President Ngo dinh Diem  
Saigon  

Dear Mr President:

First of all, I should like to present to you the instructions given by the Political Adviser on March 27th, 1958. I did not have time to do so when you asked me to: it was one o'clock and you had not had your lunch yet.

These instructions can be generally summarized under two headings, as follows:

1) With respect to the population: We often speak of holding the people; that is to say, to act so that they will like us and help us maintain security. As a matter of fact, the people want only one thing: not to be bothered, and to be left in peace to attend to their needs. They cannot like us because we collect taxes from them, etc. The essential thing is to protect our basic forces in view of the coming of a third World War; as to assuring security for the population, that is very difficult, because three armed Vietcong are sufficient to create terror. The question is not whether the people like or hate us; rather, since we are in the right, we must fight.

2) With respect to the Vietcong: The policy of destroying the Communist organizations, which has been in force up to now, has proved wrong, because one could never succeed in arresting all the Communists. They are just like a hydra with seven heads -- if one head is cut off, another will grow in its place. We should also not be concerned with re-educating the Communists; we shall only lose time without getting many converted.

The new policy which should be applied consists of three divisions: espionage, counter-espionage and indirect measures.

Espionage will enable us to know the Communist organizations. Counter-espionage consists of infiltrating our agents into the Vietcong ranks, so as to learn their plans, to paralyze their activities and to sow suspicion among them. Indirect measures are those employed to destroy, by devious means, Vietcong organizations by arrests based on non-Communist acts, assault, brawling, etc. You must not arrest the Communists; rather, spot and identify them and then surveil them; because if we arrest them, we'll lose the trail to others. In case of war, we'll round them up at the start and thus disrupt their plans.

With regard to my request to provide our cadres with good weapons in order to increase their fire power and thus raise their morale, the Political Adviser objected that this was not at all necessary. He claimed that good weapons in the hands of our cadres would only be bait for the Communists to kill them so as to get possession of the weapons, as in the case of Nguyen van Hinh's light battalions that were armed with carabines. Once you have succeeded in effectively carrying out the three activities mentioned above, you won't need any national guard or communal police.
Mr President:

No doubt the principles set forth by the Political Advisor are very lofty; carrying them out will bring about notable results. I shall do my best to put them into practice. Nevertheless, there are other factors that apply, and I presented them to the Advisor. There are also other points I did not think of at the time, so I take the liberty of presenting them to you and the Advisor now, for your consideration.

I only want to bring to bear the slight experiences I have had during four years of struggle under your command, and to submit to you some aspects of the problem as well as our capabilities for dealing with it.

With respect to the population: As the advisor so well stated, the population is not inclined to like us. The people are, in fact, rather full of prejudice against us. The people of today are no longer like those of ten years ago. If the majority want only not to be bothered and to be left in peace to attend to their own needs, on the other hand, a fair amount of them are prone to rise up like by the ferment of revolution. They have gone through the baptism of fire and have become profoundly conscious of the problems involved in the struggle for existence. The sight of women and children massing in front of tanks and guns of the French during the period of resistance, and then in front of the national army on recovery missions to regain territory evacuated by the Communists, or in demonstrations for discussions with the North, or for the general elections to bring about the reunification of the country, serve to show us that the people are no longer passive. The motivation which makes them consider death lightly and defy constituted authority can only be found in their consciousness of the class struggle by which the Communists teach them that final victory will be theirs. Drunk with marxist propaganda, they believe in the historic and messianic mission. "You have nothing to lose; on the contrary, you have a whole world to gain". That was the call which emanated from the Manifesto of the Communist Party of 1847 and was strong enough to sway part of humanity.

If a certain number of intellectuals have chosen Hanoi rather Saigon, during the period of Geneva Agreement, and if there have been those who, inhabitants of the South, have turned their faces to the North, it is because they are hypnotized by an infinitely attractive theory; but it will be too late then they discover the reality of things. The example of a goodly half of humanity (of which half is our people) fallen into the hands of the Communists is a sad experience upon which we should reflect.

Far be it from me to overestimate the Communists, because yesterday in Khanh Hoa and in Dinh Tuong, as today in Saigon and Cholon I have continuously triumphed over Communism, not only on the realm of action but also in theory. The evidence is that large numbers of High Communist cadres from district to provincial to regional levels, convinced of their errors in following Marxism, have renounced their Party and come over to our side and fought their former comrades. It is because of these constant struggles against the Communists that I know their strength as well as our own. If allowed to talk about my personal experiences, I can say that in my study of marxist theories there were times when
I felt troubled because of the sharp arguments of Communism. This means that one must have a firm philosophical foundation to avoid being overwhelmed by the Communist theory. It is because I sense this danger from the Communists and their great strength in instigating people into a cruel struggle, transforming simple and gentle individuals into courageous fighters willing and ready to sacrifice themselves that I feel the urgency of winning the people. If we cannot win them, then the Communists will, and surely they will use them to beat us.

The village councillors, militia and civil guard and our soldiers are the base elements of the people. If the population is against us, then it will be difficult to see how they can fight for us.

The following is the complaint that I myself have heard from the people: "Those in the power are far away from us; if anything happens, they will flee like the others and leave us to the Communists. Why should we oppose them and get liquidated?"

If we don't face the question of winning over the people to protect our foundations, then it is very hard to protect the latter because as the Advisor said, the Communists have infiltrated into almost all of our ranks.

The many conferences of provincial chiefs called this year to study the situation all came up with the conclusion that the unstable conditions are caused by our failure to hold the people to our side.

Like in the struggle with Hercules, Antaeus was killed because he lost his footing on the ground; so in the fight against Communism, a government without the support and backing of the population cannot endure, especially when the fate of the whole nation is at stake.

Because of these reasons I think that the question of holding the people is not a question of misleading them at our will but, rather, it is a question of life and death struggle - especially a question which is not unsolvable provided it is put in its proper perspective and that all means are utilized, all methods applied and all sacrifices borne for its realization.

With respect to the Communists: The number of Communist agents in South Vietnam is quite high and true are the words of the Advisor that we cannot capture them all. However, the results obtained in Dinh Tuong during more than one year permit me to say that if I cannot apprehend them all, at least, I could destroy almost all of their base organizations. As confirmed by the Communist provincial commissar in his general report for the last two months which I have sent to you, most of the establishments from provincial to district and village levels have been completely shattered; those agents who were not captured have to live in the bushes or in secret caves and are pursued by the people. The lower level cadres promoted to replace the ones arrested lack experience and their morale is also shaken. The carrying out of the policy of not capturing Communists but only shadowing them and infiltrating our own cadres into their ranks will, in my opinion, encounter these difficult obstacles, as follows:

I.- It is easier for the Communists to infiltrate our establishments than for us to penetrate theirs because we are in the open and they are secret. I don't say that we cannot possibly organize infiltrations into their ranks, because that's what I have been trying to do. However, the work is very difficult and the results are not worth it. Moreover, we do not have enough cadres with strong and firm Marxis
background to undertake these kind of missions. The Communists have such a way of talking and dealing with their members, that those who are not members of the Party will soon give themselves away. The Communist Party is organized on a compartmented basis; members of one nucleus do not know what the other nuclei are doing, nor do they know the other members personally. Even if our agents succeed in infiltrating those nuclei, they won't be able to learn much. To be able to obtain good information, the agents would have to be on the level of the district and provincial commissars; but it takes seniority and outstanding achievement and proven ability to infiltrate at these levels. This is also the opinion of former Communists who have deserted and are now working with me.

2.- Another question is: Could we infiltrate some Communists who have now come over to our side? This is likewise very difficult because, in re-indoctrinating these Communists and converting them to our cause, as I have been doing for a long time, we get them to denounce their former affiliations rather than to ready themselves to serve as agents to be reintroduced into their Party; and the means used to re-educate them often unmask them and expose the fact that they are converted to our side. In order to bring about the conversion of a Communist, you have to put them through various re-orientation processes before you get him to the point where he will, of his own accord, denounce its former alliances. Once you accomplish this, there is only one way the converted Communist can go - to the point where he will completely break with his former organizations; then use him like one who is riding on a tiger; he will be in the position of having betrayed his party; thus, little by little, he will be completely on our side. However, this means that he will not dare risk going back into his Party even if he were disposed to undertake work as a double agent for us.

I tried this out with some Communists whose conversion was kept a secret; but it didn't work, because the Communists are very cautious about those who have been released, especially as the Communists known about my policy of re-educating them, the Communists will surveil them for some time before accepting them back and make them go through a long period of testing their loyalty. Thus it would take quite a long time before such individuals could be re-infiltrated; and in the meantime there would be no guarantee that these individuals would stay converted to our side. So we must be content with the released communists merely keep their promise of not again engaging in communist activities.

Until now, I have only been able to organize some infiltrations into a few villages. As to any higher echelons, it would take too much time. None the less, I realize the interest there is in this direction. It would, however, take large amounts of money to support such infiltrator-agents.

I have the honor to be

Nguyen TRAN