

~~TOP SECRET~~

67  
INFORMATION

*Pres file*

Wednesday, December 13, 1967 -- 7:45 p.m.

Mr. President:

Herewith two major CIA studies which Sec. McNamara suggests should be called to your attention. I have attached to the back cover of each memoranda of comment by Bob Ginsburgh: the back cover because I think, in fairness to the CIA effort, you would like to read the summary (pp 1-5) and get a feel for the questions and answers before reading a mildly critical reaction.

Although my own view is sympathetic to Bob Ginsburgh's; and I sometimes feel that CIA is leaning against an excessive optimism that does not exist, I would regard its conservatism as an asset to the Government, if not carried to excess.

W. W. Rostow

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Authority NLS-CBS 19  
By sis, NARS, Date 6-22-84

Cy 4, SC No. 08753/67, 8 Dec 1967

"A Review of the Situation in Vietnam."

Cy 4, SC No. 08754/67, 8 Dec 1967

"Questions and Answers Relating to Vietnam."

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

13 December 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROSTOW

SUBJECT: A Review of the Situation in Vietnam

1. In many places I found it difficult to believe that the CIA document is talking about the same war we are. I believe that the Agency is overreacting to what it feels is undue optimism at top levels of government. If the document serves to caution against an expectation of a conclusion of the war before the 1968 elections, it may serve a useful purpose. In my opinion, however, it exudes an excessively pessimistic interpretation of the facts.
2. I do not believe the estimate contains any facts -- as opposed to interpretations -- which the President is not already aware of.
3. Hanoi has adapted its tactics to cope with U.S. military pressures, but I question the judgment that it has "effectively" coped with these pressures. The tactics have slowed, but they have not stopped, progress in pacification; they have not halted the erosion of the VC manpower base; they have not resulted in a Dien Bien Phu; and they have been more costly for the enemy than for the allies despite the advantages of terrain, shorter supply lines, and close sanctuaries.
4. I would agree that we cannot count on an early turning point and that Hanoi has some reason to persevere at least through 1968, but I see scant reason for Hanoi to view the past year with encouragement. From their point of view, the only silver lining to the black clouds is the estimate that things could have been worse.
5. I can see no basis for the interpretation that "the struggle between allied forces and communist regular units is beginning to go better from Hanoi's viewpoint."
6. Chieu Hoi rates since September have been very disappointing. However, I do not think that the other traditional indexes of the course of the war are significantly less favorable to the allies.

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7. I agree that in Hanoi's view the price of victories to the U.S. probably counts more than the cost of defeats to the communists. But this statement does not mean much unless we are prepared (1) to say how much more, (2) over what period of time, and (3) to compare their calculated break -- even point with the actual price/cost ratio. (In terms of killed in action the communist "cost" has been running more than nine times the U.S. "price" during 1967.)

8. It is difficult to take issue with statements on NVN manpower reserves to the effect that

- manpower resources have been more than adequate;
- they are probably adequate to support an expanded effort;
- they will not restrict infiltration;
- Hanoi retains the capability of moving several division-size elements into SVN (this may well be underway).

The study does not address the gut issue: how much of an expansion could NVN's manpower reserves support? Lacking such an estimate, the study may give the mistaken impression that NVN's manpower resources are unlimited. You will recall my personal conclusions that.

- North Vietnam probably has a surge force capability (they might be able to send south three to six divisions -- 37,500 - 75,000);
  - full use of forces already in-being (much less substantial additional forces) is probably limited by logistics capability;
  - North Vietnam may already be close to the maximum force levels sustainable at current casualty rates.

9. It seems to me that the following statement, if not actually false, may be misleading: "Soviet leaders probably judge that Hanoi, even without Soviet aid, could continue to fight, although the nature and level of the conflict would necessarily change." The Soviets furnished military aid in the first half of 1967 at a yearly rate of \$520 million out of a total of \$660 million in military aid. Soviet economic aid was \$200 million out of \$340. Thus, Soviet aid is extremely significant in both absolute and proportional terms. Furthermore, withdrawal of Soviet aid would critically threaten resupply of artillery and ammunition and would cripple NVN's air defenses. If Hanoi could continue to fight (which I personally doubt), the nature and low level of the conflict would probably permit withdrawal of virtually all U.S. ground troops and a major reduction in U.S. air forces.

~~TOP SECRET~~

10. The evaluation of the bombing suffers from the same general deficiencies we have noted in past estimates.

11. On the plus side, I would note that

- CIA does not believe that the Chinese are committed to a communist success in the south at any price;

- Giap is talking in terms of prolonging the war "at least two more years"; whereas, the North Vietnamese used to talk in terms of twenty years.

21

ROBERT N. GINSBURGH

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROSTOW

SUBJECT: Questions and Answers Relating to Vietnam

1. By and large, CIA has provided an excellent set of questions and answers. With relatively little pruning, they could be put out in unclassified form. In unclassified form they would be useful to Cabinet officers and other officials in discussing Vietnam.

2. However, before any wide use is made of these answers in either classified or unclassified form, it would be essential to coordinate the answers with Defense, JCS, MACV, and the Embassy. It would also be useful to consider the desirability of adding additional questions; for example: What would happen if we stopped bombing? What's wrong with the enclave theory? How long is the war going to last? What would the impact be of mining the ports?

3. I have reservations about the following answers:

1, 2, and 42. Although the answers properly reflect the fact that NVN has additional manpower in reserve, they do not adequately reflect the difficulties Hanoi would face in trying to mobilize, train, deploy, and maintain this manpower in combat.

7. As far as we know, bombing has not yet persuaded Hanoi to change its strategy. The answer should stop there rather than going on to say that is not likely to persuade a change.

8. Similarly, I see no reason whatsoever to take "at face value" Hanoi's assertions that the bombing is an inconclusive factor -- especially in view of Hanoi's insistence on cessation of the bombing as a prerequisite to talks.

17.. I have no credible intelligence -- just a gut hunch -- that this answer underestimates the extent of supplies via Cambodia.

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34. I doubt that there is a supportable basis for estimating VC recruitment in 1966 as high as 8,000 in view of MACV's estimate of only 7,000 -- which in fact seemed to be high. Similarly, the 1967 estimate of 4,000 - 6,000 probably should be reduced to MACV's best guesstimate of about 3,500.

36. Without getting into the subject of "crossover points," the answer should indicate that despite possible wide margins of error, MACV estimates communist strengths have decreased by 43,000 in the last year.

37. Any statement on losses should indicate what is and is not included: KIA, DOW, defections, desertions, losses from diseases.

39. Although I do not have a better answer for the decline in Chieu Hoi rates, I think this subject deserves closer scrutiny.

40. This answer logically leads to the question: What about friendly weapons losses? It should be answered both in totals and in ratios.

49. and 67. These answers, in my opinion, grossly underestimate the impact of closing Haiphong and interdicting the rail lines (we would also attack highways and waterways). As you know, I believe that such a campaign mounted at the beginning of the good weather season could well be decisive. Although this point is debatable, it should not be so lightly brushed aside. Although NVN's current imports may be relatively small by our standards, I believe that they are pretty close to Hanoi's minimum requirements for continuing the war. I further believe that (1) the minimum requirements would be increased above current imports as the result of port and LOC interdiction and that (2) their throughput could be reduced by 20 to 50%. If this estimate is anywhere in the ball-park, NVN would find the continued prosecution of the war extremely difficult -- if not impossible -- after a few months (perhaps as few as three -- maybe as many as 12).

21

ROBERT N. GINSBURGH

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