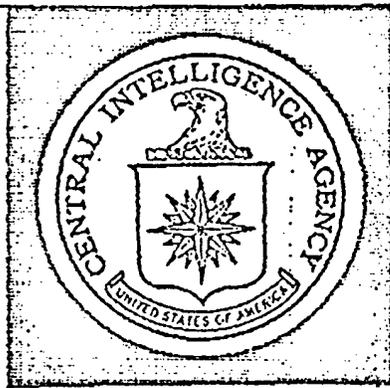


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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

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# Intelligence Memorandum

*Hanoi's Short-Term Intentions*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
3 July 1969

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Short-Term Intentions

Introduction

There has been a series of new developments in Vietnamese Communist military and political activity during the past three months or so. On the political side, the most conspicuous steps have been the ten-point program of the Liberation Front, the formation of the "provisional revolutionary government," and the apparent hardening of the Communist attitude toward talks with the GVN. On the military side, there are the absence of evidence of new infiltration inputs, the withdrawal of some logistics personnel from Laos, and the slackening of military pressures in South Vietnam. There are, in addition, less obvious signs in Communist propaganda and in captured documents that the Communists are entering a new phase of activity. This paper examines some of these developments and offers possible explanations.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and was coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Director's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs.

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1. Captured enemy documents, recently taken prisoners of war, and [REDACTED] reports have all suggested that the Communists intend to maintain a fairly high level of offensive activity in South Vietnam at least through July. Some of these sources indicate that the Communists hope to mount a higher level of military activity in July than occurred in June, and that forthcoming action will include some attacks against major urban centers, including Saigon. These same sources, however, raise the possibility that the enemy's summer offensive will be followed by a lull of indeterminate length.

2. Despite the heavy losses taken by Communist main forces thus far this year--on a scale roughly comparable to their previously unprecedented losses during the first six months of 1968--enemy main force strength has been maintained at about the same level as at the end of 1968. This is because many of the 80,000-100,000 men placed into the infiltration pipeline late last year and early this year are still arriving in South Vietnam, generally offsetting enemy losses.

The Infiltration Picture

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3. [REDACTED]

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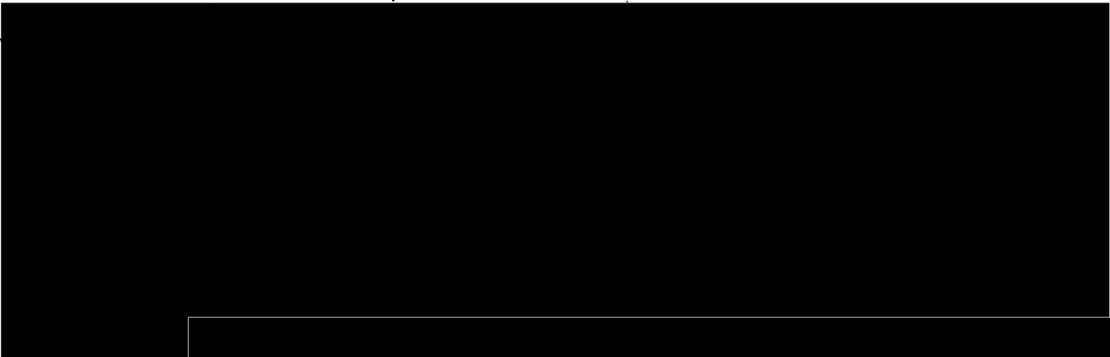
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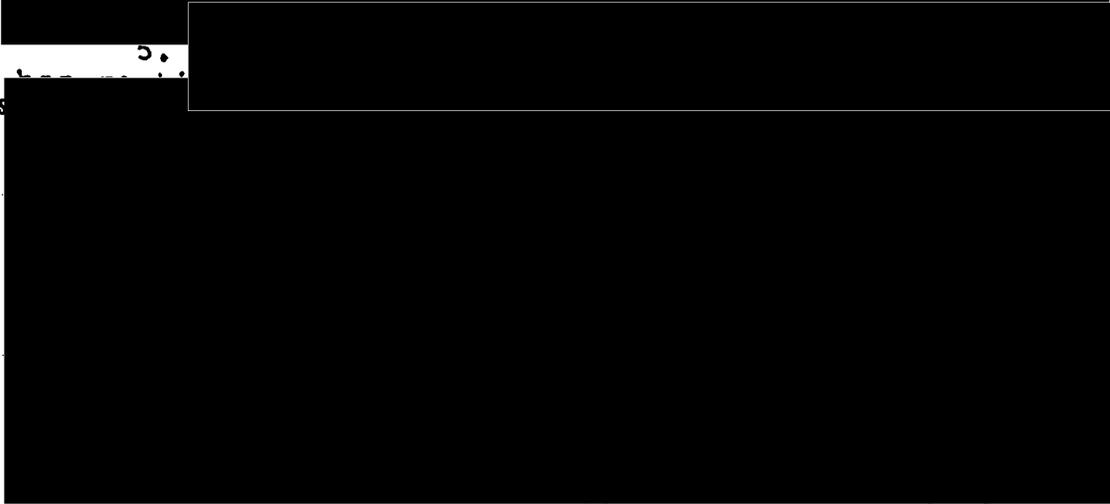
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6. Continuing study of all the evidence leads to the conclusion that there has been an almost complete standdown in the dispatch of replacement groups since late March. No regular, battalion-sized infiltration groups were observed entering the pipeline in April, only two were observed in May, and none has been observed since then. This means that the flow of North Vietnamese replacements will dry up sometime around mid-summer. It follows also that if the enemy continues to stay in the field and to take the kind of casualties he has been suffering this year, his main force strength will begin to decline rapidly during the third quarter of 1969. This probably would be the case even if infiltration were to resume immediately, because it takes from two to four months for infiltrators to make the trip from North Vietnam.

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Possible Explanations for the Infiltration Cutback

7. Even if the post-March standdown on the insertion of replacement groups into the pipeline has actually been as extensive and as long-lasting as our data indicate, this development needs to be interpreted with care. There are a variety of explanations that could account for the cut-off in infiltration starts. Some are on their face unsatisfactory. For example, although North Vietnam is experiencing some manpower drain as a result of heavy casualties, it still has a large manpower pool from which it could draw more troops, if necessary. We find no reason, therefore, to believe that a manpower squeeze is by itself an adequate explanation for the infiltration lull.

8. Some other explanations are more substantial, but they still are not wholly satisfactory because they are based on the premise that the Communists are making their present moves almost exclusively for military purposes. For example, the cutback in infiltration could be explained as the result of a Communist decision to switch to a lower level of tactical activity in the South in order to conserve manpower for a long, drawn-out war. The Communists might do this by restricting their operations almost entirely to shellings, sapper attacks, and guerrilla harassments. This course has long been open to them. But the politburo probably has agreed for years that to return indefinitely to a much lower level of combat would be to admit defeat and to abandon any hope of extracting major concessions from the US at an early date. The politburo seems convinced that the primary factor that might influence the US to settle the war on acceptable terms is domestic American opinion and pressure. If this is indeed its view, and Hanoi intends to prolong the fighting, then it probably will try to keep as much military pressure on the allies as possible, and in particular to keep the rate of US casualties as high as possible. This would entail continuing Communist casualties and replacements from North Vietnam.

9. Still another possible explanation for the infiltration standdown is that Hanoi intends to change the focus of its attacks or to make some basic

redeployments of its forces. It could, for example, shift units from north to south by first reintroducing additional divisions into the northern provinces of South Vietnam and then shifting other units farther south. The North Vietnamese have held major elements of their 304th and 325th divisions just north of the DMZ for months, and these units could be shifted south without requiring an immediate flow of replacements.

10. At the moment, however, there are growing signs that the Communists may already be headed into a period of reduced military activity. A number of units have recently moved into base areas, and a few have moved out of the northern provinces and back into North Vietnam. There are mixed indications of Communist intentions in the DMZ area. So far these moves do not amount to the kind of wholesale unit withdrawals that occurred last autumn, and there is no way to predict the ultimate extent or duration of the developing trend.

#### The Possibility of a Prolonged Lull

11. When these current military developments, plus the infiltration cutback, are examined in the context of political developments over the last few months, it appears that North Vietnam is doing something more than simply digging in for the long haul. Hanoi's decision to cut back on infiltration probably was made this spring during the same strategy sessions that led to the ten-point program in early May and to the formation of the "provisional revolutionary government" in early June.

12. We cannot pin down precisely when these decisions were made, but they almost certainly came in the period after politburo member Le Duc Tho arrived in Hanoi from Paris on 21 February, and before 28 April when he left again. The three main indications of what happened during that period--the ten points, the PRG, and the infiltration cutback--all suggest that the politburo decided the time was growing ripe for a period emphasizing "talk" instead of "fight" in their over-all strategy.

13. The most likely interpretation of Hanoi's near-term intentions, therefore, is that sometime this summer the Communists will enter a period of reduced military activity that will be prolonged for some months. Hanoi may calculate that a hiatus in offensive activity would yield both military and political advantages. Hard-pressed Communist units would be enjoying a period of rest, while their negotiators in Paris could attempt to obtain allied political concessions and a reduction in allied military operations in South Vietnam.

14. The Communists may reason that pulling back many of their units into out-of-country sanctuaries and lowering the level of fighting would be quite effective at this time in persuading the US to take steps to end the war, perhaps more effective than simply continuing the fighting. The infiltrations cutback almost certainly was not, in itself, intended as a "signal" or designed as a move to elicit a US response. Hanoi almost certainly would not expect the US to respond to the vagaries of infiltration intelligence. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] there are no signs that the Communists are trying to call the slowdown to our attention. Hanoi realizes, however, that as the cutback in infiltration becomes public knowledge and the level of fighting declines, there will be voices raised in the US urging a response to a so-called Communist "signal."

15. There was a prolonged military lull of this kind last year. Little infiltration occurred between August and late November, and over half of the enemy's main force units were pulled into out-of-country sanctuaries. At the same time, the Paris talks moved into the crucial stages that eventually culminated in the bombing halt. Hanoi probably assumes that its military cutback last year helped to bring about the US decision to stop the bombing. It may calculate that a similar lull now would provide a favorable climate for US concessions, as well as new opportunities to split the US and Saigon and to undermine the Thieu government.

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16. The Communists would still retain the option of mounting another round of offensive activity early next year. They probably would do so if there were no curbs on allied military activities in South Vietnam and if there were insufficient movement toward a settlement they could accept. Replacement troops could be started down the trails as late as September or even October in time to be ready for another go in early 1970. That was what happened last year after the bombing halt and the subsequent deadlock in the talks. The rate of infiltration suddenly shot up to a record high in December, and many of the units that had been withdrawn from South Vietnam began moving back in preparation for the offensive that eventually was mounted in late February.

17. A variant on the possibility of a prolonged lull is that Hanoi is considering a more permanent de-escalation of the war. It might even contemplate sponsoring a call for a cease-fire later this summer. Hanoi probably would prefer that a third party issue such a call, because for the Communists to do so themselves would be taken as a sign of weakness and probably would provide a morale boost to non-Communist South Vietnamese. A Communist-backed initiative for a cease-fire, however, might seem quite attractive to Hanoi as a means of accelerating US troop withdrawals and curbing allied military operations in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese would assume that the pressures for a positive US response to a cease-fire proposal would be overwhelming and that Washington would be forced to overcome any reluctance in Saigon to such a step.

18. The Communists probably would prefer that a cease-fire follow agreement on political issues and the securing of a firm power base for the Communist apparatus in the South. But if they saw no chance for reaching agreement on such matters in the foreseeable future, they might try to use a cease-fire as a means of bringing more pressure for allied concessions. Any Communist-backed initiative for a cease-fire almost certainly would be hedged with a demand that a full allied military standdown be accompanied by assurances of freedom of movement and action for Communist political cadre. If they could obtain an arrangement of this sort, there would be unprecedented opportunities for political agitation designed to capitalize on the peace issue. Communist

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efforts to undermine the Thieu government and to extract political concessions might also be enhanced if they could make continuation of a standdown in major fighting contingent on such concessions.

19. Actually, any Communist-inspired call for a cease-fire--whether enunciated by the Communists or set up for announcement by a third party--would almost certainly be part of at least a two-component package. In addition to the military and security provisions, we would expect it to contain some political gambit. This could range from a renewed demand for a coalition government to a call for some form of consultative conference in which the GVN could attend only as one participating group. We cannot predict the form of the political gambit, but we are confident that Hanoi would hold out at least a two-part package--a cease-fire plus--designed in the hope that the US would find the cease-fire offer politically impossible to turn down and the GVN would find the "plus" very difficult to accept.

#### Conclusion

20. In sum, whatever the other implications of current developments in South Vietnam, there is good reason to believe that Hanoi intends to move into a period of relative lull in its military action sometime this summer. It might even want to obtain a cease-fire. It also seems likely that Hanoi plans some new moves on the political front in South Vietnam and diplomatic moves in Paris to accompany the reduced level of military action. Hanoi would retain a great deal of military flexibility in such a period, and could maintain enough pressure to demonstrate that its forces in the field are capable of continuing the war unless the US agrees to a settlement acceptable to the Communists. If this course failed to produce the results the Communists desire, Hanoi could renew large-scale offensive actions, perhaps by first moving units just north of the DMZ back into South Vietnam and resuming infiltration to support longer term offensive efforts.

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21. Although the Communists almost certainly have plans for prolonging the military struggle if they fail to obtain an acceptable settlement in the next few months, there is a reasonable amount of indirect evidence--including what the Communists are telling their people in South Vietnam--that Hanoi has high expectations that within a reasonably short time-frame, American domestic opposition to the war will compel the US to move in directions favorable to the Communists. If by early winter Hanoi should conclude that these expectations were not going to be realized in the foreseeable future, the strains in North Vietnam and the erosion of the Communist position in South Vietnam would enter more heavily into its calculations. In such circumstances it is at least debatable whether Hanoi would be prepared to maintain indefinitely its uncompromising stance on its present hard-line political demands.

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