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Intelligence Memorandum

*The Impact of Events Since 8 May 1972 on
North Vietnamese Capabilities to Continue the War*

*Handle via
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
3 July 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE IMPACT OF EVENTS SINCE 8 MAY 1972 ON
NORTH VIETNAMESE CAPABILITIES TO CONTINUE THE WAR

1. Almost two months have passed since the U.S. began its present campaign to interdict North Vietnamese imports and to bomb those targets in North Vietnam which contribute directly to Hanoi's war-making potential. In the course of these two months, the ground and air war has also continued in the South. Both friendly and enemy forces in South Vietnam have taken substantial losses, but the losses of Communist forces have clearly been the heavier. The following paragraphs discuss, in summary form, the effects which these developments are likely to have on North Vietnam's ability and determination to carry on the war over the next several months.*

I. Status of Communist Forces in the South

2. As many as 40 percent of the enemy's infantry regiments committed to the current campaign in South Vietnam may at present be temporarily combat ineffective or at best marginally effective. North Vietnamese armor and artillery forces have also suffered heavy losses since 30 March, losses which in many cases are not immediately replaceable.

**For more detailed analyses and back-up data on many of the key points covered in this summary memorandum, see the earlier CIA memoranda of 8 June 1972 and 27 June 1972 (Ref. nos. TCS-2677/72 and TCS-2679/72).*

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3. High casualties among experienced officers, NCO's and cadres have unquestionably weakened NVA combat units. The Communists during the past dry season infiltrated enough troops to bring their units up to strength and expand their force structure, and to replace--in terms of raw numbers--most of the losses suffered to date by their units. Almost all of the replacements are inexperienced, however, and many are poorly trained and motivated.

4. Although Communist offensive capabilities relative to the ARVN have been significantly weakened, where enemy forces turn to a defensive role and are well dug in, they may make it very difficult for the South Vietnamese to regain areas which have come under Communist control during the current offensive.

5. Certain changes are likely to occur in the pattern of enemy activity in coming weeks. In northern MR 1, big-unit engagements will continue. Elsewhere, the recent shift of enemy units from northwest MR 3 to areas south and west of Saigon and the partial redeployment of units away from Kontum in the highlands suggest that Hanoi may avoid big-unit engagements and concentrate relatively more on attempting to make inroads into populated rural areas during the remainder of the campaign.

6. Such a change in emphasis would be consistent with an expectation on Hanoi's part that some kind of cease-fire may be negotiated in the next few months. The enemy would wish to occupy as much territory as possible--without necessarily attacking district or provincial towns--before a cease-fire occurred.

II. Effects of the U.S. Interdiction and Bombing Programs

7. By the time the current interdiction program against North Vietnam began on 8 May, the Communists had already moved enough supplies through their logistic system to support periodic high levels of offensive action in South Vietnam for several months--and probably until the beginning of the next dry

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season (October 1972). Except for certain important items such as tanks and heavy artillery, the availability of supplies is not a key element in our judgment concerning the diminished capabilities of enemy main force units in South Vietnam. The Communists' personnel losses, the pounding they have taken on the ground and from the air, and the consequent degradation of morale in many units are all far more important factors than supply stock levels.

8. The principal logistic constraints now facing the enemy within South Vietnam derive from the weather (except in northern MR 1) and the difficulty of moving supplies into forward battle areas in the face of Allied air and ground operations.

9. The mining of North Vietnamese harbors has effectively cut off practically all of North Vietnam's seaborne imports, and almost certainly will continue to do so. Some supplies, primarily carried on East European flag ships (but not those of the Soviet Union), have been unloaded at the Chinese port of Huang Pu, but once there they face the same difficulties in getting to their destination in North Vietnam as do all overland imports. Other supplies have been off-loaded onto lighters from a few Chinese freighters off the North Vietnamese coast near Vinh, but the amounts involved are small.

10. Therefore, for practical purposes almost all of Hanoi's imports will have to come across China by rail to the North Vietnamese border. The Chinese rail system and inventory of rolling stock is adequate to handle the added burden. (The Soviet Union could conceivably initiate a large scale air-lift to transport a significant portion of Hanoi's required imports, but it is unlikely to do so. China does not have the capability to sustain a large scale air-lift.)

11. We estimate that North Vietnam's minimum import requirements--both to meet its basic economic

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needs for the next six months and to continue the war in the South at near present levels until the next dry season--are about 2,700 tons per day.*

12. Of this minimum daily requirement, 500 tons would be motor gasoline. The new oil pipeline being built from the Chinese border southward will, when completed, probably be used exclusively for motor gasoline, and it will have an uninterdicted capacity to handle twice this amount. This type of Soviet-designed military field pipeline is exceedingly difficult to interdict, because breaks in it can be repaired in a few hours and the necessary pumps, which are portable, can also be quickly replaced. A successful interdiction operation would have to break the line on a daily basis and in many locations simultaneously.

13. The other 2,200 tons of Hanoi's minimum daily import requirements for the most part must be moved from the Chinese border by truck, since through movement on the heavily interdicted North Vietnamese rail system is impossible. North Vietnam has enough trucks for this task--the estimated 2,840 trucks which would be needed represent only 10 to 15 percent of Hanoi's total truck inventory.

14. Whether Hanoi can in fact move the required supplies from the Chinese border to the Hanoi area and to destinations farther south cannot be determined from data now available. On the basis of past experience, however, there is a strong presumption that by mobilizing manpower (possibly including Chinese), and by transporting supplies at night and using by-pass roads or fords where bridges have been destroyed, the Communists would be able to move the minimum tonnages required.

**North Vietnam's "normal" volume of imports (i.e., the 1971 level) is about 6,800 tons per day. We are preparing another memorandum which will spell out in detail the impact on the North Vietnamese economy if imports are in fact reduced to 2,700 tons per day.*

III. Impact of the Bombing on North Vietnam's Economy

15. Aside from the widespread disruption to transportation, the destruction of North Vietnam's electric power and petroleum storage facilities has been the most serious economic effect of the bombing. As of 3 July, over 75 percent of the nation's electric generating capacity had been put out of service. As of 30 June, we estimate that North Vietnam had petroleum stocks sufficient for 40 to 60 days. Fewer attacks have been made against manufacturing installations, but those which have been struck rank among the most important in the modern sector of industry. North Vietnam's only iron and steel combine has been hit, as have the country's largest textile and chemical plants, the only cement plant, and one of the two largest coal-grading plants. No attempt to repair any of these facilities has yet been observed.

16. The damage which these facilities have suffered is part of the heavy price being paid by North Vietnam for continuing the war. This damage to North Vietnam's economy probably will not directly affect the capabilities of Communist forces in South Vietnam, since the North Vietnamese economy makes little direct contribution to Hanoi's war-making capabilities. The loss of economic facilities, however, and the resulting dislocations--workers who must move to new jobs, urban areas with little or no electricity--may have a strong psychological impact on a war-weary populace and some elements of the governmental apparatus. This impact should be reinforced as the reduction of imports forces the still undamaged remainder of the economy down to even more basic levels than at present, and as the North Vietnamese people become more aware of the NVA's heavy casualties and failure to achieve its objectives in the South.

17. Hanoi has given no clear indication that the sum of its current vicissitudes has produced any basic shifts in policy. If adequate supplies are provided by the USSR and China, the North Vietnamese leadership may attempt to continue the struggle,

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although at a level below that of the past several months. There are, of course, the suggestions from Communist sources in South Vietnam that a cease-fire is expected in the near future. This could mean that the Communists may now be willing to make significant concessions at the negotiating table. Similar stories were current in the spring of 1969, however, and the Communists may only be engaged in a probing operation, designed to test the degree of U.S. and South Vietnamese flexibility over the next several months.

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