

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

12 April 1979

National Intelligence Officers

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director, National Foreign Assessment *mb*

FROM:   
National Intelligence Officer for China

SUBJECT: Chinese Attack on Vietnam

1. Action Requested: None. This memorandum is for your information only.

2. Background: Attachment A is the memorandum which Dr. Brzezinski mentioned to you on 11 April covering the report made to him by Chinese Ambassador Chai Zemin on the Chinese attack against Vietnam. I had been informed earlier by Mr. Oksenberg of the NSC Staff that the memorandum would be sent to you directly by Dr. Brzezinski, but the signals were evidently switched. The version forwarded herewith has some minor gaps due to secretarial problems in transcribing Chai's comments.

3. Chai notes the total Vietnamese ground, air, and naval OB; the Vietnamese forces actually arrayed against the Chinese; and the units deployed by the Chinese for their so-called "counter-attack in self-defense." He describes the progress of the Chinese attack, and lists the casualties on both sides (allegedly 50,000 Vietnamese to 10,000 Chinese). He indicates that the Vietnamese were well-dug-in along the border, and by inference suggests that the Chinese found the going tough in the initial stages. He points out that despite "severe punishment" inflicted on Vietnam which make it likely it will "restrain itself a bit" it is nevertheless stepping up its military deployments to the North and can still cause trouble.



NSC review(s) completed.

TOP SECRET

4. Attachment B is an OSR comment on Chai's report, which states that the reporting we ourselves received during the fighting generally supports his comments. There are, however, discrepancies in OB: we held a small number of Vietnamese along the border and a greater number of Chinese deployed against them. The Chinese may have upped the Vietnamese strengths to make themselves look better, but having actually fought the Vietnamese the Chinese could also be expected to have a somewhat better fix than we did. Perhaps the differences in Chinese OB can be attributed to Chai not listing armies in reserve which were further away from the border even though posted in the general region of Yunnan and Kuangxi.

5. It could be significant that Chai volunteered this information. The Chinese may have felt under some obligation to respond to your briefing of Huang Hua, and may also be signifying an interest in continuing this kind of substantive exchange.

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Attachment:

- A - Brzezinski Memo
- B - OSR Comments

cc: DDCI

Distribution:

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Comments by Ambassador Chai Zemin, March 29, 10:00 a.m.  
Meeting with Dr. Brzezinski

Our counter-attack in self-defense in Sino-Vietnamese border area started on February 17. On March 5 China declared that it was going to withdraw from Vietnam. And on March 16 the withdrawal from Vietnam was completed. All our troops returned to China's territory. Our counter-attack in self-defense deflated the arrogance of Vietnam, \_\_\_\_\_ the myth the invincibility of Vietnamese troops. Our counter-attack gave Vietnam necessary punishment and therefore attained our set goals. Now I would like to give you a count which is divided into four parts:

I. MILITARY STRENGTH AND MILITARY APPOINTMENTS PRIOR TO THE COUNTER-ATTACK.

1. According to our intelligence, the Vietnamese ground troops have four corps headquarters, 29 combat divisions, 22 production division, 2 training divisions, and a number of local independent regiments and some of the \_\_\_\_\_ and artillery troops. The Vietnamese Air Force has three divisions with more than 500 airplanes of different types. The Vietnamese Air Defense Force has five divisions. The Vietnamese Navy has two fleets, one brigade of marines with more than 200 ships of different types. A total number of Vietnamese troops is about one million. Vietnamese troops deployed in North Vietnam include one Corps Headquarters, ten combat divisions, eight production divisions, two training divisions, one Air Force

SECRET

2

two air defense force divisions. \_\_\_\_\_ seven combat divisions and more than ten local independent regiments deployed along Sino-Vietnamese border. After we started our counter-attack in self-defense, we found some of the production divisions in the Vietnamese army were redesignated as combat divisions. They have also relocated some of its aggressive troops stationed in Kampuchea and also stationed in South Vietnam to the North in order to strengthen its defense in the North.

2. Before we started our counter-attack in self-defense, we had assembled five armies and two independent divisions. Three armies of the five armies and the two independent divisions are deployed at the \_\_\_\_\_. One army at Hekou. One independent division at Jinping. One army at Jingxi. One army at Longzhu. One independent division at Dongzong. And we also deployed one army at Mengzi and another army at Chongguo as reserves. To support our infantries, we deployed a proper number of artillery and a small number of tanks.

## II. WAR SITUATION

Our army started its counter-attack in self-defense on February 17 with emphasis put on attack on Laocai, Cao Bang, and Langson.

### LAOCAI AREA

One column of our army forced the Red River and early in the morning on February 19 conquered Cocleu and Baothang, annihilating one Vietnamese infantry regiment. The other column of our army penetrated the defense line of the Vietnamese troops, and in the afternoon of February 19 conquered Muong Khuong and

SECRET

3

at Laocai annihilating one infantry regiment and one artillery regiment of the Vietnamese troops. Starting from the 20th, our army's main forces continued to push southward along the banks of the Red River. After it had annihilated No. 345 Division of the Vietnamese troops, they conquered Camduong on the 25th. At the same time part of our troops were deployed to hold off enemy reinforcements heading eastward from Pinglu??? and the enemy reinforcements is Vietnamese No. 3168. And the one regiment under that division was dealt a crushing blow. And after that our troops searched in the area and wiped out the remaining of the Vietnamese troops. The Caobang area. The army's main forces launched attacks separately from Binhmuong. Our army's main forces launched a princer movement toward the Caobang area. And in the afternoon on the 19th our army cut off Highway No. 3 along which the Vietnamese could have flagged to the interiors. Thus closing in all enemy troops in that area. After that our troops effected a breakthrough and cut off the enemy forces in attempting to encircle and annihilated Vietnamese troops. As a result, our troops annihilated Division 346 and occupied Caobang.

#### LANGSON AREA

When our army was attacking Laocai and Caobang, our army also launched attacks at Vietnamese troops deployed in advanced positions in the Langson area, and they conquered Dongdang completely wiping out one regiment and Division No. 3 of the Vietnamese troops. Starting from the 27th, our army launched attacks on all fronts from Thatkhe to Mongcai with Langsan as the main target of the attack. Our army occupied Langsan on March 2 badly wounding

three Vietnamese regiments.

### III. CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES

Our counter-attack in self-defense altogether annihilated about 50,000 Vietnamese troops. We have captured more than 7,000 rifles of different types. More than 600 canons of different types and other military materials. Our army has about 10,000 casualties with more people being wounded than being killed. And the kill ratio of soldiers being killed between the Vietnamese army and our army is five to one. (MO interpretation: More were wounded -- fewer were killed.)

### IV. FEATURES OF THE BATTLE

Our counter-attack in self-defense is a special war fought in a rather hilly and jungle area.

1. In North Vietnam in the area along the border the terrain is especially difficult which is characterized by high mountains, dense forests, deep ravines, and it is also terrain where you can find very few roads and many grottes (or caves?). It is difficult for large contingents to move around on this terrain, and it is also difficult for us to use many tanks.

2. The Vietnamese troops have made long preparation for war in the area along the border. At the first line they have built fairly solid fortifications and built up large reserves of ammunitions, grain, and other war materials in positions of strategic importance. Taking Laocai as example, the Vietnamese troops have built up a reserve of munitions sufficient for them to fight (survive?) for one year.

3. Generally speaking, Vietnamese troops are no good at fighting large-scale battles but not too bad at fighting guerrilla

war and dispatching special agents to be engaged in sabotage. At first, after the action had started they could put up a resistance at various positions of importance. But once their fortifications were conquered they would then break the whole into parts in attempting to continue their resistance by taking advantage of natural caves and remaining fortifications. Our army adopted appropriate measures in light of the kind of terrain there and the characteristics of the Vietnamese tactics. We mainly relied on our infantries, and we used a relatively small number of tanks. The kind of tactics we applied are that we organized small contingents and it affected breakthroughs in order to cut up the enemy forces. And now small contingents concentrated relatively superior forces to encircle and annihilate Vietnamese troops. In the course of applying the tactics, our troops succeeded in annihilating troops scattered all over the area. Our counter-attack in self-defense has given Vietnam a severe punishment, so it is likely that Vietnam will restrain itself a bit. But nevertheless, according to our information, Vietnam is stepping up its military deployments in the North so it is still quite possible for Vietnam to make troubles and commit sabotage along the border. The Vietnamese authorities in face of the strong demand voiced by both public opinion at first expressed their willingness to accept the suggestions put forward by the Chinese side concerning the negotiation to be held at the Vice Foreign Minister level and has stated that negotiations could start one week after our withdrawal. But when the Chinese delegation is ready to leave at short notice, the Vietnamese authorities have changed its position after its

SECRET

6

behind-the-scene consultation with the Soviet Union. But now it is spreading the lie that Chinese troops are continuing to occupy many places of Vietnam. Obviously, the Vietnamese authorities will continue to push its plan for the establishment of the Indochina Federation in order to meet the Soviet needs of the Soviet strategy of pushing southward in exchange for Soviet support and existence. To this aim, Vietnamese maintain the attention in the border area so that it could enforce the general mobilization with some reason and strengthened its war-time system and continue to be engaged in arms race and armaments expansion. Under these same circumstances, it seems thus that the Vietnamese side does not want to start negotiations now. We will continue to urge the Vietnamese side to agree to resolve the boundary dispute between China and Vietnam through negotiation. If Vietnam continues to commit armed provocation and encroachment into China's territory in the border area, we will deal forcefull counter-attacks at them.



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11 April 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: NIO/China

SUBJECT : Comments on Ambassador Chai Zemin's  
Remarks

1. Reporting we received during the Sino-Vietnamese war generally supports Ambassador Chai Zemin's comments on Chinese and Vietnamese tactics and on the progress of the war. We have somewhat different information, however, on Chinese and Vietnamese order-of-battle and casualty figures.

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[Redacted]

4. Our information on casualties sustained by either side during the conflict is sketchy. We believe the intensity of the fighting supports a high level of casualties for both sides--the Vietnamese forces were clearly outnumbered, and the Chinese forces in the first few days of the war were spread quite thinly along the border. [Redacted] Vietnamese losses [Redacted]

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[Redacted] generally ranges between 34,000 and 45,000, however, somewhat lower than Ambassador Chai's report of 50,000. Moreover, the ambassador's estimate of 10,000 Chinese killed appears to be too low. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] casualties on the two sides were about even; we believe this report more closely reflects the truth. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

Analyst  
Asia Branch  
Regional Analysis Division, OSR

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