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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*North Vietnam Defense Minister Giap's
Analysis of the War - -IV*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
26 September 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

North Vietnam Defense Minister Giap's
Analysis of the War--IV*

1. North Vietnamese Defense Minister Giap's latest analysis of the war gives no hint that Hanoi's leaders are growing discouraged or that they intend to make any concessions to bring the conflict to an early end. Instead, he implies that the Hanoi leadership is as determined as ever and remains confident of ultimate victory. Like his past analyses, Giap's latest review of the war provides a detailed explanation of the reasoning behind Hanoi's determination.

US Strategy

2. In essence, Giap argues that the US has been thwarted in its plan quickly to attack and destroy the Communist main forces. He contends that because of its world-wide military commitments, the US can put only a limited number of troops into South Vietnam and that it originally counted on a quick victory at a relatively small price. Giap asserts that the failure of the US to achieve a quick victory has forced it unwillingly into the position of fighting a prolonged conflict. In such a long-term struggle, the advantage remains with the Communist side, which is better able to persist. There are basic US weaknesses, according to Giap, which will eventually bring about US defeat in a protracted war.

*This is the final memorandum in the series on Giap's latest analysis of the war. It summarizes and analyzes the article as a whole.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence.

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3. One basic weakness of the US, he asserts, is the intrinsic inability of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) to perform adequately either as a combat or as a pacification force. This has forced the US to send additional troops to Vietnam and to spread its forces thin in an effort to take up the slack caused by the ARVN's failure. Giap confidently predicts that the performance of the ARVN will not significantly improve and, in fact, will further deteriorate, thus forcing the US to divert more of its forces from their primary task of seeking out and destroying the Communist main forces. The problem facing the US is so great, states General Giap, that putting another 50,000 US troops into South Vietnam will be like "throwing salt into the sea." Giap asserts that even another 100,000 to 200,000 US troops will not suffice to alter the "stalemate." Throughout his assessment, Giap uses the term stalemate to describe the relative strategic position at present between allied and Communist forces. In his view, a perpetuation of the stalemate is more advantageous to the Communists than to the allies.

Enemy Tactics

4. Even more important than US weaknesses, in Giap's assessment of the situation, is the role of Communist tactics in defeating the US. General Giap has long been a great believer in heavy reliance on guerrilla and unconventional warfare. Although he praises the regular Communist forces in South Vietnam, he emphasizes the unconventional aspects of their activity such as lightning raids on urban centers, sporadic mortar and rocket strikes against air bases and camps, and harassment of allied lines of communication.

5. Giap's thesis is that if the Communist forces can remain in the field, keeping the allies spread out and unable to concentrate their forces, they can inflict casualties and avoid head-on clashes with the more powerful US units. In time the allies will tire of the war, he argues, and the Communists will be able to gain an acceptable settlement.

6. Giap emphasizes a tactic which he himself used successfully in the French war--the concentration of main force units in a single strategic area rather than dispersing them less effectively throughout the country. Such an area, according to Giap's thesis, is carefully chosen--close to a safehaven from which troops can be quickly withdrawn or reinforced and for which resupply is relatively easy. In the present war, Giap finds the Tri-Thien area, just south of the Demilitarized Zone, such a strategic area. He argues that this concentration of main force troop strength has the value of tying down large numbers of US troops in areas of Communist choice. It forces the US to react by drawing down allied troop strength and fighting capacity in other areas. Giap claims that such a strategy enables the Communists effectively to counter superior enemy strength without attempting to match it man for man. It also relieves US pressure on other areas and enables Communist local guerrilla and regional forces (probably in conjunction with limited numbers of main force units) to operate more effectively in widespread areas of South Vietnam.

7. Such a concentration of Communist main force units appears directly to contradict the arguments of North Vietnamese politburo member General Nguyen Chi Thanh--who was directing the fighting in the South prior to his death in July of this year. In mid-1966, Thanh was calling for a build-up of main force units throughout the country as the only way to challenge the build-up of US forces in South Vietnam. This issue is apparently an important part of the military debate under way among the North Vietnamese military leadership over military tactics and strategy. This is the first time that Giap has identified himself so personally with the opposition to Nguyen Chi Thanh.

8. It would appear that Giap's strategy is now paramount. The bulk of infiltrating NVA units and replacement groups during 1967 have been committed to the I Corps area.

9. Giap departs further from Thanh's proposed course of action by taking the position that the war can be won through the use of main forces which do not "necessarily possess a strength equaling that of the enemy." The build-up of main forces, he adds, "must conform to the practical conditions of each region and battlefield," (i.e., where the US position is strong and difficult to overcome, Giap warns against over-committing Communist assets). In advocating this strategy, Giap seems to be constructing a rationale for the current Communist tactic of building up forces in the highlands and northern part of South Vietnam, while attempting only to maintain Communist strength at current levels in some other areas, notably coastal II Corps and the region northeast of Saigon. The strategy has been forced on the Communists to the extent that heavy losses and interdiction of supply lines inhibit a significant build-up of forces in certain areas.

10. Giap also applauds what he calls the "independent fighting method" of various elements of the Communist armed forces. Such independence of action, he claims, is a "unique" creation of the Communists in Vietnam. It includes mortar and rocket attacks on allied base areas and commando-like raids on enemy strongpoints conducted by "crack special units," small in number but high in quality. Such actions complement the "coordinated warfare which has long been the standard tactic advocated by Communist strategists.

11. Giap's emphasis on the use of the special unit tactic is probably another reflection of the growing difficulties the Communists have encountered in massing and using their forces in the face of allied pressure. Small-unit hit-and-run tactics offer the chance to inflict maximum damage on the allies at small cost to the Communist unit involved. They differ from simple guerrilla harassment in the quality and armament of the special units involved. Giap implies that "independent fighting methods" are especially useful in areas outside the normal operating area of regular Communist main force units.

Outlook

12. General Giap recognizes that the US may further escalate the war and inflict still greater damage both to North Vietnam and to Communist forces in South Vietnam. He also comments that the US may even invade North Vietnam or expand the ground war into Cambodia and Laos. He claims that the US may bomb North Vietnam's populated centers, further strike its lines of communications, blockade the coast, and bomb the dams and dikes. Despite all of these possible developments, Giap expresses confidence in the ability and determination of the "Vietnamese people" to continue to fight to victory.

13. Giap concedes, however, that greater efforts will be needed if the Communists are successfully to counter the expected step-up in US military activity. In the North, Giap calls for better military training, an expanded militia force, improved air defense work, and more strenuous efforts to keep open the lines of communication. In the South, he calls for more coordination between the various elements of the Communist armed forces.