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Soviet Foreign Ministry, Information on the Situation in South Vietnam

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Summary:

Report details the events and causes of the situation in 1961 in South Vietnam from the struggle after the Geneva Agreements to the government of Ngo Dinh Diem including the United States' involvement and underground revolutionary groups.

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ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(Information)

In 1961 the internal situation in South Vietnam became substantially exacerbated. A direct threat emerged to the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. The government of the USA, like the ruling circles of other Western countries, is blaming the current situation in South Vietnam primarily on the intensification of the partisan movement under the ever increasing support of the DRV and the PRC, as well as on the instability of Ngo Dinh Diem's government, which does not have the essential support of the people.

Indeed, in 1961 there was significant growth in the national liberation movement in South Vietnam, which in many regions of the country manifested itself as an armed struggle between the patriotic forces and the regular army of Ngo Dinh Diem. According to available reports, during October 1961 alone, the patriotic forces carried out approximately 500 military operations, as a result of which the enemy lost over 2 thousand people, and 143 local and regular troop posts were destroyed. According to information from the Vietnamese friends, in the southern-most part of the country (Nambo), 360 out of 368 communes are not under Ngo Dinh Diem's administration. In all of the southern regions, 920 out of 1290 communes are not under Ngo Dinh Diem's administration.

The development of the national liberation movement among the South Vietnamese population is to a significant extent a result of a substantial multi-faceted effort carried out by the Vietnamese friends over the course of a number of years.

Following the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements and the regrouping of forces on both sides, the Vietnamese friends undertook measures to preserve the base of the Vietnamese Workers Party (PTV) in the southern part of the country, which was assigned the task of continuing a propaganda and organizational effort among the masses. According to our friends' information, during 1954-1958 the PTV's general line in the South consisted of carrying out a political struggle to undermine the existing regime, broadening the revolutionary movement in the cities and the countryside, with the wide use of legal, semi-legal and illegal forms of struggle. At the same time, in order to maintain the fighting capabilities of underground party organizations and party cadres in the South, they were allowed under crucial circumstances to resort to armed struggle as a form of self-defense.

The implementation of the Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, as is well known, came up against sharp counteraction from South Vietnamese authorities, which, with US support, have taken up a sharply negative position, systematically rejecting all DRV government proposals, including the opening of consultations on organizing a general referendum on Vietnamese reunification, as well as on the normalization of economic, cultural and other ties between the two areas.

Under these conditions, the XVth CC PTV Plenum was convened (December 1958 - February 1959). After discussing the situation at hand, the Plenum adopted the decision that encouraged the underground organizations in South Vietnam to intensify the revolutionary struggle by any means. Armed struggle was accepted as one of the methods that, given the appropriate conditions, can and must be exercised. In reaching this conclusion the Vietnamese friends were guided by the fact that by 1959 two organized forces had in effect emerged in South Vietnam - the military-police apparatus of Ngo Dinh Diem, and the South Vietnamese underground organization of the PTV, which numbered 30 thou. active members and 150 thou. supporters.

In accordance with this, mobile armed detachments began forming in the territory of

South Vietnam, gradually becoming increasingly involved in armed struggle against the government forces. The patriotic forces led by PTV cadres began an effort of "cleansing" the remote provinces, killing individuals loyal to Ngo Dinh Diem's government and replacing them with their own cadres. The extent of military actions is illustrated by the fact that in January 1960 in the region of Tai Nin (central South Vietnam), the partisan units disarmed a regiment of the South Vietnamese army.

Influenced by their accomplishments, the Vietnamese friends began to exhibit a tendency to escalate the armed struggle. This was particularly evident during their preparations for the IIIrd PTV Congress. In May 1960, the Vietnamese friends consulted with the CC CPSU and the CC CPC on the main points of the CC PTV's political report to the Congress. The points devoted to the struggle for Vietnamese reunification were in essence a clear directive to expand armed struggle in South Vietnam with the aim of overthrowing Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, in the course of this struggle establishing liberated regions under the people's government. This struggle was declared a continuation of the War of Independence (1946-1954), while the establishment of liberated regions was declared "a form of gradual reunification of the Homeland."

In Moscow, the attention of the Vietnamese comrades was focused on the fact that, under the existing conditions, it would be probably inexpedient to move away from the slogan of peaceful reunification of Vietnam on the basis of the Geneva Agreements. The friends agreed with this, and in the CC PTV report to the IIIrd Congress laid out a position that called for a peaceful reunification of the country.

As provided for in the resolutions of the IIIrd Congress, the Vietnamese friends carried out work on establishing in December 1960 the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, with the goal of uniting all patriotic forces that oppose Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. The creation of this Front had a positive impact on launching a broad political effort among all sectors of the South Vietnamese population. The primary task of the Front is the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem's regime and the establishment of an independent, peaceful and neutral South Vietnam, headed by a national-democratic coalition government.

The actions of the patriotic forces created an immediate threat to Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, causing great concern in the USA to preserve South Vietnam as an American advance post in Southeast Asia.

By USA initiative, the question of the serious situation in South Vietnam became a topic of discussion during the March session of SEATO in Bangkok, during which, according to available information, there was a consideration of the "6/61 plan," which provided for "responsive measures" in case of an "attack by the armed forces of North Vietnam on SEATO countries" (apparently Laos and South Vietnam, which are not members of the bloc, but whose territories are included in the bloc's "defense perimeter.")

In order to investigate the situation on the ground, many prominent military and government officials have recently visited South Vietnam: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff general Lemnitzer, CIA expert brigadier general Landsdale, US Vice President Johnson, commander of the 13th Air Force division, major general Murman, and others.

Following Johnson's visit to South Vietnam (11-13 May 1961) and his talks with Ngo Dinh Diem's government on the practical measures to intensify the fight against the patriotic movement, the US government provided additional military and economic assistance to Ngo Dinh Diem in the sum of 41 mln. dollars, having expressed the intention of bringing the level of aid for the current fiscal year to 400 mln. dollars (in 1960 American aid to South Vietnam totaled 150 mln. dollars).

The Americans have devised a whole number of general and specific recommendations for the South Vietnamese government, in particular the plan for "pacifying" South Vietnam within 18 months, dubbed the "Staley Plan." In June 1961, the US took upon themselves the support and training South Vietnamese police (up to 50 thou. persons) and military-territorial formations (up to 60 thou. persons), as well as the command of the fight against the partisan movement in the country.

By now, the US have reorganized, rearmed and essentially created the South Vietnamese army, the air force and the navy. The regular army of South Vietnam

numbers 170 thousand. Weapons include 150 tanks, 170 armored vehicles and armored transports, over 1000 guns and mortars, approximately 150 airplanes, and approximately 300 combat ships.

In October 1961 a group headed by general Taylor was sent to South Vietnam to draft and present for the US President's approval general proposals on the measures to be taken in South Vietnam. In its report to the President, Taylor's group characterized the military situation of Ngo Dinh Diem's regime as "desperate." The group recommended the following measures: increase the regular South Vietnamese army to 200 thousand men; provide South Vietnam with significant military assistance, expediting first the shipments of airplanes and artillery; dispatch a large number of various specialists to this country, in addition to subunits from the corps of engineers and regular combat units of up to 10 thousand men to provide security; in order to reinforce the position of Ngo Dinh Diem's government, implement a number of economic and political reforms in South Vietnam.

However, during consultations within SEATO, the representatives of England and France came out categorically against the proposal to send American troops to South Vietnam. In their opinion, such a step would inevitably lead to reigniting military activity in Laos, spreading the conflict to Cambodia, cause retaliatory actions from the PRC and the DRV, and complete the process of undermining the positions of Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. Noting this, the Kennedy administration is for now limiting itself to an increase of military shipments, the dispatch of a large number of military specialists, and the expansion of anti-DRV propaganda.

At the present time, there are approximately 2 thousand American military advisors and specialists in South Vietnam. The US military advisors are present at command centers, and in units and subdivisions of the South Vietnamese army, from the battalion level down to the level of company.

In the city of Turan, an operations group has been deployed from the command center of the 13th Air Force division based in the Philippines. During October-November 1961, South Vietnam has been delivered for permanent keeping 8 B-26 airplanes, two helicopter squadrons, and over 400 American airplane maintenance personnel.

In November 1961, in the Pleiku region (central Vietnam), a new infantry division has begun to be formed being trained specifically for use against the patriotic forces in mountainous and forested areas. Two more such infantry divisions are planned to be created in the beginning of 1962. In order to create new units and formations, during October-November 1961 over 20 thousand men have been drafted, primarily from among the youth and students. A large scale effort is underway to provide dependable security along the borders with the DRV and Laos.

It is noteworthy that in the Philippine island region the USA is maintaining under continuous combat readiness one attack aircraft carrier (39 nuclear-equipped assault bombers, 28 fighters, 3 reconnaissance planes, and 6 long-range radar-equipped planes), one cruiser, four destroyers, one frigate with guided anti-aircraft missiles, a helicopter carrier, and several troop transports of the 7th fleet, carrying a battalion of marines numbering up to 1500 men and 20 helicopters.

Under these conditions, it is noteworthy that several actions by the Vietnamese friends indicate that they are moving to break their previously stated political line in South Vietnam. This is demonstrated by the fact that instead of launching a broad-based political effort among the South Vietnamese population with the aim of laying the conditions for mass protest against Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, the Vietnamese friends, apparently not without the influence of the Chinese comrades, have in 1961 adopted a course directed at launching an armed struggle. This has been helped by the formation of a favorable situation: certain successes of the national liberation movement in South Vietnam, as well as the establishment of an open route from the DRV to South Vietnam through parts of the southern provinces of Laos, under the control of Patet Lao's forces. The Vietnamese comrades have organized a transport of troops, weapons, ammunition, shells, and foodstuffs across Laotian territory (the Tchepone-Attape region). For these purposes they are making wide use of Soviet Il-14 planes which were allocated as assistance to Laos, as well as Li-2, that were given to the DRV government. Efforts have been launched to reinforce the existing partisan bases in the South and create large military

subdivisions up to the battalion and regimental level. During the summer months of 1961, the friends dispatched to the South three fully-equipped infantry battalions and a significant number of officers for two battalions they plan to create in South Vietnam using local forces.

The efforts of Vietnamese friends to organize wide-ranging assistance to the partisan movement in South Vietnam are influencing the positions of the DRV with respect to the settlement of the Laos question. Based on certain information, it can be assumed that the Vietnamese comrades would like to preserve for a longer period the current instability in Laos, since they fear a closing of the transport routes to South Vietnam, which run through that country.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the continuing forcing of armed struggle in the South by Vietnamese comrades, without the accompanying political preparation of the masses and under the conditions of the US government's active military support of Ngo Dinh Diem, can have negative consequences both in the domestic and international spheres. At the present time, the armed assaults against Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, without broad support of the population, can bring vulnerability to the revolutionary forces of South Vietnam. At the same time, it will bring with it a significant exacerbation of the political situation in this region and turn South Vietnam into a hot spot of international tensions.

(Information is compiled from materials available to MID USSR, the General Staff of the Soviet Army, and the KGB under the USSR Council of Ministers)

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