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Pres file

Tuesday, July 11, 1967 - 6:45 pm

Mr. President:

This analysis of a Hanoi hard-liner's view of the war is worth reading, including his mockery of our bombing limitations (p. 4).

I believe the analysis is correct: this is one side of a debate now proceeding in Hanoi.

I can guess the other side's argument but we're not likely to see it in print.

W. W. Rostow

INR Memo to the Secretary, July 10, 1967, "North Vietnamese Army Chief of Staff Comments on Course of War"

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WWRostow:rln

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NIJ 92-223
By RL, NARA, Date 1-23-93

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July 10, 1967

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NLJ 92-224

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes ¹¹⁴ By JW, NARA Date 8-13-92

Subject: North Vietnamese Army Chief of Staff Comments on Course of War

Lieutenant General Van Tien Dung, Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Army, recently published a series of articles evaluating the course of the Vietnam conflict. The articles convey a sense of confidence and determination to fight on carried to the point of inflexibility, though they also point out that the road will not be easy, and they may be intended to counter less rosy views.

Asserts US Is on Defensive. General Dung's articles, published in several June issues of the military daily Quan Doi Nhan Dan, are replete with claims that the US has been driven into essentially defensive military tactics in the Vietnam conflict. Dung asserted that, "together with the South, we have driven the Americans into a more seriously passive strategic position in which their forces are scattered more widely in both parts of our country." He hailed the strategy of continuous attacks pursued by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces over the past six months and called for the further use of such tactics in order to "annihilate each important military unit of the enemy and unceasingly drive him into passiveness, embarrassment, and ever heavier and more tragic defeats." He also expressed satisfaction over the results accomplished in expanding and training the "three categories" of NVA/VC troops (guerrilla, local forces, main forces), and over their rapid mastery of various categories of modern weapons.

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But Doubters Persist. Despite the generally satisfied tone of General Dung's review of military development, it is also clear that the Hanoi debate over military tactics still continues, or at least still rankles. General Dung stated that the balance and composition of the armed forces does not depend on a "certain subjective view" but can be changed if "objective requirements" so determine. Moreover, having pointed to the value of modern weaponry, he also recalled that "many military theoreticians" have "blindly revered up-to-date weapons and techniques." Such statements suggest that there may still be those in North Vietnam who argue that the doctrine of "people's war" requires different tactics and troop composition than now used, perhaps favoring a return to pure guerrilla war, while others may argue that greater reliance should be placed on modern weapons.

The assertive tone of Dung's comments also has a quality of protesting too much, of overstating the prospects for military success in a way which hints that Dung is attempting to convince skeptics. Dung's very tone of confidence, therefore, may indicate, in an oblique way, that there are officials in Hanoi who are questioning the prospects for military victory, just as Dung is touting them.

Differences with Soviets? General Dung at several points appeared to be claiming that Hanoi has devised better missile and anti-aircraft defenses than those suggested by its supplier, the Soviet Union. For example, Dung boasted that "our Party" is "bringing some sharp changes in the current military theory applied by many countries in the world of today--especially the theory concerning the role of an air force, missiles, and various means against up-to-date

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weapons and means." He hailed "our original Vietnamese combat methods, which are suitable to Vietnamese conditions and are not dogmatic and imitative," and boasted that "we have seen and determined correctly the way of employing our forces in air-defense combat." He also asserted that "international assistance is very important, but, no matter how great it is, it must be utilized through our efforts in order to develop its effect." The above passages suggest that the North Vietnamese have developed their own tactics for use of modern Soviet weapons, and have insisted on using the weapons themselves rather than relying on outside help--if it was offered--to operate them.

These statements, combined with reports of Soviet complaints about North Vietnamese misuse of Soviet SAM's, also indicate that there may have been arguments between Hanoi and Moscow on the tactics of modern anti-aircraft warfare, and that the North Vietnamese have insisted on developing and using their own tactics with the SAM's rather than those suggested by the Soviets. However, it would seem exaggerated to conclude that such differences have developed into major sources of friction between the two regimes. Hanoi has long been rigidly assertive on the correctness of its own views on the conduct of a "people's war," insisting that the unique character of its own experience and mission qualified it to devise its own tactics. It has disputed military tactics with Peking, and may still be doing so, but it continues to receive Chinese aid. Neither Hanoi, Moscow, nor Peking appear prepared to let the tactical disputes by themselves mushroom into major crises in relations.

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Mocks US Air Force. General Dung reserved his most sarcastic observations for the US Air Force. He observed that the USAF has found it impossible "to develop fully its strength and strong points" because the US has "been forced to act according to a definite rule due to the complex effect of the military and political factors in the country and in the world." Thus, he stated, "the US Air Force is compelled to take each escalation step and cannot attack the North massively and swiftly through strategic, large-scale, and surprise bombings." He concluded that "its basic weakness lies in the fact that it cannot freely develop its strength, which is really restricted because the US aggressors are highly isolated in the political field." He also claimed that "the US air pirates' morale is very low" because of these restrictions and that USAF "tactics, techniques, and pilots can definitely be defeated."

Opposes Negotiations and Bombing Halt. General Dung, following a stiffer line than that normally used by North Vietnamese regime spokesmen, asserted that Hanoi had to reject "the peace-negotiation tricks of the United States," and he derided the "illusion of peaceful negotiations." He also stated that, "only when the South Vietnamese revolution is successful, can the North enjoy peace," and that the "war of destruction" (i.e., the US bombing of North Vietnam) was "not a separate war but a part of the US war of aggression strategy in South Vietnam aimed at saving the Americans from defeat in South Vietnam." He added that this "war of destruction" is "closely related to the war in South Vietnam," and "will end only after the US war of aggression in South Vietnam is completely defeated." These statements suggested that Dung may have opposed Foreign Minister Trinh's public position that there might be negotiations with the US after a halt in bombings of North Vietnam, even though the war continued in the South.

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Pledges Continued Aid to Viet Cong. General Dung came as close as any North Vietnamese spokesman to admitting the nature of Northern support of the Viet Cong effort, though he did not mention Northern troops in the South. He boasted that "our very high and accurate determination has brought many great successes in both zones," and that "the more the US aggressors attack...the more determinedly the Northern armed forces and people live up to the pledge to the 14 million kith-and-kin Southern compatriots to fight alongside them to liberate the South, protect the North, and advance toward the reunification of the country." He also claimed that "we have frustrated the US plot of using the war of destruction against the North to prevent the Northern compatriots from giving aid to their kith-and-kin compatriots in the South" and added that "the more the communication and transportation facilities in the North develop, the more considerably the aid of the large rear to the large frontline in the people's war against US imperialist aggression throughout the country is increased."

Represents View of Militant Generals. General Dung's article was similar in tone to several recent statements by leading North Vietnamese generals in South and North Vietnam (including Nguyen Chi Thanh and "Truong Son"). It thus very probably represented the militant view of the conflict held by these generals, some of whom are directly responsible for conducting the Southern venture while others offer strategic assistance and direction from the North. All are heavily committed, personally and professionally, to the success of the war. General Dung's attitude, like that of his colleagues, was boastful, ethnocentric, and inflexible. Some of his remarks indicated that there may be

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opposition to his views outside this group of generals, and we can probably assume that the opposition is very powerful since it might have had to overcome the generals' attitudes before being able to come forth with Foreign Minister Trinh's interview of January 28, 1967. Nonetheless, the confident tone of General Dung's pronouncements, as well as his ability to have them published, suggests that he and the other generals have at least a very strong voice in determining Hanoi's policy in the Southern war, though this voice may have been weakened somewhat by Nguyen Chi Thanh's recent death.

The polemical and highly optimistic tone of General Dung's article also raised questions about the accuracy of his facts. As noted above, his depiction of the military situation in highly favorable terms may have been intended in part to persuade those who doubted his view of developments. By the same token, his derisive attitude toward US air operations does not square with reliable reports that North Vietnam has been hurt by the bombings and with Hanoi's efforts to bring them to a halt. It is, therefore, possible that Dung may have presented a false picture in order to shout down his opponents and to cheer his military audience, but there was no indication in the article whether or not he himself really believed his version of events.

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