

35

Wednesday, September 27, 1967 -- 8:00 a.m.

Mr. President:

*Pres file*

You asked me to get validation from the intelligence community of population control data in South Viet Nam.

The attached memorandum and chart represent an unforced consensus representing: CIA, State, and Defense.

As compared with data with which you are familiar, they chose not to allocate the contested population to either side. The contested proportion of the population has dropped from 40% at the end of 1964 to 20% now.

If we allocated it to both sides, the over-all figures would be somewhat more optimistic than the data I originally gave you; but I recommend that, at this time, you use this script and this chart (*after checking in Saigon*).

Clark Clifford (whom I brought into the problem) and I agree that by bringing the intelligence community along -- and this is their product -- we minimize the likelihood of leaks, complaints, allegations of White House pressure, etc.

There are three steps ahead:

- check this much in Saigon;
- work up a fuller package for release in Saigon and backup briefing here (under way);
- get the whole intelligence community to work out a package of other charts on the war, which you -- and all others -- can use, here and in Saigon (under way but slower).

In short, I believe we are on our way to getting the whole town to work together on this problem, in which you and I (and Art McCafferty) have been a bit lonely.

W. W. Rostow

WWRostow:rla

COPY LBJ LIBRARY

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

(Drafted for background presentation to editors)

35

You and I share a problem.

We have got to find a better way of explaining to the American people how the Viet Nam war is going.

This is a difficult thing to do. It is difficult primarily because there is no front line in a guerrilla war by which the public can gauge shifts in the fortunes of war. We must use more sophisticated indicators, and each of these tell only a part of the story, and not always very well even then.

I am personally convinced from all of the people I talk to and the facts and evidence at my disposal that we have made substantial progress in the last two years. By no means can we afford to be complacent, because there is still a long road ahead, but all of the information available to me indicates that we do have something to show for the effort and sacrifice we have been putting into this war.

Let me try to share with you one of the bases for this conviction.

I believe that the VC are losing their control of the people in South Viet Nam. That is what this war -- or any guerrilla war -- is really all about.

Since the beginning of the U. S. military build-up in early 1965, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people living in areas of relative security in South Viet Nam.

In fact, since the end of 1964, there has been roughly a 50% increase.

At the same time, the Viet Cong's population control has decreased by about 30%.

This situation is reflected on this chart which shows that the South Vietnamese government's control of population has increased from about 40% to 65% -- and Viet Cong control has decreased from about 20% to about 15%.

Now let me make my own feelings clear as to the meaning of these numbers. First, I believe the trend in government control of the people of Viet Nam is substantially valid. Second, the reasons for the improvement in population security are important: people in large numbers -- over 1.2 million since December 1965 -- have left their villages in contested areas in order to move to Government of Viet Nam controlled areas where they could be safe. Further, several hundred thousand have left contested

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NLJ-CBS 19

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ By sis, NARS, Date 6-22-84

areas and poverty areas to move to the cities and larger towns where they could find jobs. This flow is continuing at a rate of about 40,000 to 50,000 a month. Thus, the statistics do not mean that 4 million people in the past 2-1/2 years have given their allegiance to the Government of Viet Nam, nor that the war will be over when all of the people are secure. We and the elected leaders of Vietnam know that we have a monumental nation-building task ahead of us, and only progress in that task will mean lasting and final victory. Third, and finally, the numbers are meaningful -- particularly to the Viet Cong. They mean fewer people to pay their taxes, raise food for them, and man their army -- and we have overwhelming data from captured soldiers and documents that the Viet Cong are feeling the pinch. One Viet Cong document in early 1966 complained about the loss of one million people from the rural areas to the Government of Viet Nam-controlled urban areas. Another document in late 1966 noted that 400,000 people had been added to the Government of Viet Nam control in one area. Still another document acknowledged loss of Viet Cong control of 180,000 people in one province alone.

Progress is continuing. Government pacification and Revolutionary Development programs have produced positive results in terms of population control. More than 1,500 rural hamlets, containing more than 1.5 million people, have been brought under government control since the beginning of 1965. Several hundred additional hamlets currently are being developed by government pacification cadre and will probably be added to the secure category by the end of the year. There will be some back-sliding in areas which we control, and this program is still not moving as fast as we would like. But they are moving and we are making net gains.

Besides the population control statistics, Viet Cong documentation, and observers' reports, we have the results of three elections in Viet Nam in the past two years -- a fantastic feat in itself. In May 1965, 3.8 million people voted of 4.2 million registered voters in the municipal and provincial elections. In September 1966, 4.3 million voted of 5.2 registered voters in the Constituent Assembly elections. In September 1967, 4.3 million voted of 5.3 million registered voters in the presidential and upper house elections. Now, when we compare these voter and registration statistics with the total adult population of Viet Nam, the results are strikingly similar to the population control results. The trends are the same. Voters are up 40% in the last election over the first, and Government of Viet Nam population control is up 30% in the same time period.

So what we have seen is that there has been an enormous reversal of fortune during the past two years in South Viet Nam.

In 1964 and early 1965, the Communists were winning the war. Today they are losing.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

-3-

In 1964 and early 1965, the Communists looked forward to a steady enlargement of their base in the population. Today that base is shrinking.

This is what you and I have somehow failed to communicate to the American people.

Why? One reason, clearly, is that the slow, steady reconstruction of a nation is far less dramatic than combat -- and combat continues.

Nor can I hold out to you any hope that the level of violence will diminish until Hanoi has come to understand that it cannot win.

So long as Hanoi believes that there is no need to compromise or negotiate -- so long as Hanoi believes that we lack the patience, the will, the unity to see this thing through -- just so long will the Communists continue to send their troops and their political cadres to their destruction in the South.

So it is true, in a sense, to say that we cannot see when this war will end.

What we can see, what we can even, however imperfectly, measure is the steady progress of a South Viet Nam which now knows that it is going to live.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

COPY LBJ LIBRARY