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Mr. President:

*Pres. file*  
This is one way to look at the war.

From Hanoi's point of view there are two central facts:

- the decline of the Viet Cong manpower base;
- the possibility of a political break in the United States.

Hanoi's purpose, therefore, is to buy time to see what U.S. politics may yield. Hanoi has attempted to achieve this purpose by:

- reducing activity in II, III, and IV Corps;
- increasing pressure in the DMZ area to (1) prevent a more rapid erosion of the communist structure and (2) inflict higher U.S. casualties in hopes of eroding the U.S. will.

Hanoi's strategy has been only partially successful -- but extremely costly, in that:

- Revolutionary development progress has been slowed as a result of the diversion of U.S. forces to I Corps -- but it has not been stopped.

- U.S. losses have increased substantially (7,000 killed in action in nine months against 5,000 all last year) -- but for every American killed they have had more than nine deaths.

- Total friendly casualties have also increased (15,600 killed in nine months compared with 11,100 for the same period in 1966) -- but they have suffered disproportionately (the kill rate is now 4.26 against them compared with 3.2 in the same period in 1966).

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- Despite their increased losses in I Corps (and higher kill ratios against them in I Corps), they have been unable to cut their losses in the other corps areas (April through August losses equalled 25,300 compared with 18,400 for the same period last year. Monthly average was 5,200 compared with 4,900 for the preceding 15 months).

- North Vietnamese losses have probably increased more than VC losses.

In the meantime, the intensity of the fighting in I Corps has tended to obscure the fact that the over-all pace of the war has slowed down:

- Communist-initiated incidents in I Corps have increased from 20% of the total to 26% -- but the total incident rate is down about 30% from the peak.

- Battalion-size contacts in I Corps have increased from 34% of the total to 66% -- but the total rate is down 55%.

- Small unit actions and contacts per quarter in I Corps have increased from 600 to 3,000. In the other corps areas they have decreased from the peak of 1,900 to 1,500.

- September death rates are substantially down from their peaks this spring: U.S. rate is down from 1,233 to 775; South Vietnamese, from 1,026 to 740; enemy, from 9,351 to 6,354.

It is too early to tell whether the current "lull" will be followed by a renewal of intense fighting in I Corps or whether Hanoi will now change its strategy.

Hanoi may feel that its DMZ strategy has been too costly in terms of its limited gains. If so, their alternatives are:

- negotiate with or without a continuation of the fighting;

- retreat from stage III to stage II insurgency (fragmentary evidence indicates that this process may be underway in some areas);

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- switch their main effort from the DMZ to some other area;
- a combination of the above.

On the other hand, Hanoi may well decide to pursue its DMZ strategy despite its high cost, because:

- they simply are not yet ready to quit;
- even though it is a "losing" strategy, it may buy more time at less cost than other alternatives (Hanoi may calculate that they would have suffered even more if they had not adopted the DMZ strategy).
- for a time, at least, the communists may be prepared to exchange 7,200 killed a month for 800 American deaths (or 1,700 friendly deaths) if they believe that their will to persist is that much stronger than ours.

W. W. Rostow

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