselytizing program aimed at government military and paramilitary personnel and their dependents. These efforts at persuasion are complemented by a campaign of selective terrorism designed to cow the stubborn or to convince the apathetic.

This type of political campaign is conducted on a massive scale, overtly in areas held by the Viet Cong and covertly in government-held areas. Its effectiveness is difficult to measure, but is evidenced in the lack of active popular support for the government's counterinsurgency programs in many rural areas.

#### Viet Cong Difficulties

Despite their renewed effort, the Viet Cong continue to be faced with two serious problems: a continuing shortage of food supplies in their sparsely populated base areas, particularly the highlands, and the difficulty of maintaining morale under the harrowing conditions of a resistance movement operating against forces with superior military capabilities. Their already

difficult food problem in the mountain areas and swampy delta redoubts has been made more serious by the government's pacification programs, which have restricted Communist food requisitioning efforts.

As a result, the Viet Cong have continued to divert combat elements to production of food, and many of their attacks are conducted primarily to seize food from defended villages. Viet Cong morale has consistently been lower in the highlands than elsewhere because of these and other difficulties.

The government's increasing use of artillery and air strikes has also made life extremely difficult for the Viet Cong military forces.

Captured documents and prisoner interrogations reflect continuing concern over the morale problem. However, the drop in Viet Cong desertions since last July, together with a decreasing response to the government's guerrilla amnesty program, suggests that Viet Cong morale has, on the whole, improved.

#### Effectiveness of Government Programs

The renewed Viet Cong effort developed in the face of the Diem government's vigorous

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counterinsurgency programs, which began to take effect in 1962. In addition to stepping up the tempo of its tactical operations, the government followed through on other measures to improve its military posture.

New tactics emphasizing ambushes, night patrols, and widespread small-unit actions have been instituted. Psychological operations have been increased, with stress on the amnesty program inaugurated last year to win over Viet Cong adherents. The government's territorial command structure has been revised and refined, concurrently with the deployment of an additional division to the Communist-infested Mekong Delta. The training of paramilitary forces--notably the hamlet militia, Citizens' Irregular Defense Groups, Combat Youth, Self-Defense Corps, and Civil Guard--has continued.

The Diem government's key pacification effort--the strategic hamlet program--progressed steadily during 1963 except in the delta area, where it suffered serious reverses in several provinces. By the end of October, some 8,300 of these hamlets had been built, containing 77 percent of the rural populace. Most of these were established in areas already under government control, but in some areas the program had been overextended. It had emphasized the initial physical security aspects, while political, social,

and economic improvement programs necessary for gaining the support of the people against the Viet Cong were only beginning when the Diem government was overthrown.

Hamlet defense elements often fought well when attacked, but the training of hamlet militia lagged behind the construction program. Only about one third of the hamlets had armed defense elements. The Viet Cong exploited this condition, combining armed attacks with intensive propaganda, sabotage, and terrorist activities designed both to shake the confidence of inhabitants in inadequately supported hamlets and to try to demonstrate the continuing insecurity of the populace even inside protected ones. These overt activities were supplemented by equally intensive subversive pressures.

The Diem regime's political modus operandi blunted the overall effectiveness of the government's counterinsurgency effort. Under Diem, the efficiency of key programs was hindered by frequent shifts in the assignment of province chiefs and by bureaucratic bottlenecks. Particularly in its conflict with the Buddhists and students, the Diem government alienated important segments of the urban populace and made itself vulnerable to Viet Cong exploitation of these difficulties in rural areas.

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Although Saigon's new military rulers are fully cognizant of the enormous problems confronting them, they have moved slowly in developing new policies and programs while consolidating their control. Diem's pacification programs have virtually ground to a halt while the new regime replaces key personnel at the province and district levels. This month the top military command structure has been improved, an advisory council intended to mobilize civilian political talents has been set up, and the government is showing awareness that it has limited time in which to get moving.

Outlook

It remains to be seen how the new government in Saigon

will check the momentum of the Viet Cong drive in the delta, rally popular support, defeat the Viet Cong's military forces, limit their access to and support from North Vietnam, and gradually destroy the Communist political and subversive apparatus. The Viet Cong have continued to show the resourcefulness, adaptability, and determination which has characterized their nearly continuous involvement in guerrilla fighting since 1945. They forced the French to withdraw in 1954 after nine years of bloody struggle, and there is no evidence that the change of government in Saigon has caused them to lose heart for the struggle now. The prospect at best is for a prolonged, grinding test of endurance, will, and morale.

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