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# Intelligence Report

*Le Duan and the Post - Ho Chi Minh Leadership*

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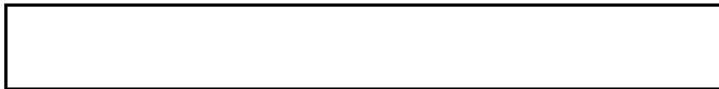
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**LE DUAN AND THE POST - HO CHI MINH LEADERSHIP****I. Principal Judgments**

Le Duan, First Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party, appears to be fairly secure in his position as "first among equals" in the collective leadership that runs North Vietnam. He faces some generally muted opposition, chiefly from the party's doctrinaire wing, but thus far has commanded enough support from colleagues to make his views prevail. The central issue for the leadership in Hanoi since 1954 has been and remains the question of how to "liberate" South Vietnam, and how much of the North's resources should be put into the effort. The Hanoi leaders have worked hard to achieve a take-over and have been reluctant, even since the cease-fire, to defer progress toward that aim. At the same time Le Duan, Premier Pham Van Dong, and some others are eager to push ahead with the job of rebuilding the North. Thus the leaders will be faced with a policy dilemma as long as the Communists remain so far short of their goals in the South.

Next to Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan apparently has had more influence than any other North Vietnamese leader in determining Hanoi's strategy toward the South since 1945. His strategic views have been relatively flexible. He has never been identified with a strategy of protracted guerrilla war (the strategy the Viet Minh followed against the French in the North), at least as a long-term policy. After the US entered the war in 1965, Le Duan generally advocated and supported large-unit, sustained offensive warfare in the belief that it could force a collapse of US and South Vietnamese resolve to keep fighting. Earlier, there had been periods (e.g., 1955-1957 and 1961-1962) when Le Duan seemed to share with Ho Chi Minh the belief that the North had nothing to gain by stepping up the war; at those times Le Duan supported a policy of refraining from major violence, while letting the political pot simmer.

The evidence since the cease-fire suggests that the Politburo under Le Duan's leadership is taking the second, "political" tack, at least for the time being. Hanoi is also maintaining major North Vietnamese forces in the South

*\*This report was prepared in the Office of Current Intelligence. Analysts of several other offices in CIA have been consulted, and they are in general agreement with its judgments. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the report's author, [REDACTED]*

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capable not only of defending Communist-held territory (their immediate mission), but also of mounting a strong offensive should the Politburo decide that it could force the South Vietnamese into a weakened negotiating position. The currently somewhat ambivalent policy is apparently the best mix the Politburo can agree on to preserve some military options in the South while improving opportunities for pushing postwar construction in the North.

#### **A Record of Unity, Despite Internal Differences**

The record of stability in the Vietnamese Communist leadership is unmatched by that of any other ruling Communist party. There has never been an open power struggle or an extensive purge in the top leadership. The men at the top have been waging war most of the time since 1941, and have tended to submerge differences for this reason. A more important unifying force has been the skillful leadership provided first by Ho Chi Minh and then by Le Duan. The hallmark of their leadership style has been a willingness to tolerate differences in the Politburo, combined with an ability to keep dissenters in line.

Differences have existed among Politburo members over both domestic and war policy. There have usually been some leaders who have regarded specific decisions as too aggressive and others who believed they were not aggressive enough. Such differences apparently persist despite efforts by Le Duan to broaden the base of agreement. In 1972 and 1973, for example, Le Duan reportedly had only a majority of Politburo members with him in his decisions to launch the Easter 1972 offensive and then, again, to make concessions to reach agreement at Paris in January 1973.

Le Duan's chief rival over the years has been Truong Chinh, who was party secretary-general from 1941 until 1956, when he was demoted for errors in domestic policy. Under Truong Chinh the party had operated in consonance with Chinese precepts in both domestic affairs and war strategy. In 1957, Le Duan was brought to Hanoi to replace Chinh. The Southern-oriented policy he began to develop owed little in the way it was applied to either the Soviet Union or China.

Since then, Le Duan has gathered around him a group of men who had worked under him in South Vietnam while other leaders were fighting the French in the North. Among them are Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's highly competent negotiator and chief of the party's powerful Organization Department, and Pham Hung, who heads COSVN. There are indications that Chief of Staff Van Tien Dung has been particularly close to Le Duan and shares some of his views. If Le Duan were able to form a new Politburo in the near

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future, e.g., at the long-rumored 4th Party Congress, these men might well be key figures.

### **Le Duan's Strengths and Weaknesses**

Le Duan has several things going for him:

- More than any other leader, he had Ho Chi Minh's trust and backing. It was Ho who in 1960 conferred on Le Duan the title "First Secretary"—the title then held by the head of the CPSU and that of nearly every other ruling Communist party except China.
- Le Duan's long tenure at or near the top (since 1937) gives him prestige and authority. He made good use of the years he served as party boss under Ho to put his men in key spots.
- Although lacking Ho's charisma, Duan has solid qualities of intellect and leadership that seem to command respect and loyalty in the VWP apparatus.
- He has never been tainted by association with an officially discredited policy nor did he ever publicly incur Ho's displeasure, as did Truong Chinh, Premier Dong, and General Giap at one time or another.
- Le Duan is an astute political maneuverer who has acquired enough proteges and allies in the power structure to give him majority support. He has edged his old opponent Truong Chinh into an isolated position that provides little opportunity to challenge him effectively.

Nevertheless, Le Duan's failure to restructure the Politburo suggests that the potential for opposition to his policies, if not to himself, remains strong. The present Central Committee and Politburo were both created by Ho Chi Minh at the last party congress in 1960, and changes seem overdue. The failure to hold the long-delayed 4th Party Congress now that the cease-fire has reduced hostilities in the South is reminiscent of delays often seen in Chinese affairs which have usually masked an unresolved power struggle. As long as solid progress is not apparent in the reconstruction of the North and the revolution in the South, the opposition could coalesce against Le Duan. This will become increasingly likely if the regime is unable in another year or so to show reasonable progress toward its goals in the South or should it decide to put the main emphasis on development in the North and fail to make some solid economic progress there.

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## II. Unity, Differences, and Groupings

The leadership in North Vietnam is remarkable for its cohesiveness and for the determination with which it has pursued its nationalist and Marxist goals. The senior members of the Politburo of the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP) all began their revolutionary careers in the 1920s, rose to prominence in the Stalinist Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in the 1930s, and have worked as a leadership team for about three decades. The fact that they have been fighting wars most of the time since 1941 has been a unifying force. More important has been the skillful leadership provided first by President Ho Chi Minh until his death in 1969, and then by Party First Secretary Le Duan. The hallmark of their style of leadership—unusual among ruling Communist countries—has been a willingness to tolerate dissent among colleagues, combined with the ability to reconcile differences.

The smoothness of Politburo teamwork has been marred occasionally by personal antagonisms and sharp behind-the-scenes disputes. These have sometimes led to shifts in relative positions within the power structure. But there has never been an open power struggle among the men at the top, a purge reaching into their group, or a major defection (like Trotsky and Chang Kuo-t'ao). This Vietnamese record of stability and continuity is unmatched by any other Communist state.

The party leaders are clearly tough-minded people; they have had their differences, but they have also demonstrated that they are able to submerge or resolve their disagreements and to work together once a decision is reached. Differences stem from several causes. There is diversity in temperament, background, and experience. Some individuals have at times been more receptive than others to Soviet or Chinese influence. Some, often the same individuals, have been associated with mistakes in domestic policy or have opposed key war decisions.

In the past, diversity was encouraged by Ho Chi Minh's unusual style of leadership. He seems to have tolerated a spectrum of views in the Politburo, while generally taking a central position himself. Thus during the Vietnam war some leaders usually regarded particular decisions as too aggressive, while others believed they were not aggressive enough.

Le Duan apparently is continuing Ho's practice of keeping around him men who do not always see eye-to-eye. It is doubtful, though, that Le Duan is pleased at having potential rivals on the Politburo. Perhaps, lacking Ho's great personal authority, he acquiesces in their presence on the Politburo for reasons of prudence or because he really has no choice. Whatever the reason,

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differences persist under Le Duan and are not always welcome. In late May 1972, for example, the party journal *Hoc Tap* complained of "rightist and leftist tendencies" in the party. This was possibly a reference to reservations of some of the leaders about the wisdom of the 1972 offensive, especially in view of the strong US retaliation that resulted. The decision to launch the Easter 1972 offensive reportedly did not have the unanimous support of the Politburo, only the "majority."

It has never been easy to identify with certainty the individual members of groupings within the Politburo, but it was not quite so difficult when Ho Chi Minh was alive. He allowed considerable information about factional views to circulate within the party [redacted]

[redacted] Much of this type of information ultimately leaked out [redacted]

[redacted] Such reports have been rare since Ho's death. Their near-disappearance suggests either that Le Duan has clamped down on circulation of dissenting views within the party or that, with the passage of time, groupings have become less distinct and contentious.

The views of leaders on war policy have shifted over the decades. In the early years of the war, when the leadership as a whole was deciding to escalate the war, General Giap and, to a lesser degree, Premier Pham Van Dong apparently tended to urge caution and were more ready than others to make concessions to negotiate an end to the war. Their counsel resembled the advice Hanoi got from Moscow throughout the war, and they were labeled by their more militant adversaries in inner party circles as "pro-Soviet" and "revisionist." In 1967, when Hanoi's war strategy changed to the launching of big offensives (either to win a quick victory or to gain a strong position to negotiate), both Giap and Dong apparently became strong team players again. Giap almost certainly played a major part in the military planning of the Tet 1968 and Easter 1972 offensives.

At the other extreme, early in the war, was a group of men who opposed any concessions and advocated instead a classic "people's war" that would continue until a complete military victory was achieved. This was what the Chinese Communists were advising too until 1971, and it seemed to be a view widely held (and probably still held) in the army and in the southern apparatus. The most vociferous advocate of this position in the Politburo was COSVN chief General Nguyen Chi Thanh, who died, reputedly in an air raid, in July 1967. His chief backer (besides Ho Chi Minh) was the then number-three man, Truong Chinh, who had been party secretary-general from 1941 to 1956. In that era Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communists accepted Chinese political and ideological guidance more or less

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# VIETNAMESE WORKERS' PARTY

## Politburo



Le Duan



Truong Chinh



Pham Van Dong



Pham Hung



Vo Nguyen Giap



Le Duc Tho



Nguyen Duy Trinh



Le Thanh Nghi



Hoang Van Hoan



Tran Quoc Hoan



Van Tien Dung

## Secretariat

### First Secretary

Le Duan

### Members

Pham Hung  
Le Duc Tho  
Le Van Luong  
To Huu

Hoang Anh  
Nguyen Van Tran  
Nguyen Con  
Xuan Thuy

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uncritically and with great enthusiasm. Their illusions came to an end, however, in 1956 when a land reform program conducted along lines specifically recommended by Mao Tse-tung had disastrous results. The failure of the program also led to the downgrading of Truong Chinh, although Chinh later made a partial comeback.

The year 1957 was a watershed for Hanoi. A sobered Ho Chi Minh, by now determined to pursue an independent Vietnamese course in domestic affairs and also impatient to take over South Vietnam, brought Le Duan, the Communist Party boss in the South, to Hanoi to replace Truong Chinh. Le Duan was given the job of reorienting the party toward a southern-directed policy, which was independent of both the Soviet Union and China. Over the next few years a third grouping coalesced under Le Duan, and this is the dominant group today. Besides Le Duan, it includes party organization boss Le Duc Tho and COSVN chief Pham Hung. The background of these three differs significantly from other senior members of the Politburo. They were in jail in Indochina during World War II and thus did not participate in the building of the Viet Minh organization. After 1945, they all stayed in the South to work in the underground. Le Duan and Le Duc Tho remained there until 1957. Pham Hung returned to the North in 1955, but was not placed on the Politburo until 1957. Thus none was serving in the center of power during the many years the Vietnamese were particularly close to the Chinese Communists.

The record indicates that one additional member of the Politburo—Chief of Staff Van Tien Dung—has been close to Le Duan (he worked under Le Duan in the South in 1955-56) and shares some of his views. Like Tho and Hung, Van Tien Dung was not at the center of power until after 1956. Dung was only a lowly divisional commander during the war against the French and was not even at Dien Bien Phu. Despite his inexperience and youth (he was 37), he was promoted to chief of staff in mid-1954, displacing a favorite of Giap's (Hoang Van Thai, who became Deputy Chief of Staff), and was immediately transferred South

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Other members of the Politburo are specialists who exercise varying degrees of influence. In order of precedence, they are Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, a political light-weight; economic specialist Le Thanh Nghi, a loyal Le Duan man; the aging specialist on China and an associate of Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Hoan; and Security Minister Tran Quoc Hoan, the only one of the four who appears to have a strong power base of his own. Tran Quoc Hoan is a shadowy figure not aligned with any faction. He has held his sensitive post since 1953, well before Le Duan's rise, and there are tenuous signs that the relationship between the two is an uneasy one.

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### III. Le Duan's Policy Record

For many years the DRV has been generally consistent in its broad policy directions. Apparently Le Duan saw eye to eye with Ho Chi Minh on most issues, and thus felt no reason to institute fundamental changes after Ho's death. Le Duan, unlike Khrushchev under Stalin, was more than just an executive officer carrying out Ho's orders; he was a junior partner, helping form policy. The main elements of Le Duan's policies are:

- In foreign affairs, he has continued the policy started by Ho of pursuing a line independent of Moscow and Peking, while, so far as possible, maintaining good relations with both. The Sino-Soviet doctrinal split on war issues that existed from 1957 to 1971 enabled the Vietnamese to play one ally against the other and ensure continuing support from both. Hanoi has not been able to do this as effectively in the current era of Soviet and Chinese detente with the US, but it still maintains its independence of the two big Communist powers.

- His policy toward the South has been innovative and flexible. Military strategy has sometimes been daring and sometimes cautious, and the mix of political and military measures employed in each phase of the war has varied. Le Duan, with Ho Chi Minh's approval while he lived, apparently has had a dominant role in determining most strategy shifts. Virtually all the recurrent changes—from the 1954 Geneva agreement to the 1973 cease-fire agreement—met with opposition from groups believing that the decision was either too militant or not militant enough. Le Duan, and Ho Chi Minh before him, dealt skillfully with dissenters to induce them to submerge their differences. They also showed considerable talent for dealing with conflicting demands of their big allies.

- In the domestic field, Le Duan's prime objective is to build a modern, industrialized state as rapidly as possible, and to do so in an efficient way unencumbered by excess ideological baggage. He has opposed efforts to restrict "capitalist tendencies" if this hurts the economy, and he believes that "revolutionary enthusiasm" and experience in guerrilla warfare are a poor substitute for managerial and technical expertise. He is sometimes pragmatic to the point of being non-Marxist. More doctrinaire leaders, whose most vocal spokesman is Truong Chinh, have understandably taken exception to some of Duan's positions. Since 1960 policies generally have borne Le Duan's stamp, but the occasional appearance of mixed strands suggests a flexible amalgam of the two approaches. The doctrinaire wing of the VWP is strong enough to make its influence felt, particularly because the cease-fire has not ended

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fighting in the South. So long as that conflict continues, Le Duan probably will hesitate to make the policy shift he almost certainly would like to initiate—that is, to give the North top priority for attention and resources.

### **On Strategy Toward the South, 1945-1972**

The Vietnamese Communists have paid due obeisance to Mao Tse-tung's precepts of guerrilla warfare. The precepts, which have been set out in textbooks by Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap, in fact governed Viet Minh strategy against the French from 1946 to 1954. Le Duan, however, seems never to have been an unqualified admirer of either the Chinese Communists or their revolutionary doctrine. He has developed a complicated and flexible doctrine of his own that gives a place to classical rules of "people's war," but stresses the political and psychological effects of a given course of action. Thus, while the Communists have consistently emphasized political measures—including subversion and terrorism—in their struggle in the South, they have been far more willing to initiate heavy military action for its political impact than classical doctrine dictates. The aspect of "people's war" that has received short shrift is guerrilla warfare—a fact duly noted by proponents of classical strategy such as Truong Chinh, who reportedly criticized the offensive of Tet 1968 as a costly, "adventurous" act.

Some of Le Duan's views on strategy undoubtedly have their roots in the essentially political nature of his party experience from the 1930s through the 1950s. During those decades, Le Duan was engaged primarily in legal and clandestine political organization work, not in organizing forces for armed rebellion.

Between 1936 and 1939, for example, when the Communist parties of France and its colonies were permitted to operate legally and their leaders were given amnesty, the Indochina Communist Party was a tightly knit group of intellectuals—urban-based, bicultural, and responsive to the French Communist Party and the Stalin-controlled Comintern. In contrast, by 1935 Mao Tse-tung's Communist Party had left the coastal cities to organize peasants for armed revolt, in defiance of the Comintern. Le Duan held high positions in the ICP between 1936 and 1939; this was in fact the only period between 1931 and 1945 when he was not in a penal colony.

After 1945, during the war against the French, Le Duan served as secretary of the party's southern region, away from the main fighting in the North. Le Duan's area of responsibility simmered along at "stage one" of people's warfare—the stage of political preparation.

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After the French left in 1954, strong pressure built up in the southern branch of the VWP to expand guerrilla forces and to work to overthrow the Diem regime by violence. For several reasons, however, the VWP leadership in Hanoi ordered the Viet Cong to bide their time and restrict themselves to political activities: Hanoi was under pressure from both China and the USSR not to renew armed conflict; building the North had been given priority for resources; and it was felt that as a result of Diem's repressive policies and resultant unpopularity, time was on their side.

It was Le Duan's job to keep the lid on the restive southern apparatus, and this he did. Subsequently he justified his action in a widely circulated pamphlet issued late in 1956, *South Vietnam's Revolutionary Line*. In the pamphlet Le Duan said that the VWP fully supported the thesis of the 20th CPSU Congress (February 1956) on pursuing revolution through a "peaceful line." Le Duan specifically ruled out armed violence in South Vietnam, stating that "only" political action was permissible.

#### On Strategy Before the US Entered the War, 1958-1965

By 1958, however, the VWP Politburo, with Ho and Le Duan setting the line, began moving in the direction of a policy of more violent resistance to the Diem regime. Two developments brought about this change: the Diem regime, with US aid, was growing stronger, not weaker; and Hanoi was being pushed hard by one of its major allies, Peking, to pursue a militant anti-US policy.

Hanoi's shift was made slowly because of persistent opposition from Moscow and concern over provoking US intervention, and also because of what captured documents have referred to as "hesitancy" within the ranks of the Politburo itself.\*

Le Duan signaled the beginning of the shift early in 1958, when he made a series of speeches criticizing Soviet ideas on "peaceful" means of

*\*According to available evidence on the 1958-60 strategy arguments, General Giap and Premier Dong urged caution and delay in stepping up the conflict; at the other extreme, Truong Chinh and General Nguyen Chi Thanh, backed by Peking, argued that as long as it was being decided to fight a "people's war" they should go all-out and fight it in the way they had fought the French and the Chinese had fought their revolutionary wars. Ho and Le Duan opted for a third course, which in most respects was a compromise between two extremes.*

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acquiring political power. Reversing his 1956 position, Le Duan asserted that the Soviet theses did not apply to South Vietnam.

25X1  indicate that the Politburo spent the next two years working out the strategy for the southern struggle and the amount of support the North should contribute. What was finally agreed upon was a cautious mix of political action and "armed struggle" at the level of guerrilla warfare, backed by limited logistic and manpower support from the North. Le Duan spent most of these two years in the South preparing the apparatus for an intensified conflict. He evidently played a direct role in forming the South Vietnam National Liberation Front in December 1960; its manifesto incorporated verbatim whole passages from his September 1960 report to the Third Party Congress in Hanoi.

By the end of 1960, Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan apparently were satisfied that the insurgency in the South was on the right track and that they could safely turn their attention to economic development of the North. Over the next two years the Politburo held several plenums on North Vietnam's economy, and Le Duan spoke frequently on problems of industrialization, which seemed now to be his chief area of concern and interest. Relations with the USSR warmed, Truong Chinh stayed out of the limelight, and in March 1961, the hawkish General Nguyen Chi Thanh was quietly transferred to a position in rural affairs.

The lull in attention to the South ended in the spring of 1963, when the Politburo perceived that the Diem regime was on the verge of crumbling and decided that the time had come to make contingency plans for a military take-over. According to a captured document, Hanoi then reached the conclusion that it would have to send NVA forces South to ensure a decisive victory.

Le Duan once again signaled the change in a speech delivered in March 1963. The speech so closely followed the Chinese line on use of violence in revolutionary situations that it was broadcast by Radio Peking. As before, however, there was delay in acting. General Giap, backed this time by Khrushchev, argued that overt North Vietnamese intervention would invite US retaliation. (Khrushchev did, in fact, cut back Soviet military support in the spring of 1964.) General Nguyen Chi Thanh, back in Ho's good graces and now commander of all Communist forces in the South, believed with the Chinese that the North should quickly send enough of its own troops south so that ARVN could be defeated before the US had a chance to intervene effectively.

The final decision to send NVA forces South, made at the 9th Plenum in December 1963, mixed boldness with caution. Large-scale support—about

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six NVA infantry divisions—was planned, but the Politburo (including Le Duan, according to a captured document) did not believe that the US would introduce ground forces, and thus had no sense of urgency. NVA combat units were formed, trained, and dispatched South so deliberately and cautiously that they were not in position to fight until mid-1965. By then the US had entered the ground war, and the Communists had lost their chance for a quick victory.

#### On Strategy Against Combined US and GVN Forces, After 1965

25X1 [redacted] strongly suggest that Le Duan was the chief architect of North Vietnam's strategy in the next stage of the war. It was apparent to Le Duan that the war no longer could be won by military means alone. His idea [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] was to fight hard for two or three years to soften up the US (particularly US public opinion) and then to negotiate a favorable settlement of the war from a position of military/psychological strength. Basically, it was the same strategy that had been used successfully against the French. Le Duan called it a strategy of "fighting and negotiating."

25X1 The strategy was immediately opposed by Peking and Moscow, for different reasons, and Le Duan took issue with both allies. [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] he viewed the Chinese as extremists who wanted Hanoi to tie down US forces by dragging out the war indefinitely, and who dismissed any possibility of negotiations in the future. In a speech published in August 1966, Le Duan attacked basic Maoist principles of warfare, which had been spelled out—apparently largely for Vietnamese benefit—in an article by Lin Piao. Le Duan took two of Mao's points—fight defensively when the enemy is stronger, and do not risk losses by pitting weak units against strong—and turned them around. He asserted that the Vietnamese Communists were on the offensive and had been throughout the war, and had "invented" methods that enabled them, even with a weak force (a ratio of "one to 10, or more") to overpower a stronger enemy force. Le Duan was justifying two basic elements of his strategy: to maintain the option of negotiating, which can be done only from an offensive position; and to be prepared to strike military blows, even when one's forces are weaker, for psychological effect. The Tet 1968 offensive launched 19 months later was based on these premises.

25X1 Soviet advice to negotiate an end to the war immediately was rejected by Le Duan in 1966. He argued [redacted] the US was not yet as war-weary as the French were at the time of Dien Bien Phu. In a speech given at the 23rd CPSU Congress in Moscow in April 1966, he carefully pointed out that the time was not ripe for negotiations.

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[redacted] the Politburo met in the fall of 1966 and, over the objections of Truong Chinh and General Nguyen Chi Thanh, adopted a contingency plan for stepped-up military action that would lead to negotiations. [redacted] Hanoi sought and readily obtained Moscow's support for the plan, but that Le Duan was unable to get Chinese approval. The Politburo went ahead with contingency planning despite the reported opposition of the Chinese. General Thanh's death, on July 7, 1967, may have removed one obstacle to the plan, for specific planning at COSVN headquarters for the Tet Offensive began soon after he died. The 1968 Tet offensive consisted of surprise attacks on nearly every city and military base in South Vietnam. Since in most battles the attacking forces were weaker than defending forces, no lasting military gains were possible. The boldness of the stroke, however, did lead to a dramatic rise in anti-war sentiment in the US, but not enough to force the US to withdraw on Hanoi's terms. So a second country-wide offensive was launched on May 5, 1968. Its failure and the failure of two subsequent country-wide offensives compelled the Politburo to abandon the Le Duan strategy in April 1969 and to retreat to the concept of "protracted war" that Truong Chinh and the Chinese had been advocating all along.

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The failures almost certainly eroded Le Duan's leadership authority for a while. [redacted] senior COSVN commanders were openly complaining as early as the summer of 1968 that the cost of the offensives was not worth the gains. (Le Duan reportedly visited COSVN headquarters in June 1968 to argue in person for continuation of his strategy.) The publication that September of a major speech by Truong Chinh criticizing the big-offensive strategy implied that the Politburo (and Ho Chi Minh) were dissatisfied with Le Duan's direction of the war.

But after Ho Chi Minh's death in September 1969, Le Duan managed to reassert his authority. A major policy statement published in February 1970, and his subsequent war policies, demonstrated that his faith in the basic validity of his approach had not been shaken by the need to retreat in 1969.

In his 1970 article he again rejected Maoist military tactics and reiterated his concepts of strategy and war goals. For example:

- **Le Duan:** Our general theory of warfare is to maintain steady offensive pressure, with occasional leaps forward, even though the enemy is superior in troop strength and equipment. **Mao:** Fight the war in slow stages, and do not risk going on the strategic offensive until the military balance of forces has tipped in your favor.
- **Le Duan:** It is our strategy to attack the enemy on all fronts. **Mao:** Never disperse your forces. Concentrate superior forces for every battle and destroy enemy units one by one.

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- **Le Duan:** We attack the enemy anytime and anywhere, when he is weak and uncovered and even when he is strong and on guard. **Mao:** Strike the enemy only when he is weak and off guard.

- **Le Duan:** In a passage underlined for emphasis, Le Duan claimed that the Vietnamese have learned the military art of using a small force to fight a great force. **Mao:** In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (2,3,4, and sometimes even 5 or 6 times the enemy's strength.)

On negotiations, Le Duan was flexible. "To take advantage of the enemy's internal contradictions...our Party, on the basis of holding fast to principles, has flexibly and wisely employed various strategies." He cited approvingly past occasions when the party had made "principled compromises" in dealing with the French.

Le Duan's 1970 article laid the doctrinal basis for the 1972 Easter offensive and its aftermath, the January 1973 cease-fire. As of early 1974, it was Communist strategy to refrain from major military action, except to defend territory already under Communist control, and, instead, to turn to "political struggle." But GVN-controlled territory is fairly stable politically and also well-policed. With little opportunity for effective subversion a "political struggle" policy, in effect, means acquiescence of the status quo.

#### **Le Duan vs. Truong Chinh on Building the North**

Le Duan's views on domestic policy are shaped by his vision of creating a modern industrialized country in a brief period of time. In March 1973 he wrote that "the greatest scientific and technological revolution in mankind's history is now in full swing over the world," and expressed his determination to take full advantage of the opportunity to share in these benefits. He said, "We will not spare any effort or money in this field, which plays the most decisive role...in the present era."

Le Duan's pragmatic and energetic proposals for building a strong state are not always enthusiastically received by others in the leadership. Some fear that economic development may be achieved only at the expense of traditional Marxist goals and lead to a resurgence of "capitalist and bourgeois tendencies."

Debates on domestic policies, like those on war policies, have been sharp and polemical. The key issues in dispute show up most clearly when

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the writings of Le Duan and Truong Chinh, long the principal spokesman for the doctrinaire wing, are compared:\*

*\*Le Duan's economic and ideological views—which have been consistent over time—have been set down at length in writings and speeches published since he became First Secretary in 1960. His views are comprehensively spelled out in three statements issued since 1968:*

- *a speech given June 1968 in Nam Ha Province, published in the August 1968 issue of Hoc Tap*
- *a "state of the nation" report in February 1970.*
- *an article in the March 1973 Hoc Tap describing the kinds of cadres and party and government organizations needed in the "new era" of postwar construction.*

*Truong Chinh's ideological views are comprehensively stated in his 1968 speech, "Let Us Be Grateful to Karl Marx and Follow the Path Followed by Him." The speech was summarized in the same August 1968 issue of Hoc Tap that published Le Duan's Nam Ha speech. Chinh's speech, a long one, was broadcast in full on September 16-20, 1968, and apparently recirculated, at least to Party members, in 1970; as recently as August 1970 Party members were being instructed to study it.*

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### The Three Revolutions

The “three revolutions”—“the revolution in production relations, the revolution in technology, and the revolution in ideology and culture”—is a slogan that has been popular in Vietnam since at least 1961. The slogan expresses, somewhat clumsily, the same idea embodied in the Chinese slogan “Red and expert.”

It has been standard practice for Le Duan, especially since 1970, to word the slogan in a way that singled out technical expertise as the most important aspect. For example, he says that the only way to build socialism is by “successfully carrying out the three revolutions, of which the technical revolution is the key.” (Le Duan’s underlining) (1970).

The general line of building socialism in the North consists of “strengthening dictatorship toward the people’s enemy, repressing counter-revolutionaries, maintaining security and order...and carrying out the following three revolutions: the revolution in production relations, technical revolution, and ideological and cultural revolution.” In the ensuing discussion of the “three revolutions” Truong Chinh typically gives more extended treatment and emphasis to the third revolution, that of ideology and culture. (1968)

### The Struggle Between the Capitalist and the Socialist Road

The struggle between the two roads is primarily a problem of economic production. “Only” by expanding production through the three revolutions—of which the technical revolution is the main one—can the conditions that foster capitalism be eliminated. “Carrying out the three revolutions...represents the basic content of the class struggle.” (1970)

“The struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road is still going on to determine definitely who will defeat whom.... This is a protracted, hard, and complicated struggle. Such movements as the movement to suppress counter-revolutionaries...are the content of this struggle.” (1968)

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### Lenin on "Building Socialism"

Praises Lenin for having boldly changed from a policy of war communism to the New Economic Policy in 1921. Lenin, he said, "had to exert immense effort to persuade communists who were imbued with revolutionary enthusiasm but unaware of economic laws" that "the New Economic Policy was not a policy of restoring capitalism but the only possible single policy for the USSR at that time." (1970) (similar reference to Lenin's NEP was made in 1968)

Quotes Lenin to the effect that the main task of a revolutionary regime *after* acquiring power is to prevent the resurgence of capitalism. (1968)

### On Cooperative Farming

Cautions that it is absolutely essential under present backward conditions to preserve the individual peasant economy, which provides peasants with 40 percent of their income, and is the system under which 5 million pigs are raised.

Twice Le Duan states that it is party policy not to do anything that "restricts" the sideline economic activities of peasants. Cadres should even help promote family farming by seeing that peasants get seed and tools, and should not find this a "frightening" trend. (1968)

Although it is very important to eliminate capitalist elements, this is not the crucial thing; it is imperative that labor and materials are "managed so as to expand production most rapidly." (1970)

"The idea that any method of production that increases the social product is acceptable is not the view of the working class and the Party.... We must produce in accordance with socialist collectivization." (speech published in January 29-30, 1969 *Nhan Dan*)

"The spontaneous capitalist character of small producers is appearing again and must be repressed." "The management of land under collective ownership has run into deviations and errors," and we must strengthen the collective economy in all possible ways. (1968)

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### On Repression

Old cadres, trained in revolutionary techniques, now often rely on coercive measures to get things done. "This is not right." (1970)

"Easing vigilance against...counter-revolutionary forces...represents a dangerous rightist error. However,...if we are only concerned with quelling (these forces) while losing sight of the essential task of...carrying out the three revolutions, we would commit a serious error." (1970)

It is "necessary to use violence against counter-revolutionaries and exploiters who refuse to submit to reform." We must strengthen "the repressive apparatus." (1968)

### On Revolutionary Enthusiasm

"Without revolutionary enthusiasm, there can be no revolutionary acts. But with only revolutionary enthusiasm, the most we can do is eliminate the old; we cannot build a new society." (1970)

"Revolutionary enthusiasm is very important. But if we think that we can build socialism with...our enthusiasm alone and if we disregard all objective laws and economic facts which are sometimes cruel and hard, we are grossly mistaken." (1970)

"The most zealous elements" make the best party members. (1968)

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### On Ideology

"But something which deserves our attention is that no small number of our cadre often merely emphasize ideological indoctrination and view that as the only and the best measure for resolving every problem. It is clear that this method of operation cannot meet the requirements of production." (1968)

"If we simply acquiesce to generalized ideological appeals...we will be unable to complete the great task of building socialism." (1968)

Cadres are already imbued with enough zeal and enthusiasm. The main danger now lies in the fact that "many" party officials, at all levels, "have substituted general ideological and political tasks...for the organizational task." (1970)

Formerly, the party relied heavily on propaganda to get things done, but now we should use modern methods of management. "However, most of our cadres do not yet know or are still unfamiliar with this fact." (1970)

It has "become a way of life" with some people to talk incessantly about ideology in a loose way that ignores practical organizational problems. "This is an inherent sickness found in the bourgeois intellectuals and old-fashioned Confucianist school teachers." [This could be a slap at Truong Chinh, who is the only senior Politburo member to have received a classical Chinese (i.e., Confucianist) education.] (1973)

The party must be built "both ideologically and organizationally." He stresses the importance of "heightening the political and ideological standards of cadres and party members and of enhancing their revolutionary virtues." "However, it is regrettable that up to now, for one or another reason, our tasks of theoretical and ideological struggle still have many shortcomings." The solution Truong Chinh recommends is to intensify ideological indoctrination "to guard against the influences of revisionism and dogmatism." (1968)

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### Criteria for Selecting Party Cadres

Previously, cadres had to know how to lead revolutionary struggles, how to operate clandestinely, how to lead guerrilla warfare. Today, in the era of construction, problems are different. Now, in order to lead economic development, party officials "must know how to manage the economy and must study science and technology." Today, criteria for judging performance are different: "We cannot recognize any party organization...as good, as long as its production is slow." (1968)

The old guard must be replaced by men who have the energy, health, know-how and managerial skills required in this "new era." Thus:

Experience acquired in decades of revolutionary party work is "valuable;...however, this definitely cannot compensate for what we need most badly—the ability to organize economic development." (1970)

The key party mission today is the "technical revolution," and this will be the "only" criterion by which party members are judged. (1973)

"We have often heard abstract and fuzzy talk about 'class stand and class ethics.'" There is no need to be unclear, because the issue is simple. In the past, one's class stand was manifested by revolutionary activities. Today, in the North, class stand is manifested mainly by efforts to create modern industry and agriculture. (1973)

"The task of party-building must be closely tied to mass revolutionary movements. New cadres must be selected on the basis of their revolutionary background.... On the one hand, look for the most zealous, most select elements of the working class and make them party members. On the other hand, draw into the party outstanding elements of the laboring masses who have emerged in the long and arduous struggle against imperialist aggressors.... Simultaneously with the admission of new party members, quickly expel from the party the provocateurs, the antiparty elements, the factionalists, and those who are politically backward, as well as those poorly qualified, party-wise." [Says nothing about technical or managerial expertise and experience] (1968)

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#### IV. Le Duan's Position Since Ho Chi Minh's Death

Le Duan appears to have strengthened his political position considerably since Ho Chi Minh died in 1969. He was even then "first among equals"; now the gap has widened between him and his potential rivals on the Politburo. Le Duan's decisions do not always command unanimous support, but he seems strong enough to make his views prevail. There is a similarity in the rise of Le Duan and that of Brezhnev in the Soviet Union. Neither is a figure who rules through the force of his personality, but both, after somewhat shaky starts, have gradually consolidated control so that they now effectively lead their respective Politburos.

For a few months after Ho's death in September 1969, it was unclear who was more powerful, Le Duan or his chief rival Truong Chinh. In fact, during that period VWP policy guidelines seemed to be inspired more by Truong Chinh's ideas than by Le Duan's. Truong Chinh set out his thoughts in a long speech in mid-1968 (the exact date was never clear) that was published in full in September. The speech was promptly hailed by Hanoi as "a new contribution to the treasury of theoretical works on the Vietnamese revolution," attesting to its authoritative character. It was a programmatic speech calling for greater commitment to ideological goals in the North, and in the South for a shift from the big offensives espoused by Le Duan to a more orthodox "protracted war." The speech is generally considered to have been the basis for the VWP decision in the spring of 1969 to reduce the level of fighting so as to test the new US administration and at the same time to get a breathing spell. This long-overdue retreat was almost certainly adopted with Le Duan's approval—in February 1970 he publicly endorsed the principle of sometimes shifting to the defensive to gain time. Nevertheless, it was Truong Chinh's name, not his, that was associated with originating the policy of retrenchment.

Uncertainty over Le Duan's status increased late in 1969 when, after delivering the funeral oration for Ho Chi Minh, he went into seclusion for five months, making only one routine public appearance in October. Truong Chinh, in contrast, remained publicly active, and made a few speeches on ideological issues. Understandably, Western observers began speculating that Truong Chinh was winning a power struggle.

That theory became untenable in February 1970 when Le Duan showed up to give an important speech on the occasion of the party's 40th

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anniversary and *Nhan Dan* published a long statement\* by him spelling out the party line on strategy and domestic policies. That article firmly established Le Duan's primacy. It was immediately given nearly the same authoritative standing as Ho Chi Minh's writings. A *Nhan Dan* editorial described the article as an important basic document that correctly set forth "the party's lines and policies," and all party cadres were instructed to study it. Its emphasis was on a flexible strategy toward the South and a pragmatic approach to economic development at home. In setting forth these broad new party guidelines, the article clearly was intended to put Le Duan's own stamp (and his gloss as well) on the strategy outlined in Truong Chinh's 1968 speech. As such, it was a vigorous assertion of Le Duan's leadership.

In subsequent months several leaders found occasion to affirm their loyalty to Le Duan. On May 3, 1970, Truong Chinh himself instructed 500 senior cadres attending a seminar held to study the February article to "unite around the Central Committee which is headed by Le Duan." Shortly after that, Foreign Minister and Politburo member Nguyen Duy Trinh privately told a visiting foreigner that Le Duan's stature was far above Truong Chinh's. The foreign minister was quoted as saying that Le Duan was popular and flexible, while Chinh was considered dogmatic and pro-Chinese. Premier Pham Van Dong in his annual National Day speech, given on August 31, 1970, quoted only Le Duan and Ho. Dong confirmed Le Duan's authority in the area of economic development—the main theme of the speech—by saying that "in his February article...Comrade Le Duan already made clear the party's line concerning...industrialization."

#### **Le Duan Encounters Resistance, February to August 1970**

Although Le Duan clearly had nailed down his claim to the number-one spot by February 1970, for several months expressions of support for Truong Chinh and some of his 1968 views indicated that Duan was still facing opposition powerful enough to introduce sour notes in the propaganda. The public discussion dealt only with domestic issues, but it seems likely that long-term strategy toward the South—the most crucial problem facing North Vietnam in the spring of 1970—was the chief issue.

*\*On February 14, 1970 the normally four-page Nhan Dan published an extraordinary 12-page edition devoted to Le Duan's article, entitled "Under the Glorious Party Banner, for Independence, Freedom, and Socialism, Let Us Advance New Victories."*

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In mid-1968 a public debate had been conducted on domestic matters (and only on them) while the Politburo in fact was preoccupied with a heated argument over whether to continue the big offensives strategy.\* In brief, the evidence suggests that in mid-1968 Truong Chinh was calling for a return to the classic people's war doctrine, arguing that big offensives had proved "adventurous" and too costly. Le Duan defended the big-offensive strategy. With Ho Chi Minh mediating, it was apparently decided to launch two additional coordinated country-wide offensives (August-September 1968 and March 1969). In April 1969, after these offensives also had failed to achieve satisfactory gains, the Politburo adopted the Truong Chinh line.

The classic strategy to which Communist forces then returned was the cautious and defensive stance that people's war doctrine prescribes for combat with a militarily superior enemy. It was essentially designed to conserve manpower so that the Communists could, if necessary, fight for a long time. The Politburo was still committed to this course in the spring of 1970, when Le Duan again asserted his primacy. In his February 1970 article, Le Duan approved the retrenchment strategy—as a temporary expedient. He urged that Hanoi retain its flexibility and be ready to seize promising opportunities of any kind: either to resume the offensive, or to make "principled compromises" with the enemy under certain circumstances.

At that point, the Politburo seems to have been wary of giving Le Duan the authority to move in one of these directions. On the one hand, it had had enough of "adventurous" offensives for the time being, but on the other, it probably saw no advantage in making concessions. Without Ho Chi Minh around to mediate, it was not surprising that Le Duan apparently had trouble selling his strategic views.

Whatever the issue, he was certainly having trouble convincing his colleagues to accept his recommendations. His own February article acknowledged the existence of "differences in view" in the collective leadership, and said that "some comrades must learn to make concessions." It is significant that the Hanoi leadership as a collective body withheld public affirmation for Le Duan's program through most of 1970. During that

*\*The August 1968 issue of Hoc Tap published a speech on domestic problems by Le Duan—his only major public statement of the year—which soundly criticized the doctrinaire stand being taken by Truong Chinh on such issues as qualification of party members and farm cooperativization.*

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period, the program was not endorsed in part or in whole by a Central Committee communique, Politburo resolution, or Secretariat directive.

Not only did Le Duan fail to get a clear endorsement from his peers, but two Politburo resolutions issued in March and one in August actually ran against the grain of his February article. In March, the Politburo issued resolutions on improving the quality of party members and on strengthening cooperative management of farms. In their emphasis on ideological purity, both echoed Truong Chinh's 1968 speech, and both conspicuously failed to pick up Le Duan's standard emphasis on practical results and on the importance of technical expertise over ideological purity.

Treatment of this so-called "Red and expert" issue became a measure of support for Le Duan's position. With typical pragmatism, Le Duan has generally treated technical expertise as more important than ideology, but his February 1970 article was exceptionally categorical. It stated flatly that of the three revolutions (the revolution in production relations, the revolution in technology, and the revolution in ideology and culture), "the technological revolution is the main one." The slogan, which appeared repeatedly in his article in this form and was even underlined several times for emphasis, thereafter appeared routinely in articles and editorials in the party press. The two Politburo resolutions of March 1970, however, withheld endorsement of Le Duan's formula, by mentioning merely "the three revolutions" without indicating that one aspect had priority over another.

Le Duan apparently was running into substantial opposition in August 1970, when a Politburo resolution came out instructing cadres to study both the 1968 Truong Chinh and the 1970 Le Duan statements. Party officials almost certainly interpreted this as a sign that pressure was being put on Le Duan to make concessions to those who shared Truong Chinh's more fundamentalist philosophy.

Another important clue that Truong Chinh's standing vis-a-vis Le Duan remained strong in that period surfaced in the treatment given the two in

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official histories published at the time.\* As in histories before Ho's death, both men continued to be given more or less equal attention in passages describing their roles in the party's early history. After August 1970, Truong Chinh's name rarely appeared in historical reviews and attention to Ho Chi Minh himself diminished, leaving Le Duan the paramount figure in early party history.

In sum, there were enough mixed signals in propaganda as of August 1970 to conclude that Le Duan's power position was less firm than he desired. Nothing in the propaganda indicated that his hold on the number-one spot in the VWP party structure was in doubt, but it appeared that he was having difficulty enlarging his authority and winning over colleagues to his policy viewpoints.

#### **Le Duan Acquires More Power and Silences the Opposition After August 1970**

A review of political events in the last third of 1970 suggests that late in the summer Le Duan did manage to strengthen his position. Probably the immediate pressing issue he was able to exploit was the mounting GVN/US military threat to Communist logistic bases in Laos. In any event, from the autumn of 1970 through the beginning of 1974, war strategy and policy pronouncements carried Le Duan's stamp and propaganda comments on him were more adulatory. Central Committee documents, instead of undercutting him, reinforced his authority. What political opposition persisted was not clearly defined.

Military developments in the late summer of 1970 were forcing the Politburo to make a major decision on how to respond to the threatened

*\*Three histories were published in 1970: a history of the party (January 1970), a new biography of Ho Chi Minh (May 1970), and "The August Revolution (1945)" (August 1970). The January history, the most comprehensive of the three, followed the traditional party line in presenting a fairly balanced treatment of Duan and Chinh. It noted that Le Duan rose to the standing committee of the ICP Central Committee in 1939, shortly before going to jail. Truong Chinh then became provisional secretary-general in 1940, helped build up the Viet Minh, and, with Ho, led the party to victory against the French. The January history, like previous ones, took a significant slap at Truong Chinh by referring to land reform errors in 1956.*

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allied invasion of Laos. A few months earlier, allied forces had invaded all Communist bases in Cambodia, and Communist forces retreated in confusion. By late summer 1970, Hanoi realized from the logic of the situation (and probably from agent reports as well) that the allied command was planning to follow up with a massive invasion of Laos.

The Politburo had a choice to make. It could continue the strategy of "protracted war"—falling back when strongly attacked, encouraging the enemy to extend his lines of communication, and then moving to inflict heavy losses on him. After the enemy has withdrawn, friendly (Communist) forces would then rebuild their bases and resume the slow process of building up greater military strength, in preparation for an ultimate confrontation after the balance of forces had tipped in their favor. It was recognized that this process probably would take many years.

The strategy actually adopted was much more daring and aggressive. It was plainly devised by Le Duan, who once before (1966-1967) had shown little patience with "protracted war" doctrine as a long-term policy. In high-level debates, Le Duan argued successfully for adoption of the "fighting and negotiating" strategy that became firmly identified with his name. The crux of the strategy was to strike hard military blows so as to be in a position of strength during peace negotiations.

The final decision to launch another big military/psychological offensive in 1972 was probably reached at the 19th Central Committee Plenum\* convened about December 1970. The Hanoi leadership apparently decided to resist the coming allied invasion with all possible force (elements of 13 divisions were used) and, if all went well, to follow up with preparations to launch a large country-wide offensive of its own.

The allied operation, Lam Son 719, failed to achieve its objectives and was successfully thrown back in March 1971. On March 27, 1971, just after the operation ended, Le Duan went to Moscow where he stayed 43 days, arguing successfully for Soviet support of Hanoi's own plans for its offensive. As with previous offensives launched against a militarily superior force, the

*\*The communique of this crucial Plenum picked up Le Duan's formula on "the three revolutions" in the North ("the technical revolution is the main one")—the first known instance a collectively approved Central Committee document used this slogan. This, and other signs, indicated that Le Duan was in firm control at the Plenum.*

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aim of the Easter 1972 offensive was as much psychological as military. The purpose was to break ARVN'S resolve to keep fighting and to induce a demoralized Saigon government to negotiate an end to the war on Communist terms, namely, to accept a coalition government dominated by Communists. It was the same fight-to-compel-negotiations strategy Le Duan had pursued, with only partial success, in the big offensives of 1968 and early 1969.

When the 1972 offensive lost momentum in September 1972, Moscow and Peking—concerned that the war was interfering with their separate efforts to develop a detente relationship with the US—urged Hanoi to come to terms with the Saigon government. As a result, the collective Politburo made political concessions it had been unwilling to consider at the time the offensive was first planned—a time when the Vietnam war was still politically backed by Peking. Le Duan, as party leader, must have approved the final cease-fire arrangements, but some Vietnamese leaders reportedly opposed any new concessions. The vacillation in Hanoi between October 1972 and January 1973 over signing the agreement suggests that Le Duan had difficulty getting the support of the Politburo for the concessions.

Hanoi Radio went out of its way immediately after the signing of the cease-fire agreement to describe Le Duan in an exceptionally effusive way, apparently to scotch any thought that his authority was in jeopardy. In reporting on a celebration of Tet 1973 attended by Le Duan, Truong Chinh, and others, Hanoi Radio said that those who attended “together with Comrade Truong Chinh wished...Comrade Le Duan good health so that he may lead the party and state in achieving ever greater victories.”\* The account not only put Truong Chinh in his place, but, more important, showed that Le Duan dominated direction of the state as well as the party—an unusual situation inasmuch as Le Duan holds no important position in the state apparatus.

Despite this expression of public confidence in Le Duan, his endorsement of concessions almost certainly strained Politburo unity, for it implied that Hanoi was willing to admit the possibility that the division of Vietnam

*\*A year later, during Tet 1974 festivities, Hanoi Radio again gave Le Duan unusually adulatory attention, reporting that a group of people to whom he paid a Tet visit greeted him as “venerated and beloved Uncle Le Duan.” This kind of accolade hitherto had been reserved for Ho Chi Minh.*

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into two countries would be perpetuated. This prospect was anathema to die-hards in the leadership, and Le Duan himself probably was unhappy about it. One positive note from his point of view was the opportunity the cease-fire gave him to push economic development and modernization in the North. This had long been a subject dear to his heart, and Le Duan wasted no time announcing plans for postwar development.\* A prominent feature was a comprehensive plan to reshape the party at all levels, possibly including the Central Committee, in a mold of his own choosing. A Politburo Resolution—on which Le Duan published a lengthy exegesis—was issued in February 1973. It set out guidelines for changing the Party apparatus so that it would be better prepared to direct the economic and technical revolution that Le Duan envisaged in the “new era” ahead. One basic precept was that tired old revolutionaries should be replaced by vigorous managerial and technically oriented people. Le Duan had argued before, notably in his February 1970 article, that personnel changes were overdue. Numerous articles touching on aspects of this theme and quoting one or both of the 1970 and 1973 Le Duan articles appeared in North Vietnamese media after February 1973.

The North Vietnamese media also bolstered Le Duan's position relative to his colleagues by rewriting an early period of party history so as to give him, rather than Ho Chi Minh and Truong Chinh, major credit for setting the line on “armed struggle” that was followed in the three decades since 1940. A series of articles played up the importance of the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee, convened in November 1939 near Saigon, and attended by Le Duan and a few other leaders (now all dead). The articles, published in the autumn of 1972, asserted that the 6th Plenum, rather than the 8th Plenum attended by Ho Chi Minh and Truong Chinh in 1941, set the party on its wartime course. Hitherto, party histories had invariably treated the 8th Plenum as the “historic” occasion when the party firmly embarked on its revolutionary course.

#### **The Status of Truong Chinh**

In past years, when Le Duan gained political strength, Truong Chinh tended to fade into the background, and vice versa. This pattern has held true since August 1970.

*\*Progress on this front has been slow, probably because of the persistence of uncertainties in the military situation. These uncertainties have strengthened VWP elements opposed to making a wholesale shift to a peace-time footing until political prospects in the South look better.*

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Truong Chinh has ceased to be identified with major policies, either those actually adopted or those espoused by the regime. His 1968 speech—his last important contribution to policy—has not been mentioned in the Hanoi press since August 1970. Chinh did make one long speech in December 1971 at a Vietnam Fatherland Front meeting, but it does not appear to have been a major one. Although it was mainly a pep talk designed to rally popular and international support for the new phase of the war the Communists were about to initiate, Truong Chinh made his first capitulation on the “Red and expert” issue, acknowledging that the aim of socialism in the North was “to achieve the three revolutions—of which the technical revolution is the key.”

An early sign that Truong Chinh's position in the power structure was insecure was his absence from public view from October 26, 1970 to January 26, 1971. This was unusual for Truong Chinh; his ceremonial posts require him to carry a heavy schedule of public speaking, receiving foreign delegations, and so forth. Truong Chinh may have been abroad for medical attention during at least part of his absence; on January 11, 1971, the East German radio made a brief and unusual announcement that Chinh was there taking a rest cure. In any case, it appears that Truong Chinh missed the crucial 19th Plenum, which is reliably reported to have been held in December 1970. (Hanoi held up announcement of the plenum until February 2, 1971; such announcements are often not made for a month or more after the event.) Another Politburo member who apparently missed the plenum was Chinese specialist Hoang Van Hoan, a long-time associate of Truong Chinh. Hoan, who was traveling in Europe in the autumn of 1970, did not return to Hanoi until December 30, 1970. Whatever the precise facts of their whereabouts and the timing of the Plenum, Hanoi apparently was willing to give the impression that the presence of these two Politburo members was not necessary at key leadership deliberations.

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Shortly after the Easter 1972 offensive began, Truong Chinh told a [redacted] “events have passed me by.” This remark was interpreted [redacted] to mean that his views on the offensive had been ignored.

Truong Chinh continued to make frequent routine public appearances during the rest of 1972 and 1973. He made one trip abroad, to Moscow in December 1972, but the highest ranking official he met was Suslov, an influential party secretary but not one of the “troika.” Occasionally Chinh is still quoted in the media, but not on really major matters. In general, Truong Chinh's activities and speeches show that his post-1970 role has been to serve the propaganda purposes of the regime, not to initiate or influence policy.

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### Le Duan's Strengths

In the competitive atmosphere that characterizes high-level politics in Communist regimes such as North Vietnam, it takes strong and astute men to survive at the top. Le Duan, although lacking the oracular authority of Ho Chi Minh, seems to have the necessary strength to survive. He has:

- the mantle of Ho Chi Minh's approval;
- a long tenure at or near the top;
- solid qualities of intellect and leadership, which seem to command respect and loyalty in the VWP apparatus;
- an unblemished party record, unlike some of his colleagues;
- enough proteges and allies in the power structure to give him majority support.

How and when Le Duan earned Ho Chi Minh's esteem is something of a mystery. According to party history, the two did not meet until after World War II. Even then, for the 12 years that Le Duan was party boss in the South their personal contacts were limited to Le Duan's infrequent visits to Ho Chi Minh's headquarters in the North. Le Duan must have made a good impression, for when the first postwar Central Committee was formed in 1951, he was given the number-three position, immediately below Secretary General Truong Chinh.

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In 1957, Ho Chi Minh, disenchanted with Truong Chinh's disastrous handling of land reform and wishing to develop a more aggressive policy toward the South, summoned Le Duan north and gave him his first postwar job at the national level. It could not have been easy going for Le Duan at first. Although listed ahead of the now demoted Truong Chinh in protocol appearances, Le Duan was not given a formal title to enhance his status and, moreover, had to spend much of his time in the South preparing the apparatus for the new war effort. (The new course did not get fully launched until 1960.) While Le Duan was diverted to this task, Truong Chinh was able to make a strong comeback. In 1958 and 1959, Chinh again became regime spokesman on land reform and sharply criticized "rightists" and "revisionists" in the areas of ideology and culture. Chinh apparently retained a seat on the Secretariat and was named (over General Giap, for one) senior vice premier, a position that automatically made him acting premier when Pham Van Dong was out of the country or ailing.

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Such signs of preferment ended abruptly for Truong Chinh in September 1960 at a party congress held, in part, to confirm Le Duan as First Secretary. Chinh was dropped from the executive side of government and from the Secretariat in a reshuffle that left him chairman of the legislature, a prestige job carrying no responsibility. He did, however, retain his number-three spot on the Politburo.

Le Duan, now formally chief party executive, gave the major political report at the congress, while Truong Chinh gave only a minor report on ideology. By conferring the title "First Secretary" on Le Duan, Ho Chi Minh showed that he had reached a firm decision to groom Duan to succeed him as party leader; in 1960 "First Secretary" was the title held by party bosses in most Communist states. In reserving the rarefied position of Party Chairman for himself, Ho Chi Minh was only following Mao Tse-tung's special example, and He probably intended to let the position lapse on his death. In



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Although Le Duan now held the title of First Secretary, he was still little known among party officials. Steps, almost certainly approved by Ho Chi Minh, were therefore taken to enhance Le Duan's party prestige. His works were quoted more than those of any leader except Ho, and the party press gave rave reviews to some of Le Duan's books, a practice not usually accorded anyone else except Ho. For example, a book by Le Duan on the peasant problem (Truong Chinh's long-time specialty) was praised in the January 26, 1965 *Nhan Dan* as a "great work" and an "important contribution to the revolutionary dialectic." The review took special note of Le Duan's leadership qualifications by observing that he had participated in the "leadership" of the party since its inception, had done extensive work in all three regions of Vietnam, and had successfully applied basic Communist principles to actual conditions in Vietnam.

Again, the June 1969 issue of *Hoc Tap* described a book by Le Duan on the economy as "a valuable theoretical and practical book on developing the socialist economy in North Vietnam." By asserting that Le Duan's precepts are "practical" as well as "theoretical," the reviewer seemed to be pointing up the limitations of Truong Chinh, who is known chiefly as a theoretician and whose famous 1968 speech was praised only for making a "theoretical" contribution.

Le Duan acquired more than just the trappings of power in 1960. Ho Chi Minh allowed him to name his men to key positions and gave him a virtually free hand in determining policy toward the South. In personnel matters, for example, besides edging Truong Chinh away from center stage,

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Le Duan was able to place two colleagues from the South (Pham Hung and Le Duc Tho) on both the Politburo and the Secretariat.

25X1 [redacted] most of the time Le Duan has been the architect of North Vietnam's war policy. At the first major COSVN conference held in early 1966 after the US entered the ground war, the VWP representative said he was speaking on behalf of Le Duan; the major report presented was a letter written by Le Duan; and the COSVN commander expressed satisfaction that, in Hanoi, his conduct of the war had the full support of "Comrade Secretary," meaning Le Duan. Ho Chi Minh's name came up only in a general propaganda context. [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] [redacted] said that "Ho Chi Minh tended to equivocate but left everything to Le Duan"—probably an accurate statement at that time.

By the time Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, Le Duan had had years of opportunity to use the party's formidable resources for indoctrination—secret party documents and political lectures as well as public media—to his advantage. He was able both to enhance his own stature and also subtly to weaken the political standing of potential rivals. The cumulative effect of his skillful indoctrination [redacted]

25X1 [redacted]

political reports that he had made a mistake or incurred Ho's displeasure were never allowed to circulate. By contrast, political officers reportedly have freely referred to Truong Chinh's tendency to be inflexible and too pro-Chinese, and both General Giap and Premier Dong came under criticism early in the war for counseling caution when Ho Chi Minh (and Le Duan) wanted to enlarge the North's war commitment.

#### Le Duan's Weaknesses

Although Le Duan's political assets are formidable, there are some liabilities in his position.

As already noted, he has less than a charismatic personality and must therefore work harder, and perhaps make more compromises than Ho Chi Minh in order to retain control. His basic policies have prevailed in the past two years, indicating that he has the majority of the power structure with him, and probably commands personal loyalty from men like Le Duc Tho who owe their rise to Le Duan. The evidence also suggests, however, that he must contend with a certain amount of stubborn opposition.

The opposition at present apparently lies mainly on Le Duan's left flank, where he seems to be vulnerable as a result of the political concessions he made to reach the cease-fire agreement. The evidence tenuously suggests that opposition is centered in the army and the southern Communist apparatus.

The result presumably is a divided Politburo, over which Le Duan presides with something less than unquestioned authority.

One would expect a leader with Le Duan's experience to be doing more to surround himself with able, loyal subordinates. The top party organizations—the Politburo and the Central Committee—are all of 1960 vintage and were largely created by Ho Chi Minh. Le Duan's failure to rearrange the leadership in a mold more to his liking may be another sign of weakness.

## V. Structure of the Present Leadership and the Outlook

The leadership structure of the VWP has been very stable over the past 15 years. People have tended to be frozen in jobs because of wartime requirements and there has been little upward mobility.

Most Politburo members are in their mid-60s, well below the age of retirement or senility in communist countries and a decade younger than their Chinese counterparts. Le Duan was 66 on April 7, 1973. The oldest (and least influential) member is the 69-year-old former ambassador to China, Hoang Van Hoan. The inner circle of six senior Politburo members are all first-generation revolutionaries who rose to prominence in the ICP of the 1930s.

Second-level leaders can be neatly stratified on the basis of when they first made their mark on party history. The older group is composed of men who came to the fore in the war against the French. They include 25 generals, men who now hold key command and staff positions. Some probably will be transferred to civilian tasks to meet the need for executive talent as extensive postwar reconstruction programs get under way. Civilians in this category include two members of the Secretariat: Hoang Anh and To Huu. Both are candidates for a future Politburo. Anh is the regime's top agricultural specialist, and To Huu is responsible for propaganda and education and possibly also for science and technology.

A younger group of men, so-called "new blood," is composed mostly of economic managers who have risen to key positions since the mid-1950s. Prominent men in this list include Nguyen Con, a Secretariat member who also apparently serves as executive deputy to Premier Pham Van Dong, who is in frail health; Nguyen Lam, Chairman of the State Planning Commission; Tran Quang Huy, deputy head of the party's Science and Education Department; and Tran Quynh, reportedly Le Duan's personal secretary, who also has responsibilities in the area of science and technology. Con and Lam are clearly Politburo material. Do Muoi, who was named minister of a reorganized and enlarged Ministry of Building in June 1973, is an important senior economic manager.

A change in the leadership is long overdue. The list of men who look like "comers" is sparse, and the Central Committee—last formed nearly 14 years ago—is full of deadwood. Less than half the 41 full members of the Central Committee appear to meet Le Duan's criteria for men he wants to have around him. In March 1973 he wrote that "general leadership" cadres should be youthful or at least vigorous, loyal to the top leader (himself), and

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competent to manage major economic and technical developmental projects. Rumors circulate from time to time in Hanoi that a 4th Party Congress will be held to revitalize the leadership and mark the changeover from a war to a peace footing. They have not yet been confirmed, but the long-delayed congress may be held in the coming year.

When a 4th Party Congress finally is convened, some diplomats in Hanoi expect to see an "explosion" in the leadership ranks. Presumably, Le Duan, if still in the saddle, would try to strengthen his position as much as politically feasible. The outcome could be less than an "explosion," however, for Le Duan has shown considerable prudence in the past when moving against political adversaries. Assuming he retained control of VWP, he might settle for a few crucial selections of loyal, competent men for the Politburo and Secretariat. Le Duan might not even try to purge his old opponent Truong Chinh, but agree to a compromise that left Chinh on the Politburo, while reserving for himself the right to pick his own number-two man. In this case, he would probably choose Le Duc Tho, who seems to be Duan's closest associate on the Politburo.

Barring the unexpected, there will continue to be two influential bodies of opinion in the VWP. One, centered in the military and the southern apparatus, will argue for the return to a higher level of military activity (a big offensive or perhaps guerrilla warfare). The other, the group headed by Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, though not entirely unsympathetic to the aims of the first group, will take a more moderate position.

Stabilizing factors are also at work. Hanoi media continue to make frequent references to a "new era" of "peaceful struggle." and Le Duan, Premier Dong, and some other leaders want very much to get on with the job of "building socialism" in the North. Le Duan, who has dominated policy toward the South under a variety of conditions during the past 28 years, has acquiesced before (1955-57 and 1961-62) in a static situation when the North seemed to feel it had nothing to gain by intensifying the war. Moreover, China and the USSR both want to see the conflict dampened, to let the political yeast ferment and count on time being on the Communists' side. Their advice has adherents in the Hanoi Politburo, but it is probably not decisive. A "political action" strategy is in fact the course being followed now. It was adopted after the cease-fire and reaffirmed by the Central Committee at its 21st Plenum which was held toward the end of 1973.

The strategy has forced the Politburo to make difficult compromises. Le Duan has joined with the Politburo in a major effort to maintain a large North Vietnamese fighting force in the South. Although the immediate mission of this force is defensive, it is large enough with relatively little

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reinforcement to allow the Politburo to keep open the option of renewing the military offensive. There may be strains in the North Vietnamese leadership over just how much more effort should be put into support of the South and how much into construction of the North.

Such strains could get worse if the present strategy fails to produce results in the South, and especially if reconstruction in the North lags as well. A continued failure to make substantial progress toward both goals could make the next few years a period of serious challenge to Le Duan's leadership.

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