

October 9, 1969

Letter, V.M. Chebrikov to the CPSU CC

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Summary:

A report on the current situation in South Vietnam, with a discussion of current and future US plans for the region.

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[handwritten in the
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followed by some illegible
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[KGB letterhead]

9 October 1969

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[to the] CPSU CC

The prospects of a settlement of the Vietnamese problem have recently not become clearer and reassuring. The participants of the war in South Vietnam, recognizing the failure of the military path of solving this problem, have nevertheless not abandoned their final goals and intend to continue to seek the creation of the necessary preconditions to accomplish them.

The leadership of the Vietnamese Worker's Party (VWP) takes a rigid position with respect to the conditions for a settlement of the Vietnamese problem and does not desire to retreat from the demands presented in the four points of the DRV and the 10 points of the program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NFOYuV). The Vietnamese leaders hope that in view of the lack of prospects for the war in Vietnam US President NIXON will sooner or later be forced to [make] concessions to the DRV and NFOYuV. Speaking at a conference of the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs this April DRV Prime Minister PHAM VAN DONG declared that NIXON will not be re-elected President for a second term if he does not put an end to the war in Vietnam. He stressed that time is working for the Vietnamese, that is it necessary "to wait a year or two" and then the US government will be forced to make substantial concessions.

The VWP leadership assumes that the armed struggle in South Vietnam might take on a protracted character, but thinks that it has sufficient forces to wage a lengthy war with the support of the socialist countries. As First Secretary of the Party CC LE DUAN declared at the May plenum of the VWP Central Committee the armed forces of the DRV together with the troops of the NFOYuV are "the fourth largest army in the world" and are distinguished by [their] high combat fighting ability and can successfully continue the war.

Following the guidelines of the VWP CC May plenum to conserve strength in the event of a protracted war or a general offensive in the future, the People's Armed Forces of Liberation (NVSO) are limiting themselves to relatively small-scale operations, choosing artillery strikes on the bases and strongpoints of the Americans and their Saigon allies as the main means of pressure on the enemy. Such a tactic, the NVSO command thinks, allows the enemy to be held in constant tension, inflicts manpower and equipment losses on him, and shows him his inability to obstruct the actions of the patriotic forces. At the same time, according to some information, the NVSO command is making preparations for large operations of an offensive nature in the region of Saigon, planning to conduct them approximately at the end of the current or the beginning of next year.

in order to increase the pressure on the US and distract its men and equipment from the war in Vietnam the VWP leadership intends to maintain and step up the armed struggle of the progressive forces in Laos and Thailand in every possible way. At the same time, in order to influence world public opinion and reduce the propaganda benefit of the US from the unilateral withdrawal of some American military contingents from Vietnam, in the DRV MFA they are studying the question of the advisability of a DRV government statement declaring the withdrawal of their troops from South Vietnam. At the same time the Vietnamese leadership is counting on pressure increasing on the US from the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, and also from the progressive forces of the world.

As before, the domestic policy of the DRV is subordinate to the interests of fighting the American aggression. The VWP leadership attaches great importance to ensuring the moral and political unity of the Vietnamese people and maintaining its readiness to wage the fight until the complete expulsion of the Americans from South Vietnam.

Certain difficulties in solving this problem are associated with the difficult economic situation of the country. As noted in LE DUAN's report at the May VWP CC plenum, all the important industrial enterprises have been destroyed by American aircraft, the production capacity has been evacuated, and other existing enterprises are far from being fully used. Great damage has been caused to housing. The shortage of labor is being acutely felt in agriculture, as a result of which the production of food has been reduced. In a number of regions the population is hungry.

The leaders of the VWP also cannot fail to reckon with the fact that the difficult living conditions might unfavorably affect the prospects for the reunification of Vietnam. The standard of living of the DRV is lower than in South Vietnam. In conversations with the representatives of the NFO [National Liberation Front] visiting Hanoi with representatives of socialist countries, they declare that "if this is socialism, then it is not very attractive and cannot serve as an example for the South" when assessing the situation in the DRV.

Considering the serious economic condition of the DRV and the low standard of living of its population the VWP leadership view as the most important task the revival of the economy and preparation of conditions for the postwar development of the economy of North Vietnam. In the plans of the Vietnamese leadership to revive the economy the main importance is given to increasing the productivity of agriculture and the development of light industry, and also an increase of the extraction of coal and the restoration of generating capability.

The VWP leadership ties the waging of combat operations in South Vietnam and the implementation of plans to revive the economy of the DRV with a subsequent increase of aid from the socialist countries, primarily the Soviet Union and the PRC. In particular, the Vietnamese are oriented toward receiving aid from the Soviet Union in the construction of heavy industrial enterprises, and from the Chinese, of light industry.

[Translator's note: the following paragraph was highlighted in the left margin] At the same time there are numerous cases of a negligent attitude toward the use of the aid received from the socialist countries, the Soviet Union in particular.

In the conditions of a reduced tension in relations between the Soviet Union and the PRC the VWP leadership intends to further follow a so-called independent policy which essentially is a policy of balancing between China and the USSR. The population is oriented toward an "equal" attitude toward both countries. [Translator's note: the following sentence was highlighted in the left margin] In spite of this, a growth of sympathies is being observed among the DRV population toward the Soviet Union and an increase of hostility toward the Chinese, whom they see as supporters of a

protracted war.

[Translator's note: the following sentence was highlighted in the left margin] The death of HO CHI MINH did not lead to serious changes in the correlation of forces in the DRV leadership and did not shake the positions of the main VWP leaders - LE DUAN (whose authority has recently risen), TRUONG CHINH, and PHAM VAN DONG. Evidently there will be no substantive changes in the DRV leadership and its policy in the near future. However, as prominent Western experts note, the practical realization of the previous policy will be more difficult for the VWP leadership, in particular with respect to the PRC and the NFOYuV. Inasmuch as the Chinese leaders continue to insist on an uncompromising fight until final victory in South Vietnam, without HO CHI MINH it will be considerably more difficult for the VWP leadership to gain their support or at least "understand" their individual actions which run counter to the recommendations of the Chinese. The death of HO CHI MINH, as these experts believe, might also lead to a NFO position more independent from the VWP; the individual leaders of the NFO have recently begun to display discontent with the fact that the North Vietnamese do not sufficiently take them into consideration.

The difficulties of the fight of the patriotic forces in South Vietnam have increased this year. The activity of American aviation in the South grew considerably after the halt to the bombing of the DRV, as a result of which the losses of the liberation forces increased considerably and some planned offensive operations were frustrated.

Anti-war sentiments have intensified among the South Vietnamese population, which has become tired of the war and is increasingly avoiding active support of both the Saigon authorities and the NFO. For rural residents support for the NFO with supplies of food, participation in the transportation of freight, and other dangerous work has become more burdensome than performing the compulsory service imposed on it by the Saigon authorities. The creation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which the socialist countries and also a number of neutral countries have supported, has promoted an increase of the international authority of the NFO, but it has not caused a notable increase in the influence of the patriotic forces among the population of South Vietnam.

In these conditions some NFO leaders think it advisable to seek the speediest rapid settlement in South Vietnam, including on the basis of certain concessions to the Americans. In particular, an NFO delegation headed by PHUNG VAN CUNG* visiting Hanoi in May of this year, noting the unpopularity of the war and the weariness of the population in South Vietnam, spoke in favor of the possibility of concessions in the negotiations in Paris in order to speed up a settlement. PHUNG VAN CUNG expressed a fear that a continuation of combat activities might weaken the political positions of the NFO.

* In June of this year PHUNG VAN CUNG was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam and Minister of Internal Affairs.

The NFO leadership, concentrating its efforts on the defense of liberated regions, is resisting the measures of the Saigon authorities to establish administrative control over the population in every possible way. The unpopularity of the Saigon leaders and the ineffectiveness of the South Vietnamese administration, and also the atmosphere of political instability are creating favorable conditions to solve this problem. The NFO attaches great importance to political work among the Saigon troops, and also among the urban population. The main thrust of the work in the cities is the creation of political organizations which advocate for peace.

[Translator's note: the following sentence was highlighted in the left margin] In spite of some successes of the American and Saigon troops the political position of the

puppet regime remains precarious. President THIEU of South Vietnam has managed to formally unite some right-wing political groups in a so-called Social Democratic National Front; however, this organization does not represent a significant political force. The differences and competition in the Saigon ruling circles remain. Extreme reactionary elements among the supporters of Vice President KY and the Catholic refugees from the North oppose any proposals directed at seeking ways for a political settlement. This narrows the opportunity for political maneuvering by THIEU, which the Americans are seeking from him. The reorganization of the Saigon government done by THIEU at the beginning of this September satisfied certain military circles, but did not allow the main problem to be solved, an expansion of the sociopolitical base of the government. Dissatisfaction with the new composition of ministers is being expressed in particular by some leaders of the Social Democratic National Front. The population of the country, including the bourgeois circles, displays mistrust in the actions and statements of the Saigon government.

The reactionary South Vietnamese circles understand that without an effective administrative apparatus that has influence among the population of the right-wing parties they cannot hold out against the NFO in the political struggle, and therefore they oppose the withdrawal of American troops in the near future. In the calculations of these circles only after one and a half or two years will they be able to stabilize the Saigon regime enough that it will be able to fight the NFO by political means. The Saigon authorities hope that the military-political actions within the framework of the "pacification program" in combination with socioeconomic measures, the most important of which is agrarian reform, will allow them to establish control over the rural regions.

During this time they are also counting on increasing the strength and combat ability of the South Vietnamese forces. [Translator's note: the following sentence was highlighted in the left margin] In particular, it is planned to increase the Saigon armed forces by 148,000 men by the end of 1970. Consequently the THIEU government is seeking a considerable increase of financial aid from the Americans for the maintenance of the army.

[Translator's note: the following sentence was highlighted in the left margin] The current US government is guided not only by a desire to preserve to preserve the anti-Communist regime in South Vietnam, but also by the need to get out of the war during NIXON's presidency. It is counting on achieving these goals by combining military pressure on the DRV and NFO with broad measures of a political, diplomatic, and economic nature. Speaking at a closed meeting with representatives of NATO member countries in Brussels in August of this year KISSINGER, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security, characterized this policy as "accommodating and soft, but without a show of weakness".

[Translator's note: the following sentence was highlighted in the left margin] The main link of NIXON's Vietnam policy is the so-called "Vietnamization" of the war, designed to carry out a broad program of measures for the political and economic stabilization of the situation in South Vietnam, strengthen its armed forces, and replace American troops with units of the Saigon army.

In the estimations of the NIXON Administration, the accomplishment of this program should show the DRV and NFO the unrealistic nature of their hopes for the US to abandon the achievement of its goals in South Vietnam and the hopelessness of further fighting by the patriotic forces, which in the final account should force the DRV and NFO to reconsider their firm position and make concessions to the US. If they do not agree to a settlement of the conflict on American terms and choose a path of a "protracted war" with small forces then the strengthened South Vietnamese army will be in a condition to successfully wage war with them.

In the opinion of the US government, the process of "Vietnamization" of the war will be quite lengthy and require keeping a considerable contingent of American troops in South Vietnam capable of giving the South Vietnamese army the necessary combat support, especially air and artillery. However, in KISSINGER's words, the main part of US ground troops should be withdrawn from South Vietnam.

Considering the dissatisfaction of the American public with the continuing American participation in the war, The NIXON government is striving to speed up the implementation of the "Vietnamization" program. It intends to accelerate the implementation of measures to realize it and achieve the maximum participation of the Saigon administration in it. As they note in American government circles, having visited South Vietnam this summer NIXON confirmed the US intention to withdraw its ground troops from South Vietnam and demanded that Saigon develop a plan to prepare for this action. In KISSINGER's words, such a plan has basically been drawn up right now.

In the assessment of the American government, the measures it is pursuing to increase the combat ability of the Saigon army and "pacify" the South Vietnamese population have recently begun to produce positive results. NIXON hopes that this trend will continue to intensify, exerting a favorable influence for the US on the development of the military-political situation in South Vietnam.

At the same time as the "Vietnamization" measures the US government intends to conduct active combat operations in South Vietnam and Laos calculated at wearing down the patriotic forces and to also carry out political, diplomatic, and propaganda actions inside the country and in the international arena. At the negotiations in Paris, judging from everything, the American delegation will continue to defend its proposals about the mutual withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam, and also Laos and Cambodia, and holding elections in South Vietnam under international monitoring. However, as is evident from available information, the Americans intend to condition the withdrawal of the troops of the US and their allies (in the event the patriotic forces accept this proposal) with such conditions which would allow them to halt it at any time, blaming the DRV and NFO for this.

[Translator's note: the following paragraph was highlighted in the left margin]
Assessing the prospects for a settlement of the Vietnamese conflict as a whole, the opinion is expressed in US government circles that one can expect substantive changes on this question no earlier than the end of 1970 or the middle of 1971.

The USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense have been informed.

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE FOR STATE SECURITY USSR under the
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

[signature] CHEBRIKOV