The new crisis in Vietnam
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The new crisis in Vietnam

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WASHINGTON — A Communist document captured by government forces in Binh Thuan province on South Vietnam's central coast six weeks ago points to tragedy growing out of the Nixon Administration's bungled campaign in Congress for continued aid to Saigon.

The document spells out unequivocally what the Communist high command in Hanoi really wants: "The revolution in South Vietnam can only be won by means of armed violence in close coordination with the political violence of the masses."

That sharply contradicts propaganda spread in Congress by radical "peace" groups that continued bloodshed in South Vietnam is caused by Saigon. Beyond that, the Communist strategy reveals the danger facing South Vietnam if, as now seems increasingly possible, it is threatened by drastically reduced US aid. Thanks to failing resolve and uncertain leadership, the root of the new Vietnam crisis is in Washington.

Early last autumn, US intelligence experts still expected a massive Communist offensive this year from 210,000 North Vietnamese regulars in northern and western parts of South Vietnam. But the 21st Communist Party conference in Hanoi decided Saigon's army was too strong. What resulted was a new strategy outlined in COSVN resolution 13, secretly issued in December. In turn, COSVN 13 was incorporated in provincial directives, such as the guidelines sent out in Binh Thuan province.

The directive, dated Feb. 5, is remarkable, omitting the usual propaganda about general elections and a coalition government (required by the Paris peace treaty). Instead, it bluntly admits that Hanoi's political progress in South Vietnam since US forces pulled out has been disappointing.

As viewed here, such directives and other intelligence data mean the Communists will continue sharp military attacks locally this year while preparing for a possible general offensive in the future. In sum, Hanoi is not abandoning force as the means to unite Indochina; the strength of the Saigon regime has simply delayed the showdown.

The one factor that could advance the showdown is an economic breakdown, to which Communist headquarters have been alerting their cadre. A drastic, sudden reduction of US aid would surely trigger such a breakdown. Thus, defecting Communists report that Hanoi's strategy is designed to undermine US confidence in President Nguyen Van Thieu's government.

This dovetails with the campaign laid out last October when veteran radical Tom Hayden invited 200 antiwar activists to Germantown, Ohio, for a strategy session. The propaganda lines set forth then have been vigorously relayed on Capitol Hill: the Thieu government, not Hanoi, is the aggressor and would collapse without provocation should the United States withdraw aid.

Even though such propaganda is contradicted by the Communists' own documents, it has found fertile soil in a Congress sick and tired of the Indochina burden. Hawkish leaders of a decade ago, such as Democratic Rep. Otis Pike of New York, have joined the aid slashers. In the Senate, old super-hawk Barry Goldwater has defected.

Joining this widening congressional fatigue is a combination of ineptitude and lassitude by the Watergate-obsessed Nixon Administration. Some Republican congressmen feel the anti-Saigon tide on Capitol Hill is so strong that even an all-out Nixon Administration effort could not reverse it.

If so, the last chapter of the tragic Vietnam story may be drenched in irony. At the cost of so much American blood, treasure and political turmoil, the Saigon regime at last has established itself politically and militarily, as even Communist documents concede. Having reached this point, however, its worst threat now is not Hanoi's aggressive designs but ineptitude and battle fatigue in Washington.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak are syndicated columnists.

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