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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

12 June 1965

The Honorable Allan Evans
Acting Director, Intelligence and Research
Department of State

Dear Allan:

The attached was prepared to assist me in pulling together some of my thoughts on the situation in Vietnam. It was also designed to serve me as a resume of intelligence community views which have been set forth in the recent National Intelligence Estimates. Because every effort was made to keep the present document to minimum length, departures from the full texts -- as agreed -- were unavoidable. Even though there are numerous estimates on the subject, they do not cover all of the major points presently under discussion. Accordingly, my staff has supplemented community findings with judgments very generally agreed to within the Central Intelligence Agency.

I myself have found the document useful and forward it to you for your information, emphasizing again that you should consider it a special-purpose briefing note and in no sense an agreed pronouncement of the United States Intelligence Board.

Sincerely,

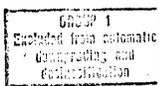
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W. F. Raborn

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

11 June 1965

BRIEFING PAPER

NIE's and SNIE's on South Vietnam

Since June 1964 there have been 12 NIE's or SNIE's on South Vietnamese problems. Only one of these, issued 4 February 1965, "Short-Term Prospects in South Vietnam," was in any sense a general assessment of the situation. Eight were on "Communist Reactions to Certain Possible Courses of US Action" -- these US courses of action were specifically given to us by policy-makers requesting the respective Estimates.

Accordingly there are no agreed USIB documents which are currently valid and which provide a general view of the situation in all its aspects, or which deal with all contingencies which might arise.

In Part I, following, we attempt to present estimative judgments on the most immediate issues. Column 1 poses the questions, or puts the propositions. Column 2 contains what NIE's or SNIE's have said on the matter. You will realize that this presentation omits supporting arguments and most qualifications. It may serve as a basis for briefing.

Part II is a list of USIB-approved Estimates specifically related to the Vietnam situation, issued during the past 12 months. It includes a very brief note on each Estimates.

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GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

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PART I

PRINCIPAL ISSUES IN THE SHORT TERM

I. The Communists think they are winning the war in South Vietnam, because:

(a) It is a guerrilla war, of small-scale operations, in jungle and difficult terrain, where advanced weapons, air power, and large-unit formations are not of decisive importance;

(b) it is a "war of national liberation" -- a political and social struggle -- the kind of struggle which they believe they will inevitably win;

(c) they think the US does not understand how to fight such a war;

(d) they perceive the weaknesses of the South Vietnamese government;

(e) they remember that they defeated the French;

(f) finally, they think they are winning because in fact they are winning. (See General Westmoreland's recent cable.)

The main judgments here are found most recently in SNIE 10-6-65 of 2 June 1965 (para. 3 for the DRV, para. 7 for the Chinese).

Virtually all the Estimates stress Communist confidence in ultimate victory.

No NIE would declare that the Communists are winning the war, and none does.

II. As long as the Communists think they are winning in South Vietnam, bombing of North Vietnam is unlikely to lead them to make conciliatory gestures.

Bombing of North Vietnam could be:

(a) limited to targets and areas approximately as at present;

(b) extended to airfields and SAM sites near Hanoi (and done with SAC aircraft);

(c) extended (gradually) to North Vietnamese industrial and economic targets (not population centers as such);

(d) indiscriminate and complete.

This proposition is most recently in SNIE 10-6-65, 2 June 1965, applying, however, only to bombing as in (a) and (b).

Since February 1965, SNIE's have stated that this degree of bombing would not lead Hanoi to make conciliatory gestures.

SNIE 10-6-65 (2 June 1965) says odds are against this leading Hanoi to conciliatory gestures. (Air Force dissents)

SNIE 10-3/1-65, 18 February, said (with State dissenting) that "if the US vigorously continued in its attacks and damaged some important economic or military assets the DRV ... might decide to intensify the struggle, but ... it seems to us somewhat more likely that they would decide to make some effort to secure a respite from US attack"

The 2 June SNIE, however, in effect though not specifically, reversed this judgment.

This has not been considered in any USIB paper.

III. As long as the Communists think they are winning in South Vietnam it is unlikely that Chinese Communists or Soviets will intervene with substantial military forces of their own, in combat.

The message of all recent SNIE's is in agreement with this proposition, for three main reasons:

1. Such intervention would not be necessary.
2. It would involve China and Russia in undesired risk of larger war with the US.
3. The North Vietnamese do not want a massive Chinese Communist presence in their country, at least not until their regime is facing severe defeat.

Note however that continuance of the flow of military supplies, equipment, and probably small numbers of technical and training personnel from China and the USSR to North Vietnam is virtually certain.

The chances of large-scale DRV invasion, of attacks on US aircraft carriers or bases, or of large-scale Chinese Communist military intervention call for further consideration, as follows:

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CONTINGENCIES

I. Large-scale, overt, DRV invasion of South Vietnam-- on the "Korean" model.

(a) Appears to us to be militarily imprudent. The only north-south road is the coast road, open to US air and naval bombardment.

(b) Caution. This does not rule out accelerated and substantial infiltration of regular DRV forces along trails west of the coastal plain. This is occurring and probably will continue.

Estimated in 10-6-65, 2 June, as unlikely in response to SAC bombings of North Vietnamese airfields and SAM sites, because of the risks to the DRV in such an invasion.

But SNIE 10-5-65, 28 April, says that if the US bombed China in sustained fashion "the DRV armed forces, with Chinese support, would probably open an offensive against South Vietnam." (This may not mean a "Korean style" offensive, however, but a greatly intensified insurgency effort within South Vietnam.)

All Estimates on the matter allow for the possibility of such an invasion. State consistently has judged it more likely, in certain contingencies, than have the other Agencies.

II. Attacks on US carriers or on US air bases in South Vietnam.

Attacks on carriers are barely possible with Chinese Communist submarines, possible with Soviet submarines, possible but almost suicidal with IL-28's.

Attacks on airfields in South Vietnam are possible but very dangerous with IL-28's from North Vietnam; are highly likely by sabotage teams.

The possibility of such attacks is recognized in SNIE's, but (except for sabotage or sneak attacks on US airfields) they are deemed unlikely.

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III. Substantial Chinese Communist
Military Intervention in
Vietnam, in Combat, with

(a) Chinese Communist air-
craft and pilots, based in
North Vietnam.

Considered likely, in response
to US bombing of North Vietnam,
as far back as SNIE 10-3-65,
11 February 1965. Limited,
however, by capability of North
Vietnamese airfields, especially
if these airfields were under
US attack.

(b) Chinese Communist air-
craft from bases in China.

State considered this likely
if US bombing extended to
northern North Vietnam. All
other agencies considered it
unlikely. SNIE 10-3-65,
11 February. Also SNIE 10-6-65,
2 June.

(c) Chinese Communist attack
on the offshore islands, Taiwan,
or South Korea.)

Considered unlikely in
SNIE 10-5-65, 28 April, even
if the US bombed South China
with sustained air strikes.

(d) Large numbers of
Chinese Communist "volunteers" --
in the Korean style.

See next page.

Question: When would the Chinese Communists intervene militarily with ground forces in a substantial fashion (so as to change the character of the war)?

(a) If the US/GVN were winning the war in South Vietnam? Probably not.

Not estimated by USIB.

(b) If US air attacks began to damage the industrial and military sector of North Vietnam? Probably not.

Judged unlikely in SNIE 10-3-65, 11 February 1965 (with partial State dissent). This Estimate almost certainly still holds.

(c) If the US bombed fighter bases in South China? Probably yes, if the bombings continued over some time.

SNIE 10-5-65, 28 April 1965, says that the Chinese under these circumstances would probably move forces "into North Vietnam" and Northern Laos, and would threaten Thailand.

(d) If US ground forces invaded North Vietnam in such strength as to control most of the country? Probably yes; almost certainly yes if US forces approached the Chinese frontier.

This is a judgment agreed in USIB a long time ago. There has been no occasion to repeat it in the past year.

Question: What about Soviet military intervention in combat.

Such intervention is judged to be extremely unlikely.

SNIE's generally estimate Soviet reactions to be confined to propaganda, diplomatic maneuver, and supply of weapons and equipment to North Vietnam.

(a) Vietnam is too far away for the Soviets to support a useful military operation, especially in view of their unfriendly relations with Communist China.

(b) The Soviets wish to avoid a military confrontation with the US.

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SOME POLITICAL FACTORS

- I. The Chinese Communists are violent, unyielding, offering no avenue to settlement acceptable to the US.
- II. The DRV is almost, though not quite, as obdurate as the Chinese, and have apparently grown more so in recent weeks.
- III. The Soviets would probably like to get the problem settled, but they cannot force the DRV to a settlement, and there is no reason to suppose that they feel either the necessity or the desire to work towards a settlement on US terms. Their attitude has hardened in recent weeks. It is worth noting that Brezhnev and Kosygin have reversed Khrushchev's policy of disengagement from the Vietnam problem.

All this is in accord with
SNIE's and NIE's.

IV. The Sino-Soviet quarrel is a factor of first importance. Much simplified:

(a) The Chinese maintain their extreme revolutionary posture, expecting that a successful outcome in Vietnam (from their point of view) will enhance their position in the Communist world and among underdeveloped nations. They wish to maximize their influence in North Vietnam, at Soviet expense.

(b) The Soviets cannot afford (even if they wish) to appear backward in their support of a "revolutionary struggle." But they are challenging Chinese influence in North Vietnam by supplying things (SAM's, IL-28's) which the Chinese cannot produce.

(c) The DRV appears eager to balance the overwhelming Chinese presence (owing to size and proximity) in their affairs with a growing Soviet involvement.

Generally in accord with various USIB pronouncements.

V. The fragility of the governmental structure in South Vietnam is also an important factor in Communist calculations.

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VI. Free World Attitudes

There is widespread disapproval of US actions in Vietnam in the Free World generally, including the US itself.

Not covered in NIE's.

We believe that the Communists rely heavily on this feeling to restrain the US from (1) anything approaching unrestricted bombing of North Vietnam and (2) widening the area and scope of the war.

Emphasized in all SNIE's.

Communist diplomacy and propaganda is vigorous in encouraging the disapproval of US policy. It is an extremely important element in their general line of policy.

Emphasized in all SNIE's.

FINAL NOTE

One Estimate -- that on reactions to US bombing of China -- deals in its final section with a situation of general war in the Far East -- perhaps in the world. We note that except for this, all the Estimates deal with situations of moderate or limited escalation (or no escalation). The general proposition is that the Communists will try to restrain further expansion of military conflict -- if only because they are doing well in conflict on the present scale.

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PART II

USIB-APPROVED ESTIMATES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE
VIETNAM SITUATION, ISSUED DURING THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS

8 September 1964, SNIE 53-64, Chances for a Stable Government
in South Vietnam

Written as General Khanh took control. "At present the odds are against the emergence of a stable government capable of effectively prosecuting the war in South Vietnam. Yet the situation is not hopeless...."

1 October 1964, SNIE 53-2-64, The Situation in South Vietnam

The Problem was "To examine the situation as it has developed since early September, and to assess its implications for the US." It said: "Since our estimate of 8 September 1964 the situation in South Vietnam has continued to deteriorate...We believe that the conditions favor a further decay of GVN will and effectiveness. The likely pattern of this decay will be increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort...."

9 October 1964, SNIE 10-3-64, Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Action

After dealing with two lesser courses, this estimate addressed itself to Communist reactions to "a systematic program of gradually intensifying US/GVN [air] attacks against targets in the DRV itself, including those associated with infiltration routes and military and economic targets...." This estimate tended, very hesitantly, to the judgment that such a program of air attacks, if continued, would probably cause the DRV to stop its military attacks in South Vietnam, press for a negotiated cease-fire in the South, and try to promote an international conference to pursue their ends, expecting, however, to fight another day. State dissented, believing that the DRV would carry on the fight.

4 February 1965, SNIE 10-65, Communist Military Capabilities and Near-Term Intentions in Laos and South Vietnam

This paper assesses the meaning of recent Communist force build-ups in South Vietnam and Laos; it sees them as having the purpose of improving Communist military capabilities in those areas, and deterring the US from expanding the war to North Vietnam. They did not (according to the estimate) "appear to be of the nature or scope that we would expect to precede a major change in the nature of Communist military activity in Laos or Vietnam such as would precede a major offensive." Also: "We believe that Hanoi and Peiping are determined to continue their present policies in Laos and South Vietnam. While the Communists are probably not yet ready to embark on a general military offensive, it is almost certain that they will continue their support of insurrectionary forces and will prepare to exploit any new opportunities which arise in either Laos or South Vietnam."

4 February 1965, SNIE 53-65, Short-Term Prospects in South Vietnam

This was an estimate on significant political forces and attitudes in South Vietnam, with an assessment of the prospects over the next month or so. It grew out of the current conflict between Buddhists and Catholics, and analyzed the nature of these and other forces at work.

11 February 1965, SNIE 10-3-65, Communist Reactions to Possible US Actions

The Problem was "To estimate Communist reactions, particularly Soviet reactions, to a US course of sustained air attacks on North Vietnam." The Soviet response "would consist both of a vigorous diplomatic and propaganda effort to bring the US to the conference table and the provision of military support to North Vietnam." This support would almost certainly include anti-aircraft artillery and radars; the chances were about even that the Soviets would provide some SA-2 defenses. In the world generally the USSR would harden its policies toward the US. The DRV would probably not reduce its levels of activity. China might send some few volunteers but would not intervene on a substantial scale. Fighters based in North Vietnam would probably be employed to the extent of their capabilities against the US attacks. If US attacks reached the

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northern part of the DRV China might react over North Vietnam with fighters from its own bases. (State believed China "would probably" so react.)

18 February 1965, SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible US Courses of Action Against North Vietnam

This estimate was a supplement to the preceding one. The majority here inclined slightly to the view that Hanoi would make some effort to secure a respite from such attacks, if they were declared and sustained, and if they damaged some important economic or military assets. (State dissented.)

19 March 1965, SNIE 10-4-65, Probable Communist Reactions to Deployment of a ROK Combat Division for Base Security Duty in South Vietnam

This paper estimated that there would not be much Communist reaction, beyond propaganda.

28 April 1965, SNIE 10-5-65, Communist Reactions to Certain US Actions

Problem: "To estimate likely Communist, particularly Soviet and Chinese, reactions to non-nuclear air strikes by the US against China." The paper dealt with three possibilities: (a) to an initial exchange, and similarly limited US responses to further Chinese air attacks; (b) expanded US air attacks to include other targets of military significance in South China (beyond airfields); and (c) US air strikes expanded to include hundreds of targets of major military significance throughout China.

2 June 1965, SNIE 10-6-65, Probable Communist Reactions to Certain US Actions

4 June 1965, SNIE 10-6/1-65, Probable Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action

4 June 1965, SNIE 10-7-65, Implications of a Certain US Course of Action

These three papers dealt with probable reaction to a US air attack, using heavy bombers, aimed at destroying fighter and bomber

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aircraft and surface-to-air missiles in North Vietnam; reactions to SAC heavy bomber strikes on enemy positions in South Vietnam; and the implications of not attacking the surface-to-air missile sites, light bombers, and fighters recently furnished to the DRV by the USSR.

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