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9 April 1965

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD
MEMORANDUM

RECENT INDICATIONS OF
COMMUNIST INTENTIONS
IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf
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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

9 April 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: RECENT INDICATIONS OF COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. During the past three weeks Communist powers have issued a number of statements threatening increased participation in the Vietnam conflict. On 22 March the Viet Cong political arm, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLFSV), declared that, "if the US imperialists continue to send their troops and the troops of their satellites into South Vietnam and to expand the war to the North and to Laos, the NLFSV will call upon the world peoples to send troops and youths to come and side with the South Vietnamese people." It went on to threaten to call on the South Vietnamese who have been in the North "for the past ten years to return to take up weapons to exterminate the enemy and save their country."

2. The Chinese Communists responded on 25 March pledging to send "all necessary material aid" and declaring readiness "to send our own men whenever the South Vietnamese people want them." On 29 March Peiping for the first time directly linked the South Vietnam situation to China's security, stating that following the US "aggressions" against North Vietnam "its next step will be aggression against China," and that China's

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security can only be assured by driving the US out of South Vietnam. Through various spokesmen Peiping has several times repeated its pledges of help to the Viet Cong.

3. On 26 March North Korea also responded by officially offering to send volunteers if requested. It has attempted to heighten the effect by publicizing the numbers of citizens it claims are volunteering for Vietnamese service.

4. Hanoi has been a little more restrained than Peiping, although it has given full publicity to the NLFSV statements. Although not specifically threatening to send North Vietnamese troops, Hanoi has supported the Front's threat to call on "regrouped" Southerners to return to fight with the Viet Cong. Hanoi has organized an extensive propaganda campaign to publicize the readiness of the Southerners to return and to mobilize the northern population "to be ready to fight anywhere needed." Hanoi has also widely publicized offers from Chinese and other foreigners to fight in Vietnam.

5. Moscow has been comparatively reticent. Although it promptly published brief reports of the NLFSV appeal for material aid and its reference to foreign troops, it made no comment on the appeal until 7 April, when Kosygin said that it had received a "positive response"

in the Soviet Union. Since 23 March Moscow commentators have frequently noted the readiness of Soviet citizens to volunteer to go to Vietnam, but they have not linked this to the NLFSV appeal. Moscow has instead stressed the importance of its material aid to the DRV.

6. Of the whole range of Communist statements, none makes an immediate commitment to direct intervention. Material aid, including weapons, is promised, but personnel are promised only if the Viet Cong needs and asks for them. We believe such statements are designed to bolster the morale of the Viet Cong and the DRV in the face of stepped-up US pressures and, more especially, to deter the US from extending its bombing and increasing its forces in the area. Nevertheless, their willingness to go as far as to threaten intervention suggests that the Communists are prepared to take some further steps to fulfill their warnings with token numbers of "volunteers" from other Communist countries.

7. In order to deter the US and to stimulate international and domestic pressures for a change in US policy, the Communists, particularly the Chinese, are seeking to raise the spectre of a Korea-type war. Actually, at this stage, the Chinese Communists have less reason to intervene in Vietnam than they had in Korea 15 years ago and more reason to fear the US reaction if they should do so. The Communists almost certainly believe that the best way to advance their cause is to prevent further US escalation of the war and to press their advantage in the South.

8. This is apparently exactly what the Communists are doing: while using threats in the hope of limiting US participation in the conflict, they are preparing for increased military activity in South Vietnam. Talk of the obligation to send personnel will probably be used to justify the introduction of foreign military technicians, and any PAVN units sent to the South could be called "regrouped Southerners returning from the North." Considerable numbers of foreign specialists may be introduced into North Vietnam in coming months, but very few are likely to join the Viet Cong in the South. The Asian Communists (especially those in Peiping) are both sensitive and arrogant; they could be provoked into irrational actions. On balance, however, in the absence of other indicators, we believe that the recent Communist threats do not presage a Korean-type intervention now.

9. A more immediate military threat lies in South Vietnam, particularly, we believe, in the northern part. There has been clear evidence in past months of an accelerated buildup of Communist forces in this region. Viet Cong have been brought in from other regions and there is considerable evidence that regular PAVN units have been introduced into Western Kontum province. Introduction of regular PAVN units would indicate lessened concern on the part of the DRV to conceal its involvement in South Vietnam. This buildup in capabilities almost certainly indicates an intention to undertake offensive actions of greater scope and significance than

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hitherto attempted in this area. The security situation in this area has so deteriorated that an accelerated sustained effort by the VC, or an attack on some key point, could have grave consequences for the GVN. Such an attack could come against any one of a number of places, e.g., Kontum, Ban Me Thuot, Qui Nhon, Pleiku, Hue, or Da Nang.

10. Communist forces are currently building up in two areas -- near Kontum and near Da Nang. The approaching southwest monsoon will handicap US/GVN air activity in areas west of the coastal range, e.g., Kontum. The coastal strip east of the range, however, will become relatively clear and dry during the same period. Consequently, Communist forces concentrated for an attack on Da Nang or Hue would be more vulnerable to air strikes.

11. The buildup in northern South Vietnam has been in progress for at least six months, and it may be that preparations for a major attack will continue for some time to come. For this reason and because of the wide range of possible targets, we cannot predict either where or when such an attack is most likely to occur.

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