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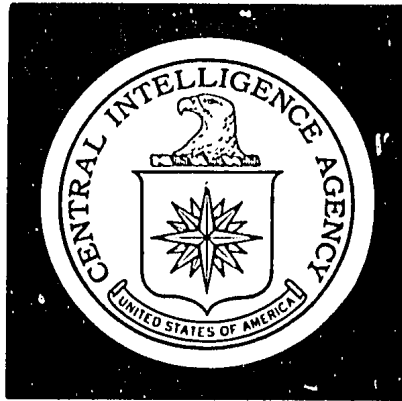
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*The Leadership in Hanoi: Four Months after Ho*

**Secret**

29 January 1970  
No. 0486/70

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
29 January 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Leadership in Hanoi: Four Months After Ho

Introduction

In the four months since Ho Chi Minh's death, a number of selected articles, statements, public appearances by individual leaders, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the trends of North Vietnamese policy, have provided clues about the course of the succession to leadership in Hanoi. The evidence, however, is not conclusive and, should the regime be trying to throw up a smokescreen, could be misleading.

This paper examines the evidence and offers some tentative conclusions about the post-Ho leadership. It does not try to answer conclusively whether the politburo is locked in a struggle for power or whether the question of succession has been resolved. It nevertheless proceeds on the assumption that these questions and how they might affect North Vietnam's future course are the main intelligence problems.\*



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*Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates, the Office of Economic Research, and the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs.*

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The Funeral Period

1. The events surrounding Ho's funeral exposed the new leadership to close public scrutiny. No clear-cut successor emerged, but Party First Secretary Le Duan, Chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee Truong Chinh, and Premier Pham Van Dong seemed to be the dominant figures. They were the only members of the politburo to participate in all of the substantive conferences with the key visiting delegations-- the Soviets, led by Kosygin, and the Chinese, headed by Chou En-lai and Li Hsiennien. The three received extensive publicity in the North Vietnamese press throughout this period; a widely distributed photo of Ho's bier, for example showed Duan, Chinh, and Don stationed at three of its four corners (aged Vice President Ton Duc Thang was at the fourth).

2. Of the three figures, Le Duan was cast in the leading role. When an occasion for listing arose, he was invariably ranked first and he was the principal orator at the main funeral ceremony on 10 September, where he read Ho's will and delivered the party central committee's eulogy.

3. Although events during the funeral period seemed to identify the leading contenders, neither the precise standing of these candidates nor the distribution of power in the rest of the politburo was established. The pattern of appearances and the public conduct of North Vietnam's leaders seemed to conform strictly to protocol and may well have had little bearing on actual standing in the new regime. Except for a few obvious slip-ups, the leaders were usually ranked, in the order that was formally established at the last party congress in 1960. Pham Hung, for example, was listed fifth on the state funeral committee, even though he probably had not returned to Hanoi from his post as Communist field commander in South Vietnam.

4. The new leadership's conduct during the funeral period suggests that some preliminary decisions on succession and policy had

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been taken prior to Ho's death. There were no signs of disarray at the funeral, and the North Vietnamese tried hard to quash talk of significant policy changes or a crisis of indecision. It is reasonable to assume that the politburo anticipated that there would be substantive discussions with key officials who were sure to come to Hanoi when Ho died, and that they had agreed on broad policy guidelines for this eventuality.

#### Propaganda Drive to Ease Succession

5. Almost immediately after Ho's death, the politburo launched a major propaganda campaign that stressed the need for cohesion in the party and national unity behind the "collective leadership" of a close-knit politburo determined to carry on with Ho's policies.

6. The first official statement on the new regime termed it "a stable, collective leadership" built by Ho and pledged to pursue his policies. The funeral rhetoric dwelt on these themes, particularly that of unity. Ho's will termed party solidarity and "single-mindedness" a must, and the central committee's eulogy read by Le Duan promised that the central committee would do its best to preserve the unity of the party. In a major speech to the National Assembly on 23 September, Truong Chinh gave added support to Hanoi's efforts to promote a tranquil succession of power. He ridiculed expectations of foreign observers that disunity and indecisiveness might arise, asserting that the party would close ranks around the politburo's leadership and would "bring into full play the spirit of collectiveness and socialist cooperation." A few days later, the politburo announced the start of a nationwide political indoctrination drive that called for "greater efforts under present conditions" to forge the national unity that Ho had requested.

7. Coming in the first critical weeks after Ho's death, this campaign seemed fashioned to assure the North Vietnamese population and Hanoi's allies that the new leadership was cohesive, firmly in control of the machinery of state, and that past policy

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would be preserved. The recurrent emphasis on unity appeared at a minimum to reflect an awareness by Ho's successors that divisive tendencies were present in certain quarters and, if energized, could threaten an orderly succession of power and even, in time, could undermine the war effort. In what was a clear attempt to enlist Ho's popularity and immense prestige on behalf of its programs, the new leadership repeatedly claimed that it was continuing the policies of the Ho era. The concept of collective leadership has recently been advanced cautiously and infrequently--it has not been noted in the public press since September. Perhaps the new leadership found it useful in the period immediately after Ho's death to obscure the real locus of power behind a collective facade.

#### Pham Van Dong's Trip Abroad

8. Premier Pham Van Dong embarked on a month-long swing through China, the Soviet Union, and East Germany on 27 September. His trip was apparently designed to secure political and material support for the regime and to impress upon Hanoi's allies that the new leadership had firmly grasped the reins of power and was determined to press forward. He was accompanied part of the way by politburo member and economic affairs specialist Le Thanh Nghi, who went on to negotiate new aid agreements with North Vietnam's allies in Asia and Eastern Europe.

9. Dong's trip provided strong evidence that the question of succession to power in North Vietnam was not in open contention or even under serious consideration in the politburo at that time. Because Dong long had been an influential and prominent figure in leadership counsels, it is highly unlikely that he would have left Hanoi while crucial deliberations or debate were under way. It is equally unlikely that he would have gone on such an obviously sensitive and important mission with significant disarray in the leadership as a backdrop. Probably either the issue of succession already had been resolved or the politburo had reached consensus on a temporary arrangement of power but had postponed a final decision.

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10. It also seems clear that Hanoi had settled on certain basic policies before Dong and Nghi departed. They conferred at length with top-level Soviet and Chinese officials on the war, the Paris talks, and economic affairs. Indeed, it is possible that Dong's conversations in Peking were instrumental in bringing about the apparent reduction in Chinese hostility toward Hanoi's policy on negotiations. Peking's seemingly softened attitude emerged around the time of his visit there in late October. Moreover, it was clear from the agreements reached that Nghi negotiated the aid pacts with at least the broad outline of a reconstruction plan for North Vietnam in mind. This appears to reinforce other signs that the regime's policymaking capacity was not hamstrung by dissension in the period immediately after Ho's death.

#### Le Duan's Role in Post-Ho Hanoi

11. First Secretary Le Duan, despite his ranking as the top party official among Ho's successors, is not known to have played any significant public role in North Vietnamese affairs since the funeral. This has been one of the most striking features of the post-Ho period and may be a key piece of evidence as to the new arrangement of power.

12. Except for two nonpolitical appearances, there are no reports that Duan has been seen in public since early October. He attended none of a series of mass rallies in mid-December that celebrated three important Communist anniversaries, although the other politburo members who were in Hanoi at the time put in at least one appearance.

13. The infrequency of Duan's public appearances since the funeral is by no means a solid indication of his standing in the new regime. There have been reports that he was touring the countryside--something that Duan has done in the past--and, even while Ho was alive, Duan generally appeared less often in public than others in the politburo. There has been no evidence, however, that he has exercised the formidable prerogatives of his position as party first secretary.

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14. Duan's extended absence inevitably raises some questions about his role in North Vietnamese affairs since Ho's death, particularly in light of the heavy rhetoric in September about the unity of the central committee and the collective aspect of the new leadership. A more visible public role for figures of Le Duan's rank and prominence would seem to be almost mandatory if the regime wished to substantiate its initial claim of being a collective. Likewise, calls for national solidarity around a unified central committee seem empty in the almost total absence of the ranking official of the party.

15. Duan's inconspicuous role in the post-Ho period follows signs of his possible eclipse nearly two years before Ho's death. He had once been a pre-eminent figure in North Vietnamese policy matters, but since the 1968 Tet offensive--during a period when Hanoi has been slowly reversing or modifying its policies for the war--he has hardly been heard from.

16. The sole publicized statement that Duan has made since the funeral contained hints that he was out of step with others and that these differences in policy had adversely affected his position in the government. An "abridged" version of Duan's speech, given before a group of local party cadre in the Haiphong area and broadcast by Radio Hanoi on 31 October, contained an unusually frank plea for party unity. Duan insisted that the principle of collective leadership required discussion of opposing views. He complained that it was wrong for the party "to adopt the opinion of one person and force all others to follow it."

17. Duan's speech was the first expression of his views on the war in about two years. By linking references to divergent views in the party with appeals for continued priority support of the war and for moderation in restoring socialist authority in the North, he left the strong impression that there were deep divisions in Hanoi. Moreover, his remarks suggest that he was fighting an uphill, and perhaps a rear-guard, battle on behalf of his views.

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Truong Chinh's High Profile

18. In marked contrast to Le Duan's low profile, Truong Chinh has appeared in public with unusual frequency. Along with Pham Van Dong, who normally has been in the public eye, Chinh has been, by far, the most conspicuous of the top politburo figures. In his appearances, moreover, Chinh generally has been cast as an important figure, pronouncing on party doctrine and policy, dispensing advice and sometimes instructions to gatherings dealing with various aspects of North Vietnam's national life.

19. In October, Chinh visited an exhibition of handicrafts in Hanoi and told party and government officials to pay more attention to encouraging and building this industry. In November, he appeared at a conference of cinematographers. In December, he assured a gathering of intellectuals that they could play a role in the post-Ho period provided they wholeheartedly sacrificed and worked for "socialist construction" and the war effort. Later that month, he emphasized to a conference on Vietnamese music that "music is a weapon for class and revolutionary struggle." In January, he told a lawyers association that North Vietnam was resolved to make its constitution "a sharp weapon to carry out the class struggle" so as to build socialism and win the war. Also that month he spoke to a meeting of correspondents from the party's youth branch newspaper.

20. The especially frequent meetings of the standing committee of the National Assembly since Ho's death also have kept Chinh, its chairman, in the spotlight. The committee conducted five announced meetings in November and December. During a comparable period in 1968, it met twice and then only once each month through August of 1969. Constitutionally, the standing committee is one of the most powerful groups in North Vietnam's government. It is the secretariat and executive body of the National Assembly and acts with full assembly powers when that body is not in session, which is most of the time.

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21. The committee's new prominence is by no means conclusive evidence of Chinh's standing in Hanoi, however. The real roots of power lie in the party, and basic policy decisions are made in the politburo. But, because in the post-Ho period the new regime has used Chinh's committee to expound what must be party policies, Chinh has been kept in the public eye in a way that emphasizes his role in national affairs.

Truong Chinh's National Assembly Speech

22. Some two weeks after the funeral, Truong Chinh delivered what still stands as one of the most significant policy statements since Ho's death. Chinh's address, given before a plenary session of the National Assembly on 23 September, reaffirmed some of the basic ideas that he had set forth in a long treatise in May 1968 on behalf of the politburo and that subsequently had been adopted as national policy. He asserted that the party's energies and resources should be primarily devoted to consolidating its control and "building socialism" (i.e. furthering the communization of the North) and repairing the physical damage and decline in morale caused by the war. The struggle in the South took a decidedly secondary place in the priorities he laid out, even though he contended that strengthening the North was the best way to support the war effort over the long run.

23. To achieve a higher state of socialism and rebuild the North, Chinh counseled a rigidly orthodox program conducted under strict party control. He urged the maintenance of a collectivized central economy, heightened ideological fervor, and tighter discipline of party cadres.

24. The address provided the first real indication of Truong Chinh's power and authority in the post-Ho hierarchy. Unlike Le Duan's funeral oration, which was labeled a central committee statement, Chinh's National Assembly speech was labeled in Hanoi's press as his own. Its significance was further underscored on 29 September when the politburo recommended the statement as one of a handful of

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study documents for their nationwide political indoctrination drive. It was one of only two post-Ho documents to be selected--the other was the party's funeral eulogy--and was by far the most incisive policy statement on the list.

Truong Chinh's Vietnam Pictorial Speech

25. Remarks made by Chinh at a meeting of North Vietnamese journalists in mid-October, and broadcast domestically by Radio Hanoi, provided more evidence of Chinh's influence and authority in the post-Ho regime. An address he subsequently delivered to the staff of Vietnam Pictorial, one of Hanoi's leading foreign propaganda publications, suggested that the party had officially adopted a policy that Chinh alone of the top politburo members had publicly advocated--the devotion of more attention to internal affairs and somewhat less to the war in the South.

26. In blunt and unequivocal terms, Chinh told the magazine staffers that their publication had failed to reflect "the present new reality in our country: that our people are fulfilling the two revolutionary tasks: anti-US national salvation resistance (i.e. the war in the South) and socialist building (i.e. internal consolidation and development in North Vietnam)." He charged that "since 1966, Vietnam Pictorial had shown a definite preference" for covering "remote battlefields" and had rarely dealt with "building socialism." "By doing so, Vietnam Pictorial has not firmly grasped the revolutionary lines and realities in our country," and its unbalanced coverage does not "conform with the party lines, policies, stand, and viewpoint."

27. There seems to be little doubt that Chinh's speech and his pointed criticisms carried great weight and perhaps reflected the official policy of the regime. The broadcast report of Chinh's remarks indicated that two officials of the publication "promised the party central committee to implement satisfactorily President Ho's testament and comrade Truong Chinh's solicitous instructions." Moreover, because Chinh's speech was broadcast domestically, it seems clear that his remarks were not directed just at a few journalists, but to the entire country.

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28. This speech, like Chinh's address to the National Assembly in late September, was an unusual statement for a North Vietnamese leader, both because of its frank outline of the issues and because of its authoritative tone. It suggested that Chinh had considerable self-confidence in his position and the policies he was espousing, much more than has been publicly exhibited by any other politburo figure in the post-Ho period. Moreover, by the end of October, two months after Ho's death, Chinh's speeches were the only significant policy statements by an individual leader to be broadcast on Radio Hanoi.

#### History of the August Revolution

29. The politburo announced on 26 November that it was preparing an official new history of the August Revolution (the period of August-September 1954 during which the Communists seized control of Hanoi and other parts of Vietnam in the name of the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam") to commemorate its 25th anniversary. Such projects are almost routinely undertaken to celebrate important North Vietnamese anniversaries. But this one, because of Chinh's acknowledged role as architect of the August Revolution, his part in determining the contents of the new history, and his apparent use of this conference to press his views on current war strategy, may carry implications for the leadership.

30. According to the politburo's announcement, various members of the central committee and representatives from local party organizations met in a six-day conference to discuss the party's line and reasons for Communist successes during the August revolution, presumably in order to provide guidelines for those actually drafting the report. Chinh was the sole politburo figure present, and he clearly dominated the proceedings.

31. The announcement said that "the conference warmly applauded when comrade Truong Chinh rose to express his views..." on such matters as building armed forces, developing bases, and revolutionary tactics. It went on: "Basing himself on lively realities and using logical reasoning, he (Chinh) helped the cadres better understand these problems

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(i.e., those cited above) and answered a number of difficult questions raised during the past few years' debates."

32. This is one of the clearest suggestions seen in the Communist media that there have been differences over war strategy in Hanoi. The obsequious language, used in the broadcast, which reported Chinh as authoritatively pronouncing on aspects of war strategy shows unusual deference.

33. The prominence that Hanoi has recently given the August 1945 period also seems to reflect Truong Chinh's rise to special status in the hierarchy. In late January, Radio Hanoi broadcast a summary of a pamphlet on party history to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the party on 3 February. The broadcast specifically cited the August Revolution as a "model" of how a revolutionary war should be conducted, and it links Ho Chi Minh and Truong Chinh with the "perfection" of party policies for fighting such a war.

#### The War, Military Policy, and the Leadership

34. Developments on the battlefield indicate that there has been no substantial change in North Vietnam's over-all strategy on the war since Ho's death. Indeed, there has been some evidence that the decisions on war strategy taken by the politburo last spring and subsequently embodied in COSVN's Resolution 9 have continued to be disseminated to cadres in the South as the operative line. To preserve their strength and stamina for the long haul while still demonstrating a credible military threat, Communist forces have maintained a measured, low level of activity punctuated from time to time by brief and intense offensive surges or "high points." Large main-force units generally have hung back in remote base areas reluctant to expose themselves to the full weight of allied firepower. Meanwhile, provincial and local units and guerrillas have borne the brunt of the grinding day-to-day war with a marked emphasis on guerrilla and commando tactics, shellings, terrorism, and political agitation.

35. A long article on war strategy written by Vo Nguyen Giap and published in December indicates

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that Hanoi may pursue this basic strategy for some time. The article suggests that the Communists will try to maintain a credible threat while preserving their assets, improving their position, and preparing for whatever opportunities may come their way in the course of protracted war. Giap's emphasis on fundamentals, adequate political preparations, and "rational" main-force attacks implies that Hanoi believes now is not the time for an across-the-board military challenge to the allied position, that such action is well down the road, and that the Communists should play for time.

36. The strategy now apparently in force can be traced to the politburo's post mortem on the 1968 Tet offensive that was embodied in Truong Chinh's May 1968 report. Chinh probably was a prime advocate of changes in strategy after the all-out commitment exhibited during the Tet attacks, and his recommendations seem to have been adopted as official policy. Le Duan's earlier writings associated him closely with the policies of the early and mid-1960s, and his position would seem to be adversely affected by the subsequent basic policy changes.

Domestic Policy and the Leadership

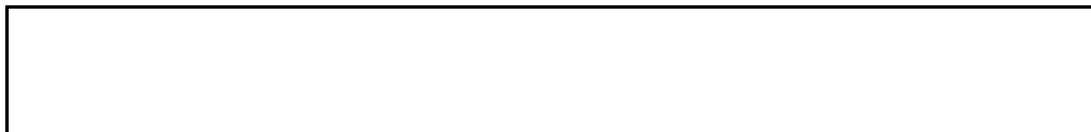
37. It is difficult to discern any clear trends in Hanoi's domestic policies since Ho's death. Trends of this kind are slow to evolve and often are not apparent until months after new or modified policies have been adopted. What evidence there has been in the past four months, however, suggests that the new regime has held to and moved farther along a course that was charted well before Ho died.

38. For more than a year, there have been signs that North Vietnam has been trying to restore a balance between the dual objectives of "building socialism" in North Vietnam and struggling for Communist control of South Vietnam. Which of these objectives should have priority has long been a matter of debate

within the leadership.\* Prior to the mid-1960s, the regime officially gave them equal weight, but with the onset of the bombing and the US intervention in the South, the balance shifted toward the war effort. The goal of "building socialism" in the North was short-changed in the next few years as the regime channeled almost all its energies and resources into the war effort. Not only were construction and production programs set aside, but Hanoi de-emphasized economic, social, and cultural matters, undoubtedly a development that those leaders who had long insisted on rigid discipline and socialist orthodoxy in North Vietnam deplored.

39. In the latter half of 1968, after the massive Communist offensives in South Vietnam and after the bombing of the North had been cut back and then stopped, some in Hanoi began to push for restoring more of the earlier balance between domestic and war efforts. Chinh was the first and most prominent figure in the leadership to be associated with these views. In the first half of 1969, it became apparent that many of the recommendations were gradually being translated into official regime policy. Hanoi began to tighten up discipline across the board, to correct some of the laxity that had developed in economic and social practices, and to reduce sharply the amount of North Vietnamese manpower being pumped into South Vietnam.

40. Agriculture was one of the most important areas where a general tightening up was apparent. In the spring of 1969, the regime announced directives to correct widespread abuses of existing regulations covering collective agricultural production and distribution. These closely paralleled recommendations made forcefully by Truong Chinh in the last part of 1968.



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41. Similarly, last spring Hanoi adopted an important new statute governing agricultural cooperatives. The law was aimed at furthering the principle of collectivization of the rural economy, but it has never been clear precisely what steps the regime intended to take to implement the statute. Since Ho's death, the statute has received widespread study and publicity, and a concerted campaign to implement the regulation was scheduled for October, but there are few signs that anything concrete has resulted.

42. Efforts by the regime to tighten social discipline have been especially evident in the last few months. Meetings of the National Assembly standing committee in November and December dealt with "maintaining public order and security, ...protecting socialist properties, ...and increasing vigilance against counterrevolutionaries." Observers in Hanoi have reported several signs of a crackdown on law-and-order violators, and the party press and Hanoi city newspaper have written extensively on "public security" problems. From the available evidence, the regime's concern appears largely aimed at a number of crimes that long have plagued Hanoi, including draft-dodging and desertion, hooliganism, theft of state property, profiteering, and black marketeering. It is doubtful, however, that the social order has deteriorated so far as to threaten stability in North Vietnam. The crackdown appears rather to reflect a lower level of tolerance by the leadership of loose, unorthodox behavior.

43. In December, Hanoi announced a reorganization and expansion in the government's economic affairs apparatus, another sign of Hanoi's interest in the domestic area. The new regulations appear designed to allow the central government to improve the production and distribution of consumer goods.

44. Increased emphasis on the civilian sector of the economy is also apparently a part of North Vietnam's 1970 State Plan. Statements by Le Thanh Nghi around the first of the year and an article in the party newspaper all identified food and consumer goods production as the main tasks for this year. Although the need to support the war effort was a recurring theme in Nghi's remarks, he did not cite

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national defense as North Vietnam's main goal, as he had in past years. Hanoi is aware that more should be done to improve the living conditions of North Vietnam's hard-pressed citizens. Whereas the people seemed to endure privation, inconvenience, and hardship with some equanimity during the bombing years, there is increasing evidence that they are now grumbling about the lack of significant improvement in their lot since the bombing halt.

### Conclusions

45. The evidence suggests that the process of succession is well along in North Vietnam and that it has been managed without a crisis of indecision in the formation and execution of central government policy. Given the closed nature of North Vietnamese Communist society, particularly in its top echelons, it is always possible that the politburo has succeeded in masking a struggle for power. Save for Le Duan's "abridged" speech, however, there has been no good evidence of discord in Hanoi.

46. Part of the apparently smooth turn-over of authority undoubtedly was the result of careful preparation by the politburo for Ho's death. There is some evidence that the leadership was aware of Ho's terminal condition months before his death and that when a crisis in his health occurred in mid-summer, questions of future policy and succession were decided.

47. The evidence is impressive, although not conclusive, that Truong Chinh has established himself in a commanding position in the leadership. From what can be discerned, Hanoi's current policies are basically ones for which he has been the foremost spokesman. If true, Chinh could now be in the process of consolidating and solidifying his position.

48. Because Truong Chinh has so dominated the public scene, the current positions of the rest of the major figures in the politburo are more difficult to assess. In September, the regime chose to portray itself as a collective, but it has not belabored the point since. Pham Van Dong's role in North Vietnam's affairs does not appear to have

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changed much since Ho's death, and he probably remains in the politburo's inner core. Vo Nguyen Giap, with his longtime views on war strategy, reaffirmed in a major article in December, can probably be placed near the center of power, but with less confidence. Not enough is known in the post-Ho period of party organization expert Le Duc Tho and Pham Hung to determine their status.

49. The real mystery figure is party first secretary Le Duan, once widely considered Ho's heir apparent. Duan probably has lost ground in the past year or so, and his obscurity since Ho's death makes his status even more uncertain. This could be misleading, however, and he may still retain considerable instruments of power.

50. More evidence is needed to nail down the post-Ho leadership firmly. On 3 February, the party celebrates its 40th anniversary, and the turnout and rhetoric on this occasion could be revealing. More than likely, however, a reliable picture of the regime will not appear until a new party congress is convened to put an official stamp on the hierarchy that has emerged. There were hints last summer that such a congress might be in the planning stages for 1970, and with Ho's death this seems an even better possibility.