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#### 4. DOCTRINE AND TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The Viet Cong have employed terror for the sake of five proximate objectives<sup>1</sup>:

1. Morale building within the Viet Cong ranks. A successful terrorist act does much to create the aura of invulnerability within a guerrilla band and helps bolster spirits throughout the insurgent organization. The Zone D document cited earlier for example declared that terrorist acts in Saigon had "aroused enthusiasm among the people." Radio Liberation, after a terrorist act in Saigon, was quick to take credit for it in the name of the NLF, usually in boastful terms. Obviously the broadcasts were aimed as much at the faithful as at the enemy.

2. Advertising the Viet Cong movement. Kropotkin called terror, "the propaganda of the deed." Undoubtedly there is no cheaper nor easier way for an insurgent band or dissident group to single itself out from other opposition than by use of terror. In the early period Viet Cong terror acts quite obviously had advertising the movement as one of its objectives. For example a civilian might be shot down in a market place after which his killer would remain on the scene long enough to pin a note to his shirt even though it increased his chances of apprehension. The leadership wanted no ambiguity, no unexplained killings. In some cases it would go so far as to issue leaflets denying the killing of individuals, asserting that they were killed by bandits. But of course this sort of activity cuts both ways -- it advertises but it also horrifies, especially abroad. Thus on January 12, 1966 Yugoslavia, the United Arab Republic and Algeria jointly urged North Vietnam and the NLF to cease

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1. Organization of this chapter owes much to "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation" by Thomas Perry Thornton in Internal War, Harry Eckstein, ed. The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964. The book is highly recommended.

their terror activities, quite obviously because terror was hurting the North Vietnamese and NLF image in their countries. Apparently there was never any reply to this appeal.

3. Disorientation and psychological isolation of the individual Vietnamese. This is done by destroying the structure of authority previously a source of security. The particular target is the Vietnamese villager. The response which the Viet Cong seek through use of terror is fright, anxiety and despair. Terror removes the underpinnings of the orderly system in which the villager lives out his life. It disorients the villager by demonstrating to him that his government cannot give him the safety and order he normally expects from it. The usual protections of his life suddenly vanish and disorientation results. This Viet Cong demonstration however, is but one aspect of the disorientation process. On a much deeper level, the Viet Cong seek to isolate the villager in his social context. Terror isolates. A villager can no longer draw strength from customary social supports. He can rely only on himself. He may be physically undisturbed but he is terribly alone in his anguish. Villagers then become impotent and of no threat to the Viet Cong. A terrorized villager is in a condition associated with anxiety neurosis. He seeks only one thing -- means of fixing his own security

4. Elimination of opposing forces. This of course is the chief utility of Viet Cong terror. By means of terror the Viet Cong have sought to eliminate an entire class of Vietnamese villagers, the local officials and governmental representatives as well as the natural leaders of the village. A leaderless village is further disoriented. The assassination program is directed at total elimination of the GVN apparatus in the village, thus is as much genocide as terror. Nor does the Viet Cong pursue terror in a random or indiscriminate pattern. On the contrary, the killing of individuals is done with great specificity. Terror is also used to immobilize the remaining GVN officials standing between the Viet Cong and their domination of the rural area. For this reason there has been re-

latively little terrorism in Saigon and virtually none directed at top level governmental officials. The Viet Cong, for example, has had ample opportunity to kill Ngo Dinh Diem or subsequent Prime Ministers but as far as can be determined never has made the effort.

5. Provocation of the GVN. There were in the early years Viet Cong terror acts committed with the express purpose of provoking reprisals but the practice was not as widespread as in other insurgencies. Any government faced with terror acts finds it necessary to attempt to suppress the terrorists. Ideally that suppression is by regular and orthodox use of law enforcement. But if the terrorist is effective and if the government sees itself in a crisis, it will almost inevitably use extraordinary repressive measures. Unfortunately, this also is manifested on the individual level without sanction -- the ARVN soldier whose family has suffered at the hands of a Viet Cong terrorist finds himself with a Viet Cong prisoner and orders to extract information from him. Torture under such circumstances, while not excuseable is understandable; an insurgency that also is a civil war unleashes more passion than any other type of war.

The Viet Cong has before it the Viet Minh experience in which suppressive or enforcement terror was conceived as a holding action pending the buildup of Viet Minh strength among rural Vietnamese. As the Viet Minh's strength increased its use of this form of terror diminished. Its use of disruptive terror, as pointed out by Brian Crozier in his book, The Rebels, was to make repression by the French so costly that the French government would prefer to withdraw rather than to continue the struggle. In general the experiences of the Viet Minh did not particularly recommend wide use of disruptive terror.

The Viet Cong leadership has experienced at least one major failure in the use of terror. This came in the Highlands in the summer of 1962 and involved the Montagnards. After years of patiently cultivating

the Montagnards, the Viet Cong leadership apparently came to the conclusion that the policy had not paid off and that a harder line was in order. It was true that despite concentrated efforts, the Montagnards remained hostile to the Viet Cong. The GVN's resources control program in the Highlands (where it is possible to starve to death) and the organizational work among the Montagnards, chiefly by the American Special Forces teams, combined to create an inhospitable climate in the Highlands for Viet Cong cadres. When food became short, these cadres under the new policy did not hesitate to take the food of the Montagnard and allow him to go hungry. The marked increase in the use of terror among the Montagnards that resulted was designed to coerce them into supporting, feeding, and generally assisting the guerrilla bands operating in the mountains. The Montagnard response to such use of force, a traditional gesture of discontent, was sudden migration; the people of a whole village might vanish in a simple night to reappear as refugees in GVN military and civilian centers. Total Montagnard exodus may have reached as high as 300,000 persons, more than a third of the total Montagnard population in South Vietnam. Eventually most of these people were relocated and a number of them were recruited to antiguerrilla CIDG teams.

Beginning in February 1964, the NLF began a terror campaign against Americans in Vietnam. It was random, indiscriminate, and closely resembled the Thornton proximate objectives. It probably did build morale among the terrorists; the bombing of the American Embassy on March 30, 1965 most certainly was for morale building purposes. The killing of American civilians, as in the theater or sports field explosions obviously advertised the Viet Cong in the United States. The terror also served to disorient Americans in Vietnam and create within them a sense of psychological isolation. Terror, however, was not used to the extent it might have been in eliminating American opposition. American death rate for example, could have been much higher in the 1960-1965 period than it was. And finally, the protective measures taken at the American

Dependent School and other civilian installations in Saigon did communicate a sense of insecurity both to the Americans and to the Vietnamese which lasted until the evacuation of American dependents in February 1965. The initial burst of intensified violence in February and March of 1964 stopped almost as suddenly as it began. Within a ten day period there were about two dozen major and minor terror-type attacks on Americans, some large and deadly in scope (had the Pershing Field bomb not partly misfired and had all three lengths of pipe exploded rather than just one, the number of dead would have been in the hundreds and might have been as high as one thousand). But the campaign suddenly ceased for reasons that were never clear.

From studies of captured Viet Cong documents and from questioning of Viet Cong prisoners it is possible to assemble a fairly complete statement of Viet Cong doctrinal approach to terror. Viet Cong cadres consider the proper use of terror as being terror applied judiciously, selectively, and sparingly. They have found that terror, turned on and off, paradoxically produces both pro and antiguerrilla feelings among villagers. On the one hand, of course, it engenders fear and hatred, with the first usually predominating over the second. But when relaxed after an area-wide terror campaign, an exaggerated sense of relief spreads through the villages and villagers tend to regard the guerrillas as being not nearly as inhumane as they are capable of being. Terror, the Viet Cong hold, is virtually useless against a dedicated opponent. In general, Viet Cong theoreticians consider terror to be the weapon of the weak and hold that as guerrilla control increases it should be used less. They hold that from terror a guerrilla band gets rapid but quickly diminishing returns. They believe that terror methods are successful only when the objectives of the terrorist have popular support. And to judge from their terror acts, they believe that terror works better on friends than on enemies. It is also true, whether or not the Viet Cong recognize it, that terror is most effective when the general population is sympathetic

to the cause and least effective when the population actively is committed against the terrorist. From this it follows that in the months ahead, if there is an increase in Viet Cong terror, it will work to the detriment not the benefit of the communists.