

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 29 Sept. 1971

TO: The Indochina Brethren

FROM:

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Attached are some thoughts and ideas of my colleagues here which I distribute for your consideration and, if you so feel, comment.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

GAC:TAW

Handwritten vertical text on the right margin, possibly a routing slip or file number, including the word "Brethren" and other illegible characters.

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23 September 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: George A. Carver, Jr.

SUBJECT : Communist Intentions

1. There is no direct evidence that the Communists are contemplating a major change in strategy in Vietnam. Neither reports nor force deployments suggest that the enemy is preparing for large-scale action. The evidence that is available from clandestine reports, prisoners, ralliers, and captured documents suggest that the major emphasis in South Vietnam continues to be on terror, subversion and small scale guerrilla operations, on attempts to disrupt the elections, and on trying to rebuild the shattered cadre network. Most of our reporting, however, is local in nature and probably is not valid for more than a few months in the future. It is entirely possible that Hanoi could be contemplating a change in strategy for early next year without yet having passed the word down to COSVN or the lower echelons.

2. To a large extent Hanoi's strategy probably is dependent upon the pace of our withdrawal program. Hanoi may anticipate that U.S. withdrawals will continue at a brisk pace with the aim of reducing U.S. forces to a minimum prior to the U.S. presidential elections. If they remain satisfied with progress toward this primary objective, there seems to be little reason for them to launch major attacks which would be costly in human and material resources, possibly cause us to slow down the withdrawals, and jeopardize their long-range prospects for taking over the country. On the other hand, should they become dissatisfied with the pace of our withdrawals or with our plans for a residual force, they may calculate that attacks on U.S. forces in order to inflict casualties might well increase the domestic pressures on the administration for a total withdrawal.

3. If the Communists were planning military action on a nationwide scope during 1971, we almost certainly should be seeing indications of it by now in reports or by noting preparations such as the forward placement of supplies. In addition, manpower and supply problems,

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particularly in MR 3 and MR 4, would seem to limit any intensification of military activity this year to a series of relatively small-scale actions designed primarily to recoup some of their position in the countryside.

4. It could be a different story in 1972, however. By next year the GVN forces will not have reached their full capabilities under Vietnamization, and the remaining U.S. forces may be reduced to the point where they will no longer be decisive. Moreover, the Communists have always closely correlated their military and political actions. The Communists may well conclude that the 1972 election year would be a good time to prove to the American people that Vietnamization is not working and that a new, anti-war president should be elected. We should soon see a major intensification of infiltration and logistical activity if the Communists intend to escalate the war significantly in 1972.

5. One could argue with equal conviction, however, that the Communists will lack the capability for any large scale military action before early 1973. The loss of the Cambodian sanctuaries, the setbacks in the infrastructure, the depleted supply and manpower situation have created problems that might require two dry seasons to overcome. Although the GVN will be stronger militarily in 1973, U.S. forces presumably will have been further reduced from the 1972 level.

6. There is nothing, of course, to prevent the Communists from raising the level of activity at any time in specified places, such as the DMZ area, or from concentrating their forces for an attack on vulnerable South Vietnamese units. They could also do this against isolated American units if they decide that this would speed U.S. withdrawals. If the Communists are planning to change their strategy at all, this appears to be the most likely course over the next year.

7. Whatever option Hanoi chooses, there are no manpower restraints. OER estimates that Hanoi could send 200,000 men down the trail annually for several years before feeling the pinch. This would sustain a high level of combat; in 1968, the year of the big offensives, 244,000 men were infiltrated into South Vietnam.

8. Attached hereto are comments prepared by [redacted] on some of the things you suggested we review.

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[redacted]
Vietnamese Affairs Staff

Attachments

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Attachment I

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Captured Documents

Information garnered from captured enemy documents was one of the key signs indicating a shift in enemy strategy and tactics that culminated in the Tet offensive. In contrast, the important enemy documents available at the present time do not as a whole tell us that a strategy shift or an impending major offensive is brewing. For example, the latest COSVN resolution, designated as the 10th COSVN plenum resolution or the COSVN Standing Committee Directive 01/71, stresses that the main missions of the Communists in South Vietnam are the building up of the revolutionary forces and the further development of the armed-political-proselyting movements. The document cautions against rightism, pessimism, asserts that the revolution is not in a defensive position, and yet proclaims that efforts are to be made to attain victory in a short period of time. Aside from the COSVN level documents, the lower echelon materials are replete with general professions of victory and talk of perseverance in the revolution. This is not to say that there may not be exceptional documents which could indicate a strategic offensive may be afoot. (For example, there is a document dated 31 July 1971 captured from the 31st Regiment of the 2nd NVA Division which is operating in the Quang Nam Province area that contained rules of personal conduct for the liberation troops who may operate in cities and towns.) However, the bulk of the currently available relatively important captured documents offer no tactical tip-offs of an impending period of intensified combat activity that approaches the 1968 Tet offensive.

Communist Territorial Reorganization

Unlike the establishment of subregions around Saigon in late 1967, the recently reported Communist territorial reorganizations do not seem to have been undertaken in order to prepare for possible renewed large-scale offensive activity. In MR 1 there are reports of a minor restructuring of province administrations and base areas. In MR 4 several sources have indicated that the Communist MR structure in the lower Delta may have been radically altered with new provinces and a subregion jurisdiction reportedly established. The exclusive explanation by these sources for the Delta reorganization lies in the necessity to arrest and repair the dismal situation which the Communists have been facing in the area during the recent past. While it is too soon to predict what effects the Delta reorganizations may have, it appears that the Communists are primarily hoping to ease their supply-logistics problems in the lower Delta through a more rational MR setup. Only time and the effectiveness of Market Time will really tell, however. The Delta reorganizations seemingly are thus dictated by a declining situation and the statement in the DIC

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item that the reorganizations may possibly be a prelude to larger scale military action in the coming dry season is a "cover the waterfront" type statement, according to the OCI author of the item. The reorganizations in the lower Delta seem to be more typical of the standard Communist way of coping with their serious problem areas -- if you have a problem, "reorganize."

Propaganda

There is no apparent indication from DRV media pronouncements of a strategy shift regarding the war. Aside from the recent series -- apparently stopped, albeit temporarily, several weeks ago -- of polemical articles pegged to the impending Nixon trip to China, there is nothing currently noteworthy in the media on which one can conceivably hang any policy shifts. OCI's alleging a possible policy shift from a couple of recent Hanoi articles was, in my view, an inaccurate judgment and reading. From our experience prior to Tet 1968, it is very unlikely that we will be able to observe signs of an impending strategic offensive in DRV media pronouncements.

Negotiations

The Communist position is frozen on the basics. Notwithstanding the appearance of flexibility which Communist spokesmen portray to visiting senators and journalists with regard to the separate settling of points 1 and 2 of their settlement position, the basic Communist position remains unchanged from what it was when the four party talks began in early 1969. The 16 September meeting confirmed that the Communists consider the 7-point proposal as a single package. Since there is little likelihood that our side will accept this position, and little indication that the Communists are willing to compromise, the prospect is for a continuation of the war. At present, Madame Binh's sojourn to Hanoi may be a development worth watching. Conceivably, she might bring back some new formulations upon her return to Paris -- possibly new phrases designed to exploit the prisoner-withdrawal issue -- but it is extremely doubtful indeed whether she will be returning with anything substantive.

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Past Military Indicators and Their Current Status

1. In view of the disengagement of U.S. combat forces, the loss of intelligence due to the reduced flow of captured documents, prisoners of war, and ralliers, and the expected degradation of signal intelligence, all of which had previously provided a wealth of data, it will be more difficult than ever to predict with as high a degree of confidence as in the past what the enemy's intentions and capabilities will be over the short term. Fortunately, information on a number of key indicators is still available though the timeliness, in some cases, has been degraded.

2. Changes in Communist strategy and plans which have led to major offensive actions have most frequently and accurately been forecast by evidence of the following: a) the deployment of Communist main forces; b) the heavy expenditure of effort to maintain, expand, and/or improve infiltration/logistics associated facilities (roads, pipelines, storage areas, landlines); c) the increased movement of men and materiel southward from North Vietnam; d) the strengthening of the defensive posture along the infiltration/logistics corridor; e) the reopening of traditional supply corridors into and within South Vietnam; f) the prepositioning of supplies in forward areas; and g) the improvement of command and control mechanisms within South Vietnam.

3. In assessing these indicators, it is noted that in the field of deployment of Communist main forces there have not been any recent significant and ominous moves. There are, however, tenuous indications that the 304th and 308th NVA Divisions, which have been in the North Vietnamese Panhandle, are about to move, but the destinations for these moves are as yet unknown. Regarding the main force divisions now involved in Cambodia, there has been no evidence that these divisions are planning or are moving from Cambodia to South Vietnam at this time. Any of these units, of course, could deploy toward South Vietnam at any time, but it is probable that such movement would be detected in SIGINT well before they arrived in South Vietnam.

4. Following past cyclical patterns, the movement of men and materiel during this dry season has been at a very low level. An exception to the pattern of the past, however, has been the retention of most elements of the 559th Transportation Group in the Lao Panhandle to maintain the road

system. While some anti-aircraft elements moved back to North Vietnam during this rainy season, the bulk of the 559th units remained in an unprecedented effort to repair and maintain the route structure in southern Laos. These extraordinary efforts could enable the enemy to begin moving both men and materiel earlier this season than in the past.

5. Perhaps it is in the strengthening of the air defense posture in southern North Vietnam that we have our earliest indication of the enemy's intentions. The augmentation since January from three to fourteen AAA regiments and to six the number of SAM regiments in the North Vietnamese Panhandle, along with the increased MIG-21 activity below the 20th parallel can be interpreted as being infiltration associated. The movement of some of these air defense units into the Lao Panhandle this season will probably portend increased efforts to protect the infiltration/logistics corridor.

6. The latter three indicators (opening supply lines, prepositioning supplies, and internal reorganizations), unfortunately, are more dependent on timely reporting from in-country assets (aerial recon and photography, ground recon, informants, penetrations). Some of the recent Station reporting on these subjects has been helpful, but much more of this type reporting will be required to enable the analysts to pull together the bits and pieces needed to complete the picture of developing enemy intentions and capabilities.