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PROSPECTS FOR THE DEFENSE OF INDOCHINA AGAINST  
A CHINESE COMMUNIST INVASION

ORE 50-50

PROSPECTS FOR CHINESE COMMUNIST  
ACTION IN INDOCHINA DURING 1950

ORE 50-50 Supplement



Published 7 September 1950

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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## PROSPECTS FOR THE DEFENSE OF INDOCHINA AGAINST A CHINESE COMMUNIST INVASION

(ORE 50-50)

### The Problem

To estimate Chinese Communist capabilities for an invasion of Indochina, the attitudes of the Vietnamese that would affect their will to resist such an invasion, and pertinent aspects

of a program of foreign aid that would be required to stimulate the will of the Vietnamese to resist an invasion.

### SUMMARY

In the event of a Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina under present circumstances, it is almost certain that the defending forces under the French would soon lose all of Vietnam except Cochinchina. So long as present political and military conditions continue unaltered, US material aid alone cannot decisively improve this prospect.

Some 100,000 Chinese Communist troops are presently deployed near enough to the Indochina border to make possible a Chinese attack without appreciable forewarning. Approximately 150,000 additional Chinese Communist troops could arrive at the border in support of an invasion within ten days. Some reinforcements might be moved by sea to rebel-held sections of the Indochina coast. It is also within Chinese Communist capabilities to furnish air support for an invasion.

The 92,500 Viet Minh regulars and the 130,000 irregulars that make up the rebel forces of Ho Chi Minh possess significant capabilities for expanding their guerrilla operations and thereby increasing the present cost in troops and equipment borne by the opposing French. Aid now being provided from Communist

China, moreover, is giving Ho's army an increasing capability for an early large-scale offensive against the French and a developing potential for conventional warfare.

The operations of the French Army (some 150,500 regulars) reveal a lack of aggressiveness and are in part handicapped by a scarcity of adequate material. The most that French ground forces, who receive some support from weak indigenous forces totalling 66,700 men, can presently accomplish is the destruction of enemy supplies and the consequent temporary postponement of a Viet Minh offensive. The French Air Force in Indochina is weak and its limited capabilities are severely strained by action against the Viet Minh. The French Navy possesses forces adequate for support of the army in limited amphibious operations but is incapable of maintaining a complete blockade against the smuggling of arms.

In balancing the capabilities of these opposing forces, it becomes apparent that, under present circumstances, a Chinese Communist invasion, which in all probability would be supported by the Viet Minh, could easily penetrate French border defenses in Tonkin and

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Note: This estimate concerning Chinese Communist capabilities is made in the light of CIA's previous estimates that an early Chinese Communist invasion is possible but not probable. The scope of the paper is in accord with the request of the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State.

The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force have concurred in this report. It contains information available to CIA as of 5 September 1950.

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compel withdrawal of defending forces to the south. The strategic Tonkin plain would probably be overrun within six weeks and the retention of a French foothold in the Saigon area would depend upon the provision of reinforcements from abroad. If Chinese Communist assistance to the Viet Minh were increased, while foreign aid for the French remained only at the level presently programmed, and the French were unable to develop the support of the Vietnamese people, Ho could eventually drive the French out of Indochina without the direct support of invading Chinese Communist forces.

In analyzing the probable Vietnam reaction to a Chinese Communist invasion, consideration must be given to the fact that the Vietnamese are in general apathetic toward Communism and antipathetic toward the French. Forced to choose between present tangible French control and the contingency of domination by international Communism, even some of those Vietnamese who have some appreciation of the nature of Communism probably would risk the change in the interest of early achievement of national identity. Although the Vietnamese dislike the Chinese, regardless of their ideology, a rapid Chinese Communist occupation of Vietnam would not arouse active popular resistance or widespread rallying to the French or Bao Dai. It might

well be met with resignation or opportunistic cooperation.

The overriding preoccupation of Vietnamese intellectuals and common people alike is the issue of independence. The effect of foreign aid on Vietnam will to resist Chinese Communist encroachments must therefore be viewed against this background of intense nationalistic aspirations. If the French should make satisfactory concessions to the spirit of Vietnamese nationalism, a program of economic assistance in Vietnam offering visible improvement in the lot of the common people, combined with military aid sufficient not only to maintain French forces but also to develop an effective national army, could be expected to stimulate the Vietnamese will to resist. The channeling of such aid through the Vietnamese themselves, subject to a certain necessary degree of French influence, would complicate the problems of supply but would have the advantage of encouraging Vietnamese desire to defend the country. The announcement of such an aid program would be more effective if it preceded a Chinese Communist invasion. In any event, the effectiveness of the announcement would be seriously lessened if it were not preceded by a declaration of unequivocal French concessions and followed by the prompt and substantial delivery of such aid.

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## PROSPECTS FOR THE DEFENSE OF INDOCHINA AGAINST A CHINESE COMMUNIST INVASION

### Conclusions.

Under present political and military conditions in Indochina, a Chinese Communist invasion in force would quickly overrun Tonkin and severely threaten the maintenance of even a French foothold in the south. US material aid alone cannot decisively change this situation.

In the event of an invasion, effective military opposition will depend at least as much on substantial modification of the present anti-French attitude of the Vietnamese people, as on the French Army or foreign assistance. French guarantees of independence, if immediately followed by the expansion and equipping of an indigenous army, would stimulate some Vietnamese will to resist. Even assuming appropriate French concessions to Vietnamese nationalism, however, successful Vietnamese opposition to the Chinese Communists would depend on the amount of time available to develop a popularly supported indigenous regime and on the speed with which effective Vietnamese forces could be created.

### Chinese Communist Military Capabilities.

Any invasion of Indochina by the Chinese Communists would probably be undertaken in cooperation with the forces of Ho Chi Minh. Sizable Chinese Communist military forces are in position to intervene in Indochina. Despite reports of actual and scheduled northward movements of certain Chinese Communist field forces, approximately 100,000 troops remain deployed along the Indochinese border. These units could launch an invasion of Indochina without appreciable forewarning. Although reliable reports do not indicate the presence of armored units on the Indochina border, a division of armored cars, plus a battalion of tanks attached to the Fourth Field Army, are stationed in South China within 700 miles of the frontier. Moreover, approximately 150,000 additional Chinese Communist

troops could arrive at the Indochina border within ten days to bolster initial invading forces. Even in the event of a simultaneous assault on Taiwan, these reinforcements would be available and would bring the potential invading force to a total of at least 250,000 troops. In view of the Chinese Communists' improving capability for waterlift, it is possible that some invasion forces might be moved by sea to Viet Minh-held sections of the Indochina coast. There is no evidence, however, of Chinese Communist preparations for such a move.

Although there have been no indications of any significant build-up of Chinese Communist Air Force strength in Southwest China and although this air force has not yet appeared in combat, the estimated 200 to 250 operational combat types (including fighters and light bombers) in the Chinese Communist Air Force could furnish effective air support to operations in Indochina. There are six airfields in China within 170 miles of the Tonkin border. In addition, construction of new airfields and the restoration of others in Southwest China are reportedly in progress in the Tonkin-Kwangsi border area and on Hainan Island.

### Viet Minh Military Capabilities.

The forces of Ho Chi Minh, which have been engaged in resistance activities against the French since September 1945, are capable of expanding their operations. Ho's organization, commonly known as the "Viet Minh," possesses approximately 92,500 regular troops and an estimated 130,000 irregulars. The Viet Minh forces include 2,000 Khmer Issaraks in Cambodia and 500 Issaraks in Laos.

The Viet Minh forces are geared primarily for guerrilla warfare. The demonstrated effectiveness of a few task forces, each totaling as many as three to five thousand men and equipped with adequate infantry weapons and some artillery, points to a developing capability

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ity for more conventional warfare. Under present circumstances, the Viet Minh should have little difficulty in maintaining relative freedom of action throughout most of Indochina while simultaneously supporting pockets of resistance within French-occupied territory and continuing to harass French lines of communication. In addition, the Viet Minh is capable of seizing one or more French border outposts and holding them for a short time at least.

Following the *de jure* recognition of the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" by Communist China and the USSR, a general plan for closer collaboration between the Chinese Communists and the Viet Minh probably was formulated. As many as 10 to 20 thousand Viet Minh troops are being trained in Communist China. There is evidence that the Chinese Communists have supplied the Viet Minh with significant quantities of materiel, probably confined to small arms, ammunition, mortars, and light artillery. Access to training facilities in Communist China, the expansion of routes and facilities for supply, and the possibility of accelerating recruitment give the Viet Minh the potential capabilities for initiating a large-scale offensive against the French at an early date.

#### Capabilities of French-Controlled Forces.

French ground, naval and air forces in Indochina are under the operational control of GHQ, Armed Forces in the Far East (FAEO). As of 1 July 1950, French regular ground forces totalled approximately 150,500 men. An estimated 66,700 troops in the armies of the Associated States, although subject to the nominal political control of these states, are under FAEO operational control. In addition there are 122,500 quasi-military and miscellaneous indigenous troops under over-all FAEO control. Of these local forces, only the Vietnamese army, at present weak and ineffective, has the potential for developing into a significant force. French ground forces are capable of penetrating the Viet Minh-held areas of Indochina but at the expense of garrison strength engaged in pacification duties elsewhere. The French have demonstrated a lack of aggressiveness. The French-controlled ground forces have a dual problem—the elimi-

nation of the Viet Minh forces and the defense of the China border. Indications are that current emphasis is on the former. Under these circumstances, the most they can hope to achieve in the immediate future is the destruction of enemy supply caches and the consequent postponement of a large-scale Viet Minh offensive.

The strength of the French Air Force in Indochina, which is severely strained by its actions against Viet Minh forces, presently totals 84 fighters and fighter-reconnaissance aircraft, 68 transports and 50 liaison planes. The level of serviceability of fighter aircraft, now about 55 percent, will probably continue to drop as maintenance shortages become more acute. Many of the French air installations—few in number and generally in poor condition—are vulnerable to sabotage and some even to direct Viet Minh attack.

French naval forces are adequate for supporting the army in small-scale amphibious operations and for conducting raids against the rebel-held sections of the Indochina coast. Their inability to maintain a complete blockade of the coast is demonstrated by the extent of over-water arms smuggling now in progress. French Naval Forces, Far East, stationed in Indochina, consist of 166 small craft and ships, and 21 aircraft manned by 8,750 personnel. Vessels in the most important categories currently stationed in Indochina waters include one old cruiser, 11 fleet minesweepers, two LST's, nine submarine chasers of various types and a number of supporting service and repair craft. Naval aircraft include nine patrol bombers and 12 reconnaissance aircraft.

#### Comparison of Opposing Forces.

A Chinese Communist invasion could without difficulty penetrate the extended French perimeter in Tonkin and rapidly overcome the defending forces. Although the French Air Force would be capable of limited defensive action in the event of an invasion, there is a grave risk of its being overwhelmed if the Chinese Communists committed their air force in support of the attack. On the ground, only in the coastal border area of the strategic Tonkin plain, where the French are organized

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in some depth, could effective resistance against a Chinese assault be expected and even in this area inferior front line strength and the lack of reserves would inevitably compel a withdrawal. It is estimated that a Chinese Communist force of 100 to 150 thousand could overrun the whole Tonkin plain within six weeks, but that the French could hold a temporary beachhead in the vicinity of Haiphong. A successful second-phase Chinese Communist drive further to the south would take longer and require additional troops. In this circumstance, French maintenance of a firm foothold around Saigon would depend upon the provision of military reinforcements from abroad.

Although French forces in Indochina are at present stalemated, a French offensive in Tonkin, with considerable outside aid, probably could carry through to the border and might even effectively isolate the Viet Minh from overland Chinese Communist aid. However, such an offensive probably would not result in the destruction of the Viet Minh forces. If Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh continues to increase—as seems probable—and if the French receive no more foreign assistance than is now programmed and are unable to develop the support of the Vietnamese people, the Viet Minh could eventually defeat the French in Indochina without the help of an overt Chinese invasion.

#### Key Vietnamese Attitudes.

Key Vietnamese attitudes which would largely determine their conduct in the event of a Chinese Communist invasion are their views concerning: international Communism, the local Chinese, Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, and the French.

The Vietnamese people, as a whole, know little about international Communism. The opposite poles of political attraction in Vietnam are represented by the Viet Minh and the French-Vietnamese regime. The fact that the Viet Minh is an instrument of international Communism causes the average Vietnamese little or no concern. Although most educated Vietnamese are aware that the espousal of Communism entails the risk of Soviet control, it is probable that—forced to choose between actual French control and hypothetical Soviet

control—most Vietnamese intellectuals would be willing to grant Communism a trial.

Among all classes of the Vietnamese population, the local Chinese, who compose the majority of the small merchant group, are generally disliked. The memory of previous Vietnamese wars of liberation against Chinese overlords and the Chinese occupation of Tonkin during 1945-46 is painful. To the Vietnamese, the Chinese are unpopular, regardless of their ideology.

Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh is widely regarded by all classes of the Vietnamese population as the potential liberator of Vietnam from the French yoke. Most Vietnamese intellectuals, even some of those who are in the Bao Dai Government, regard armed opposition to the French as justifiable and, to this extent, approve of the Viet Minh's activities. Although in some areas of Tonkin where the Viet Minh has used scorched-earth tactics, the peasantry has reportedly become bitter, such hostility (if measured in terms of popularity of the Bao Dai Government) has failed to produce significant results.

The French are the targets of historical Vietnamese antipathy, rooted in decades of colonial rule. Postwar French policy has done little to diminish this antipathy and the desire for independence has grown progressively stronger. The French today are regarded by almost all Vietnamese as the prime obstacle to the attainment of these intense nationalistic aspirations.

#### Probable Conduct in the Event of Invasion.

In all probability, a Chinese Communist seizure of Tonkin would be rapidly accomplished. As a result, the Tonkinese intelligentsia, most of whom would be basically opposed to the entry of Chinese troops, would have little opportunity to manifest opposition in an organized and effective manner. Those now in Ho's camp probably would continue loyal to him; the rest could be expected to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible while awaiting developments.

Elsewhere in Vietnam, the attitude of Vietnamese intellectuals would be largely affected by the determined nature of the French defense and by the prospects for US intervention, either locally or as part of general US-Com-

munist China hostilities. Absence of strong defensive action by the French or lack of US interest in the conflict would probably force those Vietnamese, who—although fearful of Communism—would see the futility of solitary resistance, to accept Communist rule.

In contrast to the intelligentsia, the mass of the Vietnamese people—in the absence of effective and popular anti-Communist leadership—probably would accept the burden of Chinese occupation much as they have accepted it in the past. A pact with Communist China which offered Ho ostensible control of a post invasion Vietnamese government, would probably be welcomed, at least at the outset, by the vast majority of Vietnamese. Even evidences of Chinese imperialism subsequent to the invasion probably would be rationalized by the majority so long as the Ho government did not actively oppose such actions.

#### Foreign Aid and the Vietnamese Will to Resist Invasion.

All problems connected with the strengthening of the indigenous will to resist a Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina by means of foreign aid inevitably are related to the issue of nationalism. As a whole, both Vietnamese intelligentsia and the mass of the people are preoccupied with the problem of their independence.

The character of whatever aid is granted in the immediate future will have little effect on the Vietnamese because of the present atmosphere of mutual Franco-Vietnamese distrust. So long as French monopolization of the key elements of administrative and military power continues, the Vietnamese are likely to view foreign military aid as a device actually intended to strengthen French hegemony and would probably either be apathetic to a Chinese Communist invasion or would welcome the invading forces. Economic aid—for health, agriculture, transportation, and reconstruction—would engender some gratitude but, if the allocation of such aid were subject to French control, its effect on the Vietnamese will to resist a Chinese Communist invasion would be minimized.

If, instead, it were assumed that a resolution of the difficulties arising from mu-

tual Franco-Vietnamese distrust had been achieved, the character of foreign aid required to stimulate the will of the Vietnamese people to resist a Chinese Communist invasion could be estimated as follows: (1) a program of economic assistance which, in the manner of the Griffin Mission proposals, would offer visible improvement in the lot of the common people; and (2) military aid beyond that necessary to maintain French forces in the area and sufficient to permit the development of a sizable and adequately equipped national army. It is recognized that the development of an effective Vietnam army is a long-range task made difficult by a shortage of trained personnel and by the fears of the French authorities that they may not be able to control a strong native army. Nevertheless, the announcement and the rapid implementation of plans to create such a force would at once stimulate the spirit of Vietnamese resistance to aggression and lessen antipathy toward the French.

The utilization of French managerial knowledge is essential to efficient administration of foreign aid in Vietnam. However, as earlier discussion has shown, Vietnamese suspicions are such that unless the indigenous Vietnamese government is clearly recognized as the authority through which aid is dispensed, the local reaction will be unfavorable. In this connection, it is probable that if the French were willing to make full concessions in matters of form, the Vietnamese would be willing to concede much in matters of substance. Under these circumstances, French participation (possibly with third-party or UN supervision), as paid advisors and technicians exercising a substantial managerial function within the framework of the Vietnamese government, might well prove to be a satisfactory compromise formula. The device of channeling aid through the Vietnamese, subject to such a degree of French influence, would do much to develop respect for the Bao Dai regime and concomitantly to encourage a Vietnamese desire to aid in defense of their country.

A final factor in stimulating the will of the Vietnamese to resist invasion is that of timing, which although subsidiary in importance to the French attitude toward granting independence, is nevertheless significant. If what-

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ever aid that may be offered is announced subsequent to, rather than prior to, an invasion by the Chinese Communists, the effect on the Vietnamese will to resist will be minor regardless of other factors which may characterize the timing of the announcement. Fur-

thermore, unless the announcement of aid is timed in the light of practicable delivery dates, even a promise of assistance made against the background of French guarantees of independence will be followed by disillusionment and disappointment.

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PROSPECTS FOR CHINESE COMMUNIST  
ACTION IN INDOCHINA DURING 1950  
(ORE 50-50 Supplement)

1. Introduction and Conclusions.

Communist China at present possesses the capability for a successful invasion of Indochina. If Communist China, as a participant in the world Communist movement, were called upon to invade Indochina, it could probably be persuaded to initiate such an operation. Chinese Communist military commitments elsewhere would not necessarily militate against an invasion of Indochina because the Chinese Communists possess the forces necessary for military action—separately or simultaneously—against Indochina, Korea, Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macao.

Despite this general capability and despite the existence of Chinese Communist military concentrations along the Indochina border, adequate for the task, it is estimated that an open Chinese Communist invasion—while possible and capable of being launched with little or no preliminary warning—is improbable in 1950 because considerations (from the standpoint of Ho Chi Minh, the Chinese Communists, and international Communism) favoring such action appear to be outweighed by considerations opposing it. It is highly probable, however, that the Chinese Communists will continue to expand military assistance to the Viet Minh forces (by measures short of open invasion) on a scale sufficient to provide those forces with the capability of achieving significant, but limited, objectives in 1950 and, assuming that the French receive no more aid than is presently programmed, of eventually expelling the French without the aid of a Chinese Communist invasion.

2. Types of Chinese Communist Action.

The two major courses of action open to the Chinese Communists in support of the Viet Minh are: (a) overt intervention in the form of an invasion; or (b) assistance short of open invasion.

a. *Overt Intervention.*

(1) *Indicators:*

Recent Chinese Communist activity in the two border provinces of Kwangsi and Yunnan—the construction and improvement of roads, railroads, and air facilities—might be construed as positive indicators of an impending invasion. It is equally valid, however, to interpret these activities as indicators of an increase in the flow of Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh and its subsidiary movement in Laos and Cambodia.

The presence of some 100,000 Chinese Communist troops in the Indochina border region—whence they could launch an invasion without appreciable warning—might also be construed as a positive indicator. The presence of these troops, however, can be explained in part by the need for “pacification” forces in Southwest China, where thousands of anti-Communist guerrillas have been operating. It is also noteworthy that the present strength of Chinese Communist troops in the Indochina border area is only one-third of that reported in May of this year.

(2) *Factors Favoring Intervention:*

The following factors favor a Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina in 1950:

(a) A Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina would be the most rapid means of build-

Note: This estimate was prepared under urgent procedures upon the request of the Intelligence Organization of the Department of State, dated 1 September 1950. Because of the limited time available it was not feasible to integrate it with ORE 50-50 which was already in process of coordination.

The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Navy, and the Air Force have concurred in this report; for the dissent of the Intelligence Organization of the Department of the Army, see Enclosure A.

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ing up the military strength of the anti-French forces.

(b) Moreover, it is doubtful that the French will be able to provide large-scale reinforcements to their forces in Indochina in sufficient time to oppose such an invasion.

(c) Further, decisive Communist action in Indochina in 1950 would expel the French and bring that area under Communist control before any appreciable build-up in the military strength of the western bloc could be achieved.

(d) In addition, the fall of Vietnam to the Communists would hasten the accommodation of Burma and Thailand to Communist power.

(e) On the other hand, should a Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina in 1950 not be immediately decisive, and should US or other western forces subsequently intervene, the invasion would serve to contain substantial military strength of the western bloc in inconclusive peripheral warfare in the Far East.

### (3) *Factors Opposing Intervention:*

The following factors appear to reduce the prospects for an invasion under present circumstances:

(a) Without major external assistance to the French and their supporters, Communist "liberation" of Indochina would be accomplished ultimately without resort to overt Chinese Communist intervention.<sup>1</sup> In order to achieve his objective of expelling the French, Ho Chi Minh—who at present is estimated to have 92,500 regular troops, 130,000 irregulars, and extensive manpower reserves—needs and probably prefers materiel and technical-advisory assistance rather than direct Chinese Communist intervention.

(b) The presence of Chinese Communist troops in Indochina—in addition to weakening the nationalistic appeal to the Viet Minh movement—would arouse local anti-Chinese sentiment and be a serious source of command conflict between Peiping and the Viet Minh leadership.

(c) World Communism thus far has sought to present Communist aggression under the guise of indigenous "civil wars."

<sup>1</sup> See conclusion of ORE 50-50.

(d) A Communist invasion would have significant negative effects on the presently neutral states of Asia, particularly India.

(e) Communist China's prospects for membership in the UN and UN-sponsored organizations would be eliminated and the opportunity for the establishment of diplomatic relations with non-orbit powers would be curtailed.

(f) The USSR may hesitate to urge or approve a Chinese Communist invasion of Indochina, because to do so would risk the possible substitution of Peiping's influence, backed by Communist forces in "occupation" of Vietnam, for its own present remote control over the Ho Chi Minh regime.

(g) In addition to the specific factors mentioned above, an open Communist invasion of Indochina would greatly increase the risk of global war.

### *b. Assistance Short of Open Invasion.*

A second general course of action open to the Chinese Communists in support of Ho Chi Minh is the expansion of military assistance short of open intervention. The Chinese Communists during the past six to eight months have provided substantial assistance to the Viet Minh in the form of materiel, technical-advisory aid, training, and personnel. They have the capability of greatly increasing this assistance.

(1) Materiel is now reported to be flowing into Indochina in increasing amounts, not only across the border but also from Chinese coastal ports via Hainan. Communications in Southwest China and in Tonkin are being improved and the Chinese Communists have secured control of many former Nationalist-held islands off the south China coast. Both these developments greatly facilitate the movements of materiel into Indochina. The Viet Minh has been short of heavy equipment, particularly artillery, and although the present volume is unknown, considerable quantities of such materiel probably will be forthcoming from the Chinese Communists in the future.

(2) Technical-advisory aid could and probably will be greatly expanded by increasing the number of persons detailed to Indochina

and by enlarging the already substantial training program for Indochinese within China.

(3) As to personnel, "volunteer" soldiers are believed to have already inconspicuously joined the Viet Minh forces in small numbers. Although individual "volunteers" probably will be further encouraged, such reinforcement is not likely to attain extensive proportions since the language problem, among others, will constitute a limiting factor. Problems entailed in utilizing "volunteers" can and probably will be partly overcome by integrating small units of Chinese Communists into the Viet Minh forces, operating under Viet Minh command. Those elements most acceptable to the Viet Minh probably would be of a specialized nature, such as artillery, tank, mortar, engineer, signal, and medical units, capable of providing support and services now limited or unavailable to the Viet Minh. It is improbable that units larger than battalions would be integrated, for fear of exposing direct Chinese Communist involvement and because of the increased applicability of those considerations which reduce the prospects of open Chinese Communist invasion (see 2 a. (3) above).

### 3. Prospects for Success of Chinese Communist Courses of Action.

If the Chinese Communists openly invade Indochina under present circumstances, it is almost certain that defending forces under the French would soon lose all of Vietnam except Cochinchina. A Chinese Communist force of 100,000 to 150,000 could probably overrun the Tonkin plain during the first six weeks of operation, reducing the French position in the north to a temporary beachhead in the vicinity of Haiphong. Although a second-phase Chinese Communist drive further to the south would take longer and require additional troops, Peiping is capable of providing the

forces required from areas south of the Yangtze River without immediate jeopardy to other possible operations.

Available information does not permit firm quantitative estimates of either materiel presently in the hands of the Viet Minh forces or of present or future rates of flow from China. Supply from China is presently confined to transport over secondary overland routes and by coastal smuggling, with French forces holding positions on the main overland supply routes. In addition, Viet Minh forces up to now have shown no indication of a capability for orthodox warfare on a scale approaching that essential if French forces are to be eliminated from Tonkin. Although these considerations do not rule out the possibility that the Viet Minh may already be equipped and trained in the use of heavy arms on a substantial scale, with its presently estimated capabilities the Viet Minh probably could not mount a sustained offensive capable of driving the French from Indochina in 1950.

Nevertheless, it is estimated that during the autumn of 1950 the Viet Minh will be capable of launching the initial phase of such an offensive which could result in the seizure or destruction of several key French border posts. Neutralizing these French strongholds, in addition to further reducing French strength through attritional warfare, would permit the flow of heavy equipment from China to the Viet Minh in greatly increased quantity. Acquisition of this equipment, assuming that the French receive no more aid than is presently programmed, would enable the Viet Minh to develop a preponderance of force over the French in a matter of months. Meanwhile, the earliest reliable test of the actual military strength of the Viet Minh forces will be their showing in the campaigns of limited objectives which it is anticipated they will undertake in the coming weeks.

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ENCLOSURE A  
DISSENT OF THE INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF THE ARMY

The Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, dissents for the following reason:

Page 9, section 2.a. (1), second paragraph, last sentence. G-2 has never carried a troop strength figure higher than 180,000 for the area of South and Southwest China (Yunnan and west Kwangsi). This area includes more territory than the border region defined in

page 9, section 2.a. (1), second paragraph, first sentence, as now containing 100,000 Chinese Communist troops. The 180,000 figure for the larger area was carried by G-2 in May 1950, but troop strength in the border region as defined above was approximately the same in May 1950 as it is now, that is, 100,000.

NOTE

CIA fully accepts the accuracy of these G-2 troop strength figures. The discrepancy in CIA and G-2 views arises from a difference in the definition of "border area." The "border area" referred to in this paper on page 9, section 2.a.(1), second paragraph, last sentence, comprises a strip of land approximately 90 miles in uniform depth along the Indochina

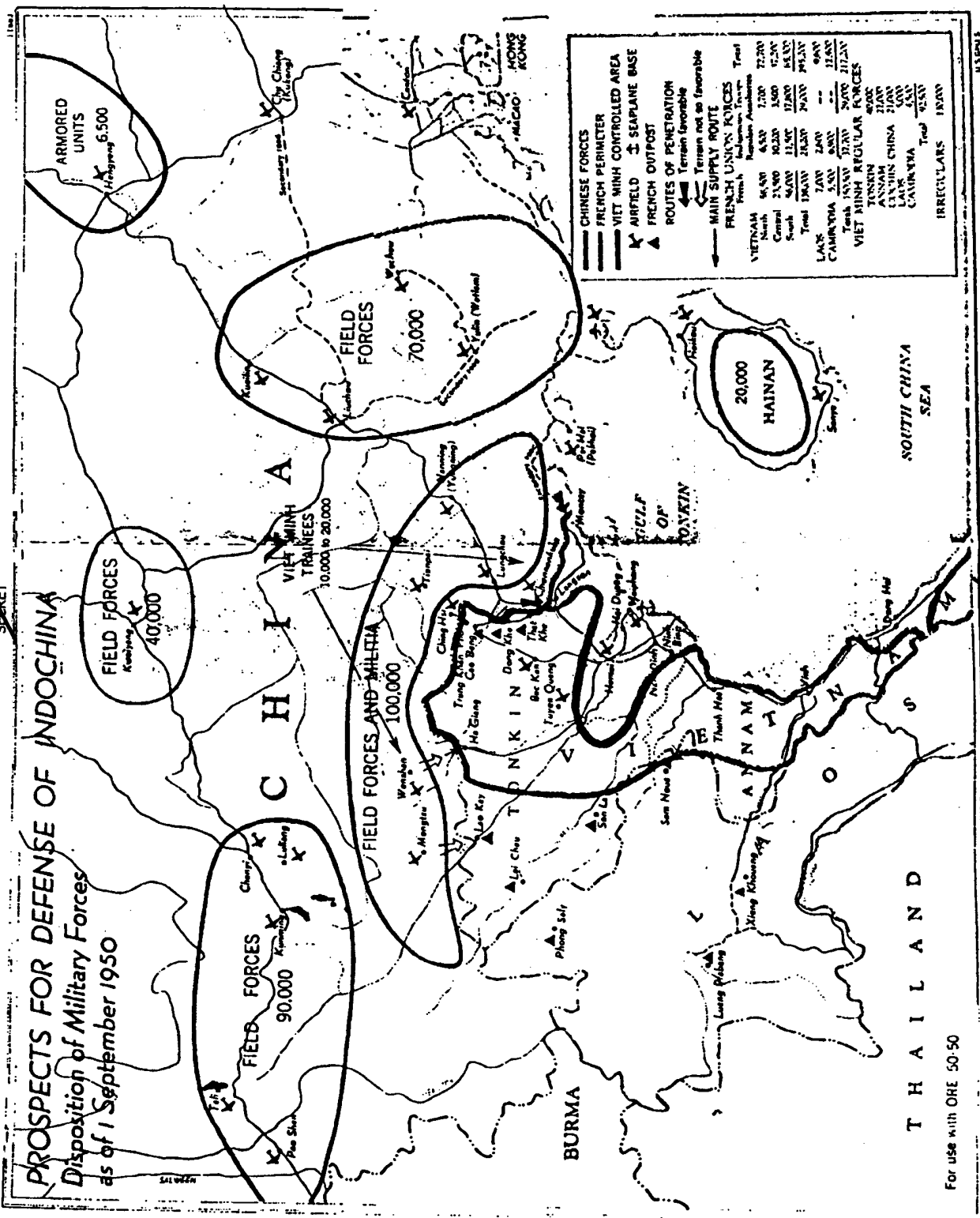
border from Mengtzu to the Gulf of Tonkin (see enclosed map). The G-2 "border area," however, appears on the one hand to exclude the Kwangtung coastal strip adjacent to Indochina and on the other to include the Kunming area over 150 miles from the border. The conclusions of the paper are not affected by this difference in definition.

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# PROSPECTS FOR DEFENSE OF INDOCHINA

Disposition of Military Forces as of 1 September 1950



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