Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

SECRET

NO FOREIGN DISSEM/BACKGROUND USE ONLY

25 July 1966

No. 1684/66
Copy No. 13

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

NORTH VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WAR

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

SECRET

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

WARNING

This Document contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, Sections 793 and 794, of the U.S. Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law. The reproduction of this form is prohibited.

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

No. 1684/66

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
25 July 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM*

North Vietnamese Intentions and Attitudes Toward the War

Introduction

1. The Communist military drive in South Vietnam has been stymied and the prospects for victory as viewed from Hanoi are almost certainly dimmer than at any time in the past five years. Nevertheless, Hanoi probably feels that the moment for a basic decision on whether or not to end the conflict is still well over the horizon. As the Vietnamese Communists see it, the allied will to persist in the war has not yet been adequately tested. Also still to be fully measured, in their view, is the ability of the US combat force in Vietnam to sustain its effectiveness, particularly in rolling back the Communists from the substantial ground position they still hold or in uprooting their political infrastructure.

2. It is clear that the Vietnamese Communists believe Washington will soon be forced by the demands of the conflict to put the US on an extensive wartime footing. They hope that such measures, combined with the effect of sustained and increasing US casualties, will fan additional domestic American opposition to continuing the war. In their view, these developments may well inhibit substantially greater US ground escalation of the conflict and may, in the long run, force major concessions in Washington's policy which could offer a realization of some Communist objectives in the South. Hanoi probably still believes that Washington's determination to pursue the war will crack before curtailed Communist capabilities make it necessary for Hanoi to completely

*Produced by the Directorate of Intelligence and coordinated with ONE and SAVA.

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

rethink its strategy. They realize that the domestic position of the Republic of Vietnam is stronger now than at any time in the past three years, but they also judge that Saigon's programs to win the populace over have a long way to go before they reduce significantly the insurgent hold on the South.

3. In sum, the policy makers in Hanoi see little choice but to continue to support and prosecute the war generally along the present lines, at least until their prospects worsen decidedly. It is probable that they view the coming winter as at least the earliest point at which the long-term outlook for the conflict may come into sharper focus. In their view, the Vietnamese Communists have the ability to continue the fighting through this period, and probably well beyond. Despite the bombing of the North, sufficient supplies of men and materiel are still moving south and the will and ability of the domestic population to support the war remains adequate. The main force Communist units in the South still hold a powerful hand, and the Communist grip on a substantial segment of the populace in the South is still strong enough to ensure most of the indigenous logistic backing needed for the war effort.

Determination to Continue the War

4. Recent North Vietnamese actions have left no doubt that Hanoi plans for the present to continue supporting and prosecuting the war in South Vietnam with large commitments of men and materiel. They have already sent at least 30,000 troops to the South in 1966. Only 26,000 infiltrators are known to have come south in all of 1965. In late June an entire North Vietnamese combat division, the 324th, entered the South across the DMZ, apparently to shorten the time required to bolster the southern forces as well as to strengthen the Communist position in the strategically important northern section of South Vietnam.

5. On 17 July Hanoi announced that it was calling up part of its reserve force of officers and enlisted men. This announcement was probably designed primarily for its propaganda impact, since our evidence shows that Hanoi had already stepped up inductions and extended terms of service to the point where its regular armed

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

forces had reached an estimated strength of slightly over 400,000. The new call-up suggests an intent to convey to North Vietnamese people and to the world Hanoi's continuing determination in the war. It also makes the people of the North aware that greater participation by all of them will be necessary in the war effort.

6. Hanoi is apparently still planning, however, to enlarge even further its pool of trained manpower for infiltration and for the defense of North Vietnam. Our estimates indicate that Hanoi can draw on sufficient northern manpower to raise its total military force to well over 500,000 men without unbearable strain on its resources. It can probably dispatch as many as 55,000-75,000 of these annually for infiltration into the South.

7. Recent tough talk out of Hanoi also appears to be aimed at leaving no doubt in anyone's mind that North Vietnam intends to keep fighting. Ho Chi Minh himself stated flatly on 17 July that the DRV will "fight through to victory, despite all the difficulties we have to overcome." Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi recently sought to reinforce this same notion by telling [redacted] that North Vietnamese leaders are determined to continue the war. He implied that the Chinese had recently been in direct touch with Ho and that Peking and Hanoi were in full agreement on their hard line.

25X1X6

Hanoi's Evaluation of the Situation in North Vietnam

8. Hanoi appears to believe that its transportation system will be able to withstand increased air attacks and still maintain an adequate flow of men and supplies to the South. This judgment is probably based in part on the DRV's proven success in moving more than enough supplies south during the past dry season to sustain the Communist forces currently in South Vietnam--at their present rate of action--through the rainy season despite heavy air strikes against the logistic system. Moreover, the North Vietnamese have made enough improvements in the road network in Laos to provide a considerably enlarged rainy season capability.

9. The development of this all-weather capability could enable the Communist forces to use surplus stocks

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

brought in during the dry season for a further expansion of forces to support an increased level of combat by existing units. Recent strikes against North Vietnam's POL storage facilities have destroyed over 50 percent of the nation's petroleum storage capacity. However, it is estimated that substantial stocks still survive and that the DRV can continue to import sufficient fuel to keep at least essential military and economic traffic moving.

10. Although the North Vietnamese economy has been hurt by the cumulative effects of the strikes, damage has come largely from the disruption of transport and from dislocations caused by diversion of manpower into war-related projects. This has resulted in shortages of certain types of food in some localities and in a rise in the price of some consumer items on the extensive free market. The North Vietnamese, nevertheless, appear still to have the essentials necessary to sustain life and continue the war. Their success in the face of the bombings so far probably has reinforced Hanoi's confidence somewhat in its ability to carry on despite the air war.

11. The state of popular morale in North Vietnam is difficult to assess, but it appears that there is no significant opposition to the regime. This is not to say that the cumulative effect of the air strikes has not had a wearying effect on the citizenry; however, there is no evidence that morale has yet declined to the extent that it exerts an inhibiting effect on the regime's policy options in pursuing the conflict. Within the party leadership there are no clear signs of opposition to current policy on the war.

12. One of the key elements in Hanoi's assessment of its capability to sustain the war effort is the level of military and political support it believes it can count on from its allies, particularly Peking and Moscow. Since Hanoi realizes it needs support from both powers, the North Vietnamese have made every effort to avoid commiting themselves to the dictates of either government. Moreover, the North Vietnamese appear to believe that there are distinct limits on the level of materiel and political support which can be counted on from Peking and Moscow and that, in the final analysis, the outcome of the war will depend essentially on the will and resources of the Vietnamese themselves. Thus,

while Soviet and Chinese backing tends to sustain the Vietnamese will to persist, there appears little likelihood that Hanoi will permit either bloc power to gain decisive control over its decisions on war policy.

13. In fact, both Soviet and Chinese spokesmen have voiced recognition of their essential inability to control Hanoi. Soviet Premier Kosygin recently told Mrs. Gandhi that the USSR could take no action on ending the war until Hanoi signified its agreement. Chen Yi put it another way. He told [redacted] that all decisions on the conduct of the war lay "strictly" with the Vietnamese. 25X1X6

The Situation in South Vietnam

14. Hanoi undoubtedly views the situation in the South with mixed emotions. It was certainly discouraged over the blunting of the 1965 Communist offensive by the rapid introduction of large numbers of US combat troops. The failure of the Communists to regain the initiative this year also contributed to Hanoi's discomfort. These difficulties are being compounded daily by the increasingly effective use of US air power against insurgent base camps and by US "spoiling" operations which clearly have upset Communist plans for launching major attacks this summer. The Communists have also begun to feel the impact of increasing casualties. In addition, there has also been a drop, although not a critical one, in Communist morale in South Vietnam. This is reflected to some extent in the growing number of Communist soldiers who defect to US or South Vietnamese units.

15. Hanoi's assessment of the situation in South Vietnam is, however, not all dark. Communist forces still hold most of the ground they held last summer. Communist main force units continue to increase in number. Hanoi probably feels that, although the Communists have failed to move ahead during the past year, they have by and large, successfully checkmated the US by preserving the major portion of their strength. Furthermore, the Communists have managed to maintain their political apparatus in South Vietnam basically intact. They still control at least 20 percent of the population and are able to operate among a considerably greater portion of the people.

Hanoi's Estimate of US Military Intentions

16. North Vietnamese spokesmen have frequently expressed the belief that the US build up in South Vietnam may surpass 400,000 men by the end of this year. They appear, however, to believe that the US will continue to employ these forces along basically the same lines as at present. The Americans, in Hanoi's view, will be aiming to keep Communist forces off balance by disrupting and destroying their bases and by attempting to trap and destroy their main force units. It would appear, however, that they are not, as yet, convinced that the allies will have enough combat forces in South Vietnam by the end of 1966 to inflict a decisive defeat on the Communists.

17. The Vietnamese Communists probably estimate that they will still hold a powerful hand in South Vietnam if they can maintain the bulk of the regular units intact in the face of the anticipated level of allied build up. They would, in such a case, still retain the option of protracting the war. This has long been their main strategy, one which they eventually hope will wear out the allied will to fight. The North Vietnamese probably also believe that the US will be extremely reluctant to expand the ground war by invading North Vietnam. Frequent public statements by US officials that the US does not desire the destruction of the North Vietnamese regime may also encourage Hanoi in this belief.

18. In the North Vietnamese view, Washington probably would be forced to make a basic re-examination of its policy if the allies, with an American ground force of around 400,000 failed to force a decisive outcome of the war. Hanoi may hope that, at this point, the US would be willing to make some significant concessions on the war which would offer a realization of at least some Communist objectives in South Vietnam. War mobilization and economic measures required of the American people might, in Hanoi's view, contribute to substantial domestic opposition to another large-scale escalation of the ground fighting. According to this thesis, the opposition in the US would be heightened by the continuation of American combat losses in Vietnam.

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

19. To this end, Hanoi will probably continue to be basically cautious in its treatment of US pilots captured in the DRV, lest it provoke an adverse reaction from the American people. Thus far, Hanoi officials have gone no further than assertions that the airmen are "criminals" subject to trial in the DRV. No North Vietnamese official has raised the threat to execute them. Harsh treatment of the pilots might tend to undercut, in their view, existing Free World pressures on the US to end the bombing. Hanoi may, however, stage trials in which "confessions" of war crimes by the prisoners would be presented. Long prison sentences could then be meted out, but it is doubtful that death penalties would be carried out even if they were handed down. It is likely that the North Vietnamese will attempt to keep the pilot issue as much in the forefront of their propaganda as possible, since they see it as a means of focusing continued Free World attention on the bombing of North Vietnam.

Future Prospects

20. If the Communists can gain a sustained stalemate in the South in which substantial pressures are working on Washington to modify US policy on Vietnam, Hanoi may finally prove interested in negotiations on the war on the basis of joint concessions. Such a situation would be roughly similar to that which existed in 1954 when the North Vietnamese were negotiating from a position of strength with the French while, at the same time, they had gone about as far as they could go in the military sphere without a long breathing spell. If Hanoi opted for a negotiated settlement at this point, it would be seeking at the minimum to gain a guaranteed territorial foothold for the Communists in South Vietnam, along with the participation of the Viet Cong in a coalition government.

21. Such a settlement would permit the Communists to build up their strength for a new effort in the future to complete a takeover in the South. Hanoi would almost certainly insist on a total suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam and on an unpoliced ceasefire throughout the South during any talks. The Communists would take maximum advantage of such a respite to prepare themselves to resume the struggle in the military and political areas.

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

22. If, however, the US build up in the South during the rest of 1966 is successful in turning the course of the fighting decisively against the Communists, the chances appear better than even that they will opt for retrenchment rather than for escalation. Retrenchment would be more likely to take the form of a de facto termination of the fighting than of a negotiated settlement. The DRV would probably estimate that a withdrawal of the bulk of Communist forces from the South, even if conducted clandestinely, would result in a cessation of US military pressure on North Vietnam. The Communists would, of course, attempt to maintain an underground apparatus in the South in the hope that the insurgency could be started anew after a period of rebuilding and reorganization.

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2

Approved For Release 1999/09/09 : CIA-RDP82S00205R000100100001-2