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Saigon would probably acquiesce in the holding of talks but would continue to resist a total halt of bombing, any reduction of US forces, and any expansion of subject matter in the bilateral talks to include the present or future situation in the South. Indeed, the public grace with which Saigon accepted the US initiatives masked what the Embassy had termed a well of "quiet bitterness." Initially, INR estimated, the peace moves had helped resolve differences within the GVN which centered around the persistent conflict between Thieu and Ky, and had brought the regime belatedly to realize that the US commitment did not necessarily imply continuing the war at its present intensity. Against these salutary effects, however, the onset of talks "could also contribute to an unraveling of the constitutional system, lessened restraints upon irresponsible political activity, and a general disintegration of morale...."

Moreover, INR stated, "there will undoubtedly be a progressive rise in South Vietnamese suspicions of US intentions and with it may come an increased possibility of a military takeover in Saigon." "The GVN will demand full reporting and consultation on the state of talks with North Vietnam and oppose an early widening of the talks...in the hope of delaying any decisive stage at which the GVN might, for example, have to decide whether its own participation in negotiations was worth the price of recognizing the Liberation Front as a separate entity equally competent to participate. The GVN would thus hope to delay still further a realistic confrontation with the problems implicit in arranging a political settlement, for which it presumably is still almost totally unprepared."

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Nevertheless, INR concluded, "the chances still appear to be slightly better than even that the GVN...can be brought along reluctantly to accept widening of the talks into negotiations." ⁷ When Foreign Minister Tran Van Do said on May 17 that the GVN would permit the NLF to participate in future elections as an opposition group, INR observed that Do's influence was limited and that his statement could not necessarily be interpreted as a commitment of the GVN. ⁸

Meanwhile, Communist activities in the South featured the congress on April 20-21 of the new and allegedly non-Communist "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces," created after the Tet offensive. INR thought that this effort was aimed at strengthening Communist appeal among the urban elite, possibly to create a "third force" alongside the GVN and NLF for future negotiations. ⁹ Reports in April indicated that the Communists were preparing for a new offensive and were doing so on a scale sufficient to support a repeat of the Tet spectacular. INR did not believe that Communist strategy called for attacks at that level, but predicted that there would be mortar attacks on selected urban and military sites, suggesting also that "any renewed military activity could fit into the framework of

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7. See VII-5: IN-283, "South Vietnamese Reactions to US-Hanoi Talks," April 17, 1968, S/NF ✓
 8. IN-364, "Foreign Minister Do's Views on the Front: A Slight Shift," May 17, 1968, S/NF
 9. See VII-6: IN-307, "Viet Cong Upgrade Alliance Front into National Organization," April 26, 1968, S/NF ✓

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did not produce a total bombing cessation Hanoi might, after several months, have to accept the idea of holding substantive talks while the partial bombing continued, or move toward breaking off the talks. The first choice would have a serious effect on party morale in both the North and the South, but the second would have even more obvious and serious implications.¹² Press speculation that Hanoi might be contemplating a break-off evoked from INR the judgment that Hanoi was unlikely to take this step "in the next month or two, and probably not even beyond that." Hanoi's hopes of keeping pressures on the GVN and on US resolve—let alone its fear of resumed bombing—meant that Hanoi would be more likely to adopt less drastic measures such as to recall its chief negotiators for "consultation" while keeping a low-level liaison office in Paris.¹³

When Hanoi appointed a member of the Politburo, Le Duc Tho, to its delegation, INR estimated that the "enormous authority" his presence would bring had been designed to improve the international impact of the delegation's propaganda and to give it greater freedom of maneuver.¹⁴ INR foresaw, however, no imminent give in Hanoi's position on the DMZ;

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12. See VII-9: IN-371, "How Does Hanoi See Things After the First Week in Paris?" May 20, 1968, SECRET
 13. See VII-10: IN-395, "Would Hanoi Break Off Paris Talks?" May 24, 1968, S/NFD/LD/CD
 14. IN-418, "Hanoi Politburo Member Le Duc Tho Off to Paris," May 31, 1968, SECRET

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while it might reduce the level of military action there, Hanoi would not agree to restore the de-militarized status of the Zone, both because of its own logistic interests and because the move would be interpreted as too great a step back from reunification.¹⁵ Again, INR believed, there was no point in debating whether Hanoi would await the outcome of US conventions or elections before deciding on its course of action; as Hanoi saw the matter, the solution of the problem lay in Vietnam—not in the US.¹⁶

In July, when the Paris talks had been under way for two months, INR discussed the tactics Hanoi might adopt for the remainder of the summer and fall of 1968. Basically, Hanoi still thought that the overall political, military and diplomatic situation in the South was favorable for its objectives and unfavorable to those of the US. It was assured of continued Soviet and Chinese aid, and the US could not significantly escalate the war in the South. Moreover, Hanoi would assume that the US would not soon be likely to resume bombing above the 20th parallel—let alone go beyond the limits it had observed before the partial halt—so that the implicit threat of resumed bombing would not of itself soon force the North Vietnamese to make changes in important policies. On the other hand, Hanoi did have growing problems in the pursuit of the war,

15. IN-413, "Prospects for Hanoi's De-escalation in the DMZ," May 31, 1968, S/NFD/LD

16. See MM-REA-68-106, "Hanoi's Attitudes on the US Elections," June 19, 1968, S/NFD

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and INR, seeing clearer evidence of the strain, came around to the view that the pressure would lead Hanoi "to seek some kind of agreement with the US by the end of the year, or possibly not later than mid-1969." If they could not thus reach a satisfactory settlement, "the Communists will be prepared to continue the war, though probably at a lower level."

Hanoi would like to discuss matters related to the future of the South, but not while the bombing continued. If the US were to continue demanding reciprocity for a complete halt, Hanoi would want to find some way around the impasse, but not by giving assurances that would inhibit it in a future large-scale offensive in the South; more likely, it would begin to touch on South Vietnamese issues without mentioning the bombing, or it might explore tacit mutual de-escalation. Finally, Hanoi would not contemplate withdrawing any of its forces from the South before US forces began to leave.

Meanwhile, the review continued, the Communists could be expected to maintain about the same patterns of military operations and infiltration, and would go on adjusting the levels of each to meet the needs of their tactical situation and their interests in the negotiation. Any increase of infiltration in the future might thus indicate that they were preparing to trade off a reduction for some US concession. If it should want to apply pressure, Hanoi would be most likely to choose the device of recessing the talks or temporarily withdrawing its key negotiators. Should all else fail, the Communists might become more

17. Especially in the testimony of a number of recent Spanish refugees from North Vietnam.

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interested in arrangements leading to a coalition government in the South; however, INR concluded, "We believe it unlikely...that they would retreat this far before the end of the year."¹⁸

Soon after this review, when Hanoi brought up in discussion elements of the Geneva Accords pertaining to the political solution--but pointedly omitted reference to those elements that dealt with military affairs--INR interpreted this more as a reflection of Hanoi's continuing desire to reach an understanding on a future political settlement before discussing a cease-fire and withdrawal. At the same time, INR pointed to a number of Communist statements that omitted reference to Hanoi's position on reunification and the NLF program; it suggested that these statements could reflect Communist interest in accommodation. Alternatively, Hanoi might be preparing to make more use¹⁹ of the Alliance. The Communists could use the Alliance more flexibly than the NLF in their effort to get the US to negotiate with South Vietnamese Communist elements and eventually obtain formation of a new GVN under Communist influence. Hanoi's problem would be to avoid too close an identification with the Alliance and to prevent dissension among the NLF/VC in the process of these maneuvers. The NLF leaders and cadre, INR estimated, "probably never expected to attain independent

18. See VII-11: MM-REA-68-115, "Possible Hanoi Tactics Through the Summer and Fall of 1968," July 12, 1968, S/LD

19. IN-571, "Hanoi Focuses Selectively on Geneva Accords...", July 19, 1968, SECRET, and REA-27, "Some Unofficial Reports of the Current Hanoi Position," July 17, 1968, S/NFD

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power in the South, since they saw themselves as Hanoi's instruments,
but they may have hoped for rank, position, and other rewards.²⁰

At this point, Hanoi seemed to be coming to grips with the difficult problem of reciprocity. There were hints early in August at a connection between a lull in the fighting and a total bombing halt; INR noted that these hints had been presented in a context which suggested a de facto reciprocity but also an implicit threat of a "third wave" offensive. INR concluded, on balance, that the matter was²¹ "probably still under review."

As even more confusing signals proliferated from Hanoi, INR considered that they reflected a time of decision-making. Hanoi in turn would be watching US reactions and proposals closely during this time in order to determine the minimum concession possible.²² When the Paris delegation delivered its first personal attacks on President Johnson on August 28, INR recognized the possibility that Hanoi had concluded it could no longer deal with the present administration; but INR also believed—partly on the ambiguous evidence that Le Duc Tho had been absent from the Paris meeting—that the attacks could possibly be intended to²³ mask an impending concession.

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20. IN-612, "Hanoi's Plans for the 'Alliance,'" August 2, 1968, S/NFD/CD
 21. See VII-12: IN-626, "North Vietnamese Links Between the Lull in the South and the Bombing of the North," August 8, 1968, S/NFD/CD
 22. IN-635, "Considerations in Hanoi's Recent and Future Tactics," August 13, 1968, S/NFD/CD/LD
 23. See VII-13: IN-688, "Hanoi Attacks President Johnson," August 30, 1968

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Meanwhile, MACV read recently captured documents to mean that the Viet Cong expected 1968 to be the year of victory and that a "third wave" offensive was imminent in late summer. INR disagreed with this analysis; it thought other documents showed that the Communists did not look upon 1968 as necessarily a decisive period, and Communist intentions regarding another major offensive were not clear. ²⁴ Of the possible military courses open to the Communists, INR believed that a continuation of the prevailing moderate level was one course "the Communists are unlikely to pursue for very much longer." Although this course offered the advantage of confusing the issue of reciprocity, it would also imperil the Communists' political position if it continued much longer. Another offensive of Tet proportions, on the other hand, would be both risky and unnecessary for Communist purposes. Therefore, the Communists' most likely immediate military tactics would be a combination of high impact attacks on a selected major urban area and intensified small-scale operations elsewhere. In this next round, moreover, "the Communists will seek to mount a campaign of some duration, striving not so much for shock effect as for opportunities to whipsaw our forces, frustrate our response, and intensify impressions of allied impotence in the United States and South Vietnam." ²⁵ A mixed offensive

24. Memo to Secretary, August 29, 1968

25. See VII-14: IN-636, "Possible Communist Military Moves in South Vietnam," August 13, 1968, S/NF

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of just this kind began exactly four days later. The perennial question of Cambodian involvement was once again raised when MACV claimed that Cambodia was now the Communists' primary logistic net for the II, III, and IV Corps areas. An INR representative participated in an investigating team which concluded that--while arms supply and Cambodian complicity had undoubtedly increased--Cambodia remained secondary to the over-
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land route as a factor in the equation of infiltration.

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Setting the Stage

On September 6, INR reported that Hanoi had made an important shift when Prime Minister Pham Van Dong omitted the usual Four Points formula in his National Day speech, and for the first time listed certain US acts which would be "in conformity" with Hanoi's demands. While he insisted on US recognition of and negotiation with the NLF, he spoke also of "US strength." This speech, INR speculated, might reflect the first preparations
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for a modification of Hanoi's position.

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- 26. See VII-15: IN-683, "The Current Communist Offensive in South Vietnam," August 29, 1968, S/NF
 - 27. "USIB Team Report," March 1968.
 - 28. IN-708, "North Vietnamese Premier Speaks on National Day," September 6, 1968, S/NFD/LD

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The next two weeks brought less hopeful signs, as Hanoi narrowed the range of topics it had originally raised, and failed to follow up other hints of change in its position. However, INR believed that the Paris talks remained an important element in Hanoi's overall mix of military-political-diplomatic endeavors, and that it would be reluctant to break them off.

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Reviewing Communist maneuvers during 1968 up to late September, INR concluded that Hanoi's "vast and costly efforts have not to date produced decisive or even uniformly favorable results." Hanoi seemed to have held in July and August a reappraisal of its situation, and INR estimated that the leadership might have discerned the following advantages: success in achieving a partial bombing halt, undiminished ability to disrupt allied programs in the South, a US position generally more accommodating than it was two years before, and the likelihood that domestic opposition to the war would continue in the US. Hanoi would not have failed to derive a sense of accomplishment from President Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 elections. Yet the leadership would still see formidable obstacles, including persistent problems of food, manpower, and morale in both North and South, improvement in the image of the GVN since the Huong Cabinet was installed, and the fact that no major US presidential candidates offered hope for an early settlement on Hanoi's terms.

29. IN-738, "Review of Hanoi's Tactics and Positions in Paris,"
September 18, 1968, SECRET

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Moreover, Hanoi remained committed to progress in the talks, and may have decided that a total bombing halt would be worth securing before it confronted a new and unknown American administration. In order to obtain a halt, "Hanoi may be willing to resolve the reciprocity issue." Since neither military pressure nor the gambit of a "lull" had worked, Hanoi might now be willing to make some limited gesture of tacit reciprocity. Indeed, "Hanoi's position may even have advanced to the point where it is prepared to be somewhat more explicit than before about the connection between an American bombing halt and the steps it is prepared to take." However, INR did not believe that Hanoi was prepared to issue a categorical assurance: "Instead, it may give us a slightly better basis for an 'assumption,' hoping that we will accept this under the framework of the San Antonio formula." But any such concession would "almost certainly" be accompanied by military and political pressure in South Vietnam. Should such a concession produce a full bombing halt, Hanoi "will not feel any urgency to yield its stiff position on the next matter to be discussed: the roles of the GVN and the NLF." Rather, "it will certainly exert maximum pressures for direct US-NLF conversations before being prepared to review its position on that issue."

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When Hanoi proceeded along precisely this line in respect to discussions between US and NLF, the US in late September proposed a formula

30. See VII-16: IN-744, "Where Does Hanoi Go From Here?" September 20, 1968, S/NFD/CD

31. As INR assumes from public sources, not having access to the official record.

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for dealing in terms of "your side-our side," by means of which the US and Hanoi could each, to the extent it chose, ignore the status of the NLF and the GVN. INR believed that North Vietnam would reject the formula: "we can expect Hanoi to demand direct US-NLF talks for quite some time." In addition to this gambit, Hanoi might also adopt one or more supplementary tactics, such as trying to include the NLF in the continuing bilateral talks with the US; accepting the "your side-our side" formula and then absenting itself from discussion about the South; or, as a fallback position, attempting to conduct bilateral talks with the US at the same time that GVN and NLF held bilateral discussions. 32

In mid-October, Le Duc Tho left Paris for Hanoi amidst rumors of US proposals designed to pave the way for a full bombing halt. In analyzing Hanoi's likely response, INR had to work from the general nature of the proposals as reported in the press; accordingly it assumed that the proposals covered a) the DMZ, b) some form of restraint elsewhere in the South, and c) representation at the talks for the GVN.

Looking at Hanoi's broader objectives, apart from minor tactical maneuvering, INR judged that the DRV wished to end "the current stage of intense military conflict." INR reiterated its judgment that Hanoi would probably be prepared to defuse—but not to restore—the DMZ. It also estimated that Hanoi would be likely "to exercise some restraint for some time" in the South, but not immediately to accept GVN

32. REA-MM, "Your Side-Our Side, - What Next?" September 23, 1968

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representation at Paris. However, if it did accept representation, Hanoi would then try to reduce the status of the GVN and get it to talk directly with the NLF.³³

During the following two weeks, the air was filled with public rumor and speculation until, on October 31, President Johnson announced a total bombing halt and an agreement to expand the talks to include the GVN and NLF. A few days later, a Pentagon backgrounder said that some reciprocity was involved: it spoke of an "understanding" that VC/NVA violations of the DMZ and attacks on the centers of South Vietnamese cities could provoke US retaliation.

The Curtain Rises

The total cessation of the bombing raised the curtain on a new phase in the negotiations. After the newly arrived representative of the NLF, Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, uttered her first lines in Paris on November 5, INR found that she had adhered closely to the script. The statement by the NLF, INR believed, "suggests reasonably clearly that the Communists are unlikely to respond favorably to a cease-fire proposal, much less make one themselves, in the near future.... It seems likely that a cease-fire will not become attractive to the Communists until they become either much more encouraged or much more discouraged over their overall prospects than they have reason to be at the moment." Moreover, even³⁴

33. See VII-17: IN-825, "What Will Hanoi Do Now?" October 19, 1968, S/NFD/LD

34. See VII-18: IN-860, "Possible Communist Attitudes Toward a Cease-Fire," November 6, 1968, SECRET

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though Hanoi had been forced to accept the presence of the GVN at the conference table, it would hope that conflicts between US and GVN in the coming negotiations would fatally weaken the regime; recalling that "the last public altercation" between the two governments had led to the fall of Diem, Hanoi would make every effort to exploit the opportunity again. ³⁵

At the same time, INR cautioned against the conclusion that because of increasing morale problems Communist military de-escalation might proceed faster than had previously appeared possible. Much of the evidence for that conclusion stemmed from captured documents and closely resembled the reports which, a year ago, had immediately preceded the Tet offensive. "We do not have the impression that deficiencies in enemy morale have reached serious proportions"; ³⁶ the Communists were still "determined, disciplined and aggressive."

It became apparent, however, that, regardless of the President's announcement on October 31, the GVN was not yet ready to appear on stage. Indeed, INR considered that the GVN might believe its role required even further delay. Despite reports that Thieu could be expected soon to find a face-saving device through which to participate in the talks, "we should probably expect that over the next several weeks at least he will tend to pursue two major objectives. He will try to block or impede any discussion on substantive issues and minimize the role of the NLF as a

35. See VII-19: IN-879, "Hanoi Propaganda Reflects Desire to Exploit and Exacerbate US-South Vietnamese Differences," November 13, 1968

36. See VII-20: MM-REA-68-156, "Evans-Novak Story on Vietnamese Communist Morale," November 15, 1968

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separate political entity." In fact, "Thieu and his generals may believe that they are not now under any great pressure to accept significant compromises and indeed that in the weeks ahead they will be able to improve their bargaining position" through delaying tactics.³⁷

On November 12, the Embassy in Saigon estimated that the Communists could be expected quite early to demand a cease-fire, and to make the necessary concessions for withdrawal of their own troops in order to effect an early US withdrawal. The Embassy foresaw no long haggling by Hanoi in the preliminary negotiations over procedures: rather it felt that the Communists, looking for rapid progress, would be disposed to make concessions if faced with US resistance.

INR forecast a somewhat different behavior. Hanoi could be expected "to lead with very advanced demands...[and] will probably be rather sticky on procedural matters." It would continue "to negotiate slowly --! carefully." Indeed, "Even though it can be forced over time to yield on its extreme demands and to work out a negotiated solution on less than ideal terms, it will not move quickly in that direction. It may 'take note' of our demands, but will not accede to them soon." Rather than adhere to the general agreement over the level of violence permissible in the South, Hanoi "will in effect try to whittle away at the price it had to pay for a bombing halt." Again, "Hanoi will probably

37. See VII-21: IN-863, "President Thieu May Pursue a Delaying Strategy," November 7, 1968

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not now or in the near future attempt to negotiate a supervised and
controlled cease-fire without a general settlement."³⁸

With the arrival of the GVN delegation in Paris on December 9, 1968,
all main protagonists were on hand to embark on a new phase of the con-
test in Vietnam.

38. See VII-22: Deptel to Saigon, subject: "Hanoi's Future Strategy,"
November 25, 1968

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- IV - Prospects for Beginning Talks and Negotiating a Settlement

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C. Thematic Summary: COMMUNIST INTENTIONS AND RESPONSE TO US ACTIONS

1. North Vietnam

From 1961 to the Tonkin Gulf crisis in August 1964, INR maintained that Hanoi's policy-makers were determined to step up the political-military insurgency in the South: they would try to improve and expand military operations by giving greater assistance, but would refrain from a large-scale infusion of native North Vietnamese or regular units of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), either on their own initiative or in reaction to an increase in American support for the GVN. In the first place, INR believed, Hanoi felt that neither action was necessary because recruitment in the South was adequate, and because good progress was being made under existing tactics of insurgency. In the second place—a point cited more frequently as INR caught increasing signs that the US was planning for escalation—INR and the rest of the Intelligence Community felt that Hanoi was determined to avoid provoking direct US retaliation against the North.

INR at no time believed that the threat or event of US action against the North would be effective in forcing Hanoi to cease its support of the insurgency or to call off the Viet Cong. A basic assumption, clearly though rarely articulated, was that Hanoi in shaping its policy was moved far more strongly by its reading of the situation in the South than by concern over the effects of direct US action against the North—of course it did not ignore the factors of damage and morale.

When debate in the US government over ^{the advisability of} escalating its effort grew warmer, in the spring of 1964, INR expressed the view that this US action

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probably would lead the DRV to give even greater support to the insurgency. INR reasoned that the DRV would no longer be trying to ward off the threat—might even find the reality less harmful than its anticipation—so that some of the restraints hitherto impeding its action would vanish. Meanwhile, in the spring and summer of 1964, as evidence mounted that the North Vietnamese were preparing against possible attack, INR estimated that Hanoi was willing to take some risk that the US would escalate activity in the South by playing a greater role in the war

and pressing the advantage it enjoyed in the troubles after Diem. INR continued, however (as did the Intelligence Community in general) to believe that Hanoi considered the risk of provoking US attacks on the North to be an important argument against the use of regular NVA units in the South, together with the fact that they were not essential.

For all their appreciation of Hanoi's determination to persevere in the South, INR and the Intelligence Community in general were surprised by North Vietnam's behavior in the Tonkin Gulf crisis of August 1964. INR interpreted this behavior as intended primarily to show the US that Hanoi was determined not to be faced down by US threats to attack the North. In keeping with this interpretation, INR believed that Hanoi would feel compelled to react to the US retaliatory strikes of August 6 by some VC "spectaculars" in South Vietnam. Furthermore, INR suggested that Hanoi might henceforth feel less constrained than had been assumed about sending down regular forces if they were needed.

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When asked to estimate Hanoi's reactions to US escalation during debates of the fall and winter which preceded the decision in February 1965 to begin bombing, INR increasingly departed from the rest of the Intelligence Community in foreseeing no chance that the DRV would actually comply with US demands or even feign to do so. Instead, INR predicted that North Vietnam would react aggressively and might dispatch regular units in force. INR maintained this basic position once the escalation had begun and when new expansions of the strike program were considered. In addition, INR held that Hanoi would be prepared to increase its commitment of forces in the South to whatever levels were necessary to offset the impact of expanded US involvement on the ground, of the sort which followed the decision in July 1965 to send American forces into action.

During 1966 INR continued to question the results of the bombing either in interrupting the flow of men and materiel to the South or in disrupting life in the North, and to doubt that it was effective enough on either count to make Hanoi reconsider its aggressive tactics or its goals in the South. By mid-1967, however, INR detected more concern in Hanoi over the cumulative effects of the bombing, so that it ascribed in part to this worry Hanoi's tentative shifts in its verbal position on negotiations. Nevertheless, INR still believed that vastly increased bombing would not move Hanoi closer to meaningful compromise. When asked to estimate North Vietnamese reactions to such expansions, in the spring of 1967 and again after the Tet offensive of 1968, INR judged that Hanoi,

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backed by China, would up the ante as needed and that the ability of the North Vietnamese leaders to compromise might well be restricted as they became increasingly dependent on China to sustain the war and prevent the collapse of their regime. After President Johnson ordered a partial halt in the bombing, the North Vietnamese made limited concessions in agreeing to talk and, later, in allowing Saigon to participate in exchange for a full bombing halt; INR concluded that the cumulative impact of the bombing clearly had been one important factor in these decisions of the DRV.

2. Communist China

From 1961 until late 1964, INR assessed Peking's role in Vietnam to be primarily one of providing material and political support for Hanoi's conduct of the war. Although it agreed with one 1961 SNIE that US bombing of the North would lead Peking to commit its aircraft to the defense of North Vietnam, INR generally held that China was not likely to intervene directly on a large scale unless the US invaded the North. INR always dismissed direct Chinese involvement in the South as a move that was unnecessary, not wanted by Hanoi, and unduly risky.

In the fall of 1964, evidence mounted that China and the North Vietnamese were planning for joint air defense; at the same time the Chinese beefed up their own defenses in the border area and undertook construction of an airfield at Ningming which was ideally suited for operations over North Vietnam. Looking upon these developments as reactions to plentiful evidence of US planning for strikes against the North, INR grew

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increasingly concerned that Peking might enter a future air war over North Vietnam, particularly if important targets in areas close to China were struck. INR felt that Peking would be motivated more by the political considerations of backing Hanoi and warning the US than by hopes of having any appreciable military impact. The rest of the Intelligence Community did consider Chinese intervention to be distinctly possible and a prospect which could not be ignored in a US decision to bomb the North; INR, however, generally took a view that was even more concerned, estimating that the threshold at which the Chinese would possibly react was lower than the rest of the community thought likely. Similarly, INR believed that the Chinese were more likely to introduce ground forces into North Vietnam as a warning against invasion and as a replacement for North Vietnamese forces going South.

These basic differences continued throughout 1965 and into 1966. Although INR remained in a minority, more components in the community came to share its concern as Chinese engineering, logistical, and anti-aircraft units moved into the North in mid-1965, and, later in the year, joint Chinese-North Vietnamese air defense plans were perfected, and Chinese planes began to act more aggressively in pursuit of reconnaissance missions which entered Chinese air space.

By mid-1966, however, when the Cultural Revolution had engulfed China and US bombings in the Hanoi/Haiphong area had failed to provoke INR had thought likely, the Bureau Chinese intervention, as /modified its position and estimated that the

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Chinese were unlikely to intervene deliberately if the war continued to be waged along these current lines. Nonetheless, INR felt it was still true that Peking was committed to keeping North Vietnam both viable and capable of prosecuting the war. Thus a greatly intensified US bombing program would, in INR's view, increase the chances that the conflict would gradually slip into a confrontation between the US and China as Peking sought to fulfill its commitment and the United States sought to bring Hanoi to heel. In the event of US invasion of the North, INR judged that Chinese ground forces were likely to intervene, although they might not actually engage US forces if the invasion appeared to be a limited action. In any event, INR estimated that escalation of this sort by the US probably would result in expanding Chinese influence and control in Hanoi, producing an even more intransigent North Vietnamese position on negotiations and thus limiting the chances of a compromise solution. Short of this situation, INR believed that Peking would try to discourage talks but not to the extent of applying all the pressure at its disposal; once talks were under way, Peking would reconcile itself to them and try to have a hand in any settlement.

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C 77 Thematic Summary: POLITICAL-STABILITY

In its general assessments undertaken during the first part of 1961, INR set forth a series of judgments on the political situation to which it adhered consistently until the dramatic changes of late 1963. Basically, INR considered that Diem's earlier popularity had faded and that the veneer of unity resulting from Diem's actions against dissident power structures in the mid-1950's had worn thin. Disaffection was increasing among groups in South Vietnam, and INR observed that the tensions were heightened by the rising Communist insurgency, while at the same time, in a vicious circle, they added to the difficulties of taking effective action against the Viet Cong. Deficiencies in Diem's governing policies gave further cause for internal discontent and contributed further to the regime's manifest inability to cope with the Communist threat. Moreover, INR concluded, Diem probably would not willingly undertake what the US considered to be reforms necessary to wage the war successfully, for fear that these moves might weaken his own power position. He sought to control American aid and if need be limit it, necessary as it was to the war effort and to the prospect for political stability; to the extent that he succeeded--and that the US continued to rely most heavily on aid to achieve progress--US aid would have the effect of insulating Diem from pressure for reform.

INR also judged that Diem's personal position within the regime was not as strong as it might appear to be on the surface. In fact a major

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coup attempt occurred in November 1960, and subsequently there were numerous reports of coup plotting. In this situation, INR estimated that the primary immediate threat to his leadership was a coup by non-Communist military or mixed military and civilian leaders, who, while content with the government's commitment to the struggle against the Viet Cong, had become antagonized by Diem's personal rule and dissatisfied with his ineffective handling of the Communist insurgency. In INR's view, potentially effective alternative leadership existed. Although it was concerned over the deterioration of the security situation and the progress the Viet Cong were making, INR did not believe that the Communists were strong enough to overthrow Diem themselves or to ride to power in the wake of a non-Communist coup--a contingency that worried the policy-makers and other members of the Intelligence Community more than it did INR.

Over the next two years, INR found increasing justification for these basic assessments as the GVN grew more unstable politically and as Diem used American aid to strengthen his control. INR continued to take a gloomy view of the GVN's ability to wage an effective war effort on either the political or the military front. Nonetheless, in the course of debating a much contested Estimate in February 1963, INR attacked the implication that it would be impossible to "win with Diem." The final version in April, reflecting widespread criticism among US policy officers of the draft's extreme gloom, took a more guarded position; it noted improvements and projected the possibility of containing the

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Viet Cong--but still questioned Diem's capacity for effective action in the long run.

INR expressed particular concern that the pacification program, however valid in concept, would in execution be bent primarily to extend the regime's control over the peasantry, and be applied with excessive emphasis on the military aspects, despite lip-service, especially on the part of Nhu, to goals of socio-economic reform.

After the Buddhist crisis broke in May 1963, INR estimated that this upheaval offered Diem a threat greater than that of the Communist insurgency; if handled ineptly and arbitrarily it was likely to erode the war effort and lead to Diem's downfall at the hands of the military. With the August raid on the Xa Loi Pagoda, INR estimated that there was little chance that stability could be restored and, later, cited military statistics to show the adverse effect of the crisis on the struggle against the Viet Cong. As reports of coup plotting multiplied, INR examined the possible effects on US policy of different kinds of possible coup attempts. Discussing one potential coup group, comprised of Vice President Tho and a military junta, INR suggested that such a regime might better prosecute the war and provide a more popular administration.

In keeping with its past judgments, INR was less gloomy than some American intelligence and policy circles in its view of the three-month period following Diem's overthrow. Reasoning from the attempts of the Minh-Tho Government to consolidate its position and restructure the administrative apparatus, INR held that the government had not had a

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chance to prove itself before it was overthrown by General Khanh at the end of January 1964. During the year of Khanh's regime, INR attributed the government's weakness and instability to Khanh's attempts to perpetuate his own power under the double disadvantage of a support base that was weak and political factionalism that was increasing. At the same time, INR felt, the growing factionalism and vehement political self-expression reflected a genuine non-Communist revolution, emerging after years of repression, as Washington pressed for civilian participation in the government and as groups contested for political power and demanded more representative government. INR saw some hope that the alliance of Buddhists and military, which eventually brought about Khanh's downfall in February 1965, might result in a more effective and popular government; but INR also cautioned that the relationship between these groups was unstable because personal ambition continued to be a primary motive force.

Instability continued under the superficially civilian government of Premier Quat, who turned back the reins to the military in mid-1965, and under General Ky who then succeeded to the Premiership. Ky's government showed a capacity for survival which INR attributed to the lack of an effective challenge and to the fact that the deterioration in the security situation had been halted by the massive influx of US forces. The regime did not have much popular support, and, largely in response to American prodding, the Premier began the promised transition to constitutional government. Fear that the military would retain power, the

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slow timing of elections, and a struggle within the military, combined to produce a new Buddhist crisis which INR gauged to be more serious than any since the one that led to Diem's overthrow. In fact, Ky survived the challenge without compromising. Elections for the Constituent Assembly were held as scheduled in September 1966 with a substantial turnout owing, in INR's view, to the stabilizing impact of the US presence.

During 1967, INR had growing reservations about the military government, believing that a civilian government was preferable even at the risk of instability. In noting the US commitment to a constitutional process controlled by the military, INR argued that at the very least Washington should not support any one candidate, particularly Premier Ky, who appeared to have less support in the military establishment than did his rival, General Thieu. In this judgment INR went against prevailing American opinion, but the South Vietnamese military justified INR by backing Thieu for president on a combined ticket with Ky. Upon Thieu's election with a good turnout of voters in September 1967, INR felt that a modicum of order had been restored in Saigon and that the general security situation had again become the primary determinant of political stability. Nevertheless, political fragmentation and lack of public confidence were weaknesses that had yet to be diminished significantly.

INR's thought that the Communists aimed their Tet offensive of February 1968 in part at intensifying and exploiting these weaknesses to

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achieve a "massive deterioration in the GVN and an erosion of the political basis for a US presence in South Vietnam." The Communists were only partially successful and, as INR noted later, probably suffered politically from their failure to provoke urban uprisings as promised. INR believed that American moves toward de-escalation and negotiation after Tet would have some salutary effects on the regime but, at the same time, thought that they also might threaten to unravel the constitutional system and to disintegrate morale. On balance, INR estimated that the regime would survive the deep strain of entry into negotiations but that the Thieu government would do its utmost to stall the negotiatory process.

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Thematic Summary: The Course of the War

In assessing the South Vietnamese security situation for the new administration in the spring of 1961, INR estimated that during that year the Communist subversive effort would reach its highest level since 1954. If the GVN failed to respond effectively, INR judged, the Viet Cong could supplant the government's authority over a substantial part of southern South Vietnam, even if the Communists were not strong enough to overthrow the central government. INR felt that the deterioration had occurred not only because the Communists were pressing harder, but also because the GVN was making an inept and misdirected response. American officials were not without blame for this situation, since they accepted the GVN's long-standing evaluation of the Communist threat which, in INR's view, overemphasized the chances of overt aggression and understated the danger of internal subversion.

Later in 1961, INR and the rest of the Intelligence Community estimated that Hanoi was likely to increase the pace of the insurgency, which still would be based primarily on local resources within South Vietnam. Although it predicted that the war would be long and difficult, the Intelligence Community generally agreed that areas of VC control could be reduced over the course of time if US aid continued at a high level and the GVN made a strenuous, well-focused and properly implemented effort. In its own independent writing, INR tended to make a more pessimistic estimate of the regime's willingness to make the type of effort required and of its ability to reverse the deteriorating security

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situation. INR continued to think that Diem had not correctly assessed the nature of the threat and that he put far too little emphasis on the political side of the struggle with the VC. By the end of 1961 INR saw no conclusive improvement in the security situation, even though the effort had increased, and noted that the Communist initiative and advantage had yet to be effectively challenged.

As US aid and involvement increased during 1962, INR thought that the best that could be said about their effectiveness was that they had slowed the process of deterioration. Although many officials now declared that the tide had been turned, INR believed that there had been no significant change in the fundamental areas of Communist initiative, organization and morale of cadres, territorial control, and recruitment. Moreover, even though Hanoi seemed determined to rely primarily on local recruitment for the bulk of the Viet Cong forces, INR felt that Hanoi could, with little effort, intensify the war considerably by increasing infiltration, which probably would not be readily detected.

At the end of 1962, INR predicted that the GVN would not be able to halt the deteriorating security trends during the next year, let alone reverse the tide, unless the counterinsurgency effort was accelerated and improved. INR pointed to the negative political and military effects of conventional tactics like large-unit action, especially when accompanied by heavy use of artillery and aircraft--to say nothing of actions like chemical crop destruction. In fact, INR concluded that the military

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could in many ways improve their handling of the war, irrespective of Diem's political deficiencies on which military officials tended to place the blame for all failures. It was in part this view that led INR to disagree with an Estimate before USIB in February 1963 which implied that it would be impossible to "win with Diem." As finally approved in April, the Estimate took a more guarded view: it noted progress and projected the possibility of containing the Viet Cong, but it still questioned Diem's effectiveness, particularly over the long haul.

Even before the Buddhist crisis broke in May, INR had grown more pessimistic about Diem's ability to halt the deterioration, particularly as he sought to circumscribe the US advisory role and failed to stress the vital nonmilitary aspects of the counterinsurgency program. His most striking failure was the strategic hamlet program, which, under the direction of his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, was used largely as a means of exerting control over the populace and which suffered from mismanagement and lack of funds. INR pointed out that these problems were undermining the program even though on paper statistics could make it appear to be progressing well. In fact, INR felt that the military statistics supplied by the GVN were also of dubious validity and could not be used with any confidence as indices of progress.

The Buddhist crisis, especially by the summer of 1963, appeared to be having an adverse effect on the security situation. In examining various contingencies, as a move against Diem appeared increasingly likely,

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INR suggested that a military-civilian coup need not necessarily have a significantly adverse impact and might even lead to a more effective effort, particularly if public confidence in the government increased.

After Diem's downfall, there was general agreement amongst intelligence agencies that the security situation had deteriorated since the summer of 1963, particularly as it became evident to all that Diem's statistics had been misleading. Having already discounted their validity, INR was not as alarmed as others about the rate of decline immediately after the coup in November. In fact, by the end of the year, INR felt that the new regime had stabilized the situation and was taking steps which would lead to better prosecution of the war; its early overthrow by General Khanh at the end of January 1964, gave the Minh-Tho government insufficient time to prove itself.

After mid-1964, the issues of Hanoi's role and of infiltration again took the spotlight when General Khanh asserted that regular North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units were being sent south and when MACV substantially raised its estimate of infiltration for the year. After much general debate and a consultation in Saigon, the Intelligence Community agreed in November that the rate of infiltration in 1964 had increased over that of 1963, though not to the level of 1962, and that native Northerners were being sent for the first time, but as fillers for VC units and not in regular units of their own.

Not until March 1965 did the US have firm evidence that NVA units had arrived in the South. Their arrival, together with a Viet Cong

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buildup and an ineffective showing by ARVN caused MACV to project the loss of northern South Vietnam unless US combat forces entered the war. In the debate over this issue, which went on for several months, INR disputed MACV's contentions that Hanoi had decided to switch to conventional warfare and that the ARVN could not possibly hold the line. Despite its long-standing deprecation of ARVN capabilities, INR estimated that the ARVN was strong enough to maintain the general stalemate. Moreover, INR did not believe that Hanoi intended to change the unconventional nature of the war, even though there might be bigger attacks, particularly against cities and lines of communication. US ground forces and bombing would not be effective in unconventional war of this sort, in INR's view, and could not bring the war to a close very quickly. The US moves would not undermine Hanoi's determination and, in fact, NVA troop strength in the South was likely to be increased to meet the challenge.

After US troops had been in combat for some five months, INR stated that the deterioration had been halted and the Viet Cong robbed of whatever hopes they had held for early victory. Nevertheless, in INR's analysis, the situation remained a stalemate, for even the maintenance of which the US combat presence was now necessary; however, the qualitative changes necessary for a GVN victory had not yet been made. Hanoi remained determined to persist, the Viet Cong forces were stronger than ever, and the Communists continued to hold the initiative.

Over the next two years, INR continued to detect little improvement in the security situation despite the massive US effort. Viet Cong

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initiative and strength remained intact

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Moreover, attacks by small VC units were on the increase, the VC political infrastructure was largely undamaged, and VC inroads in the cities were planned. Successful military action tended not to be followed up by extension of GVN territorial-administrative control. Moreover, the ARVN remained an ineffective weapon even in the pacification role which it was increasingly called upon to play; it still operated in a conventional mold with little understanding of or support for the goals of the pacification program which was receiving so much emphasis by the US after the end of 1966; further, INR judged that the speed with which the program was implemented required a rate of conversion to a new type of effort that went far beyond the ARVN's capability to meet.

In INR's view, the United States had demonstrated by 1967 that the Viet Cong could not win but not that they could be defeated. In this stand, it differed fundamentally with Saigon's opinion and with public optimism in Washington. The Tet offensive tended to vindicate INR's position, although INR certainly had not anticipated the scope or nature of that drive. Analyzing Hanoi's motives, INR suggested that the effort was intended to make the war intolerable for the urban residents, thereby undermining the political base of the GVN and creating the impression that the Communists had to be accommodated. This was no last gasp, for the Viet Cong still appeared prepared for protracted warfare; and in fact, aside from their political gains, the Communists had made substantial

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inroads against the pacification program when GVN forces were withdrawn into the cities for a while in order to prevent a recurrence of the Tet offensive.

After early April, when the confrontation began to move slowly into political channels, INR estimated that Hanoi would keep military operations at a moderately high level to support its negotiating position, impeded only by fear of provoking US retaliation and a breakdown in Paris. Unlike many military officials who foresaw a number of offensives on the Tet model, INR felt that there would be sustained widespread attacks on urban and military targets but that they would be less intense than the February offensive. To support this effort, INR thought there still would be a fairly high rate of infiltration.

By the summer of 1968, INR detected evidence of growing Communist problems with the war effort. And, in October, INR thought Hanoi wished to end the phase of intense military action. Nevertheless, Communist capabilities to sustain a relatively high level of violence appeared undiminished and, in November, INR cautioned against expecting that military de-escalation might proceed rapidly. In INR's analysis, the Viet Cong remained strong, disciplined, and determined to keep up the pressure.

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Thematic Summary: PROSPECTS FOR BEGINNING TALKS AND NEGOTIATING A SETTLEMENT*

How an end to the conflict might be negotiated was rarely considered by INR in the early days of the new administration in 1961 since neither side appeared interested in negotiating within the foreseeable future. / During 1962-63, calls by the Communists for consultations under the auspices of the 1954 Geneva Conference to condemn US/GVN actions were interpreted at face value--as a Communist effort to undercut American support for and assistance to the GVN. There was a general assumption, however, that the Communists might eventually seek a negotiated settlement, not only as an interim stop to takeover.

In the turmoil of 1963, INR thought that Hanoi might encourage some contacts with GVN officials, particularly involving Viet Cong officials, but would do so largely for their disruptive impact, without making much effort actually to reach agreement in the extremely fluid situation. At this juncture and subsequently, INR judged that Hanoi eventually might seek a political solution on the basis of some form of coalition government and neutralization without effective controls; INR felt that Hanoi might make this move when it felt either that the Communist position

* The reader is reminded that this review does not include all of INR's studies, because some were based on sensitive information which has not yet been reclassified. It must also be pointed out again that INR was hampered in its analysis of Communist positions by the fact that on grounds of sensitivity some important information was withheld or only belatedly made available.

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was too weak for anything more to be gained from military pressure or that the position was strong enough to insure a Communist takeover through political channels.

In 1964, as the question of retaliation against North Vietnam itself was debated and probable Communist reactions weighed, INR at first agreed with the general view of the Intelligence Community that Hanoi probably would seek to involve the United States in negotiations --but without making significant concessions--in an effort to forestall or halt attacks against the North. In the fall of 1964, INR shifted its position on the question. It still believed that Hanoi might make moves toward negotiating while escalation was being debated, but thought that Hanoi would not do so to halt a sustained bombing program--largely because of its concern to avoid appearing weak and compliant with American demands. In late 1964 and early 1965, when the Communists hinted at flexibility and interest in talks, INR felt that the evidence was insufficient to judge whether they simply were trying to ward off escalation, or whether they had a more serious interest in negotiations. The conclusion implicit in INR's discussion was that the matter merited exploring further in careful, private contacts.

After the bombing program began and President Johnson called for "unconditional" negotiations, North Vietnam issued its Four Points in mid-April 1965. In INR's view the Four Points themselves were not new, but the way in which they were presented meant that for the first time

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Hanoi had officially allowed that the conflict could end in a political settlement and provided terms for it. Subsequently, INR closely analyzed public and private statements by the Vietnamese Communists in an effort to identify shifts in their attitude. Hanoi seemed to be leaving the door open for eventual compromise, cautiously indicating interest in probing the American position, but ever wary of appearing weak or prepared to compromise while the bombing continued. INR believed that the Communists would in turn raise their military effort before indicating renewed interest in negotiations, in order not to appear to deal from weakness.

INR believed that this sensitivity would prevent Hanoi from responding positively to pauses in the bombing which were accompanied by implied or explicit demands for reciprocal de-escalation in the South. Even if a pause were handled with the utmost discretion to preserve Communist "face," INR felt that there was little chance for a rapid pay-off. For Hanoi demanded recognition of its Four Points in some form, as well as a permanent halt to bombing as preconditions to talks and, less precisely, some role for the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front). Even after US troops were despatched, Hanoi seemed confident that its position in the South would grow stronger and enable the Communist side to prevail.

Although INR had thought the Communists eventually might make some positive response to an announced pause, its analysis of Communist

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actions during the pause in December 1965-January 1966 suggested that the North Vietnamese probably were not interested in negotiations nor even in entangling Washington in protracted contacts in exchange for an extended pause. Nevertheless, INR saw sufficient ambiguity and uncertainty on the Communist side to recommend that the US continue exploration before it resumed the bombing.

After the bombing was resumed in late January 1966, Hanoi's stand on negotiations remained virtually on dead center until a year later. In INR's judgment, there was no chance for talks on US terms --but, although Hanoi's position was tough, the North Vietnamese leaders kept the position sufficiently ambiguous to leave them an approach to compromise when they saw fit. In the meantime, it was clear that Hanoi was relying primarily on wearing down the non-Communist side through its protracted war tactics.

In January 1967, public North Vietnamese statements indicated movement when they began making an unconditional bombing halt the sole condition for talks. Hanoi's maximum bargaining position, in INR's view, was to hold out hope for contacts in return for a bombing halt and to commit the United States to discussing the future of the GVN, with the NLF involved, before these contacts developed into negotiations.

During 1967, Hanoi gave no more ground, although INR felt that it might be interested in testing the non-Communist side through

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contacts. Basically, however, the North Vietnamese remained highly suspicious, distrustful of US actions, and concerned over their ability to gain much through negotiations. These negative attitudes, combined with Hanoi's evident confidence in its position in the South, left slim chance for productive negotiations.

INR noted, however, that according to Hanoi's doctrine, a move in the direction of talks might follow some spectacular military action in the South. In late December, a month before the Tet Offensive began--and perhaps in anticipation of it--North Vietnam's Foreign Minister again shifted the formula to promise that talks "would"--instead of could, as in January--begin after the US unconditionally halted bombing. INR suggested that this change meant that Hanoi was feeling the effects of the bombing and also that the North Vietnamese might be concerned about the progress being made in the South toward political stability. There was little question, INR thought, that talks would in fact begin if the US stopped the bombing, but INR doubted that Hanoi was willing to concede that it would take "no advantage" of a bombing halt, as requested by President Johnson. However, tacit understanding on this score seemed possible. Even if talks were undertaken, INR felt that they would be very protracted and accompanied by continued Communist military pressure. This judgment was reiterated by INR after Hanoi agreed to limited contacts following the partial halt in American bombing announced on March 31, 1968.

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As soon as the holding of talks was agreed upon, INR also noted that the long-held intransigent position of the GVN comprised an additional stumbling block to a negotiated settlement. In INR's view, Saigon would have to accept bilateral talks, but would do its utmost to keep the future of South Vietnam off the agenda and generally to prevent widening the talks. Saigon seemed still to be "almost totally unprepared" for a political settlement of the conflict.

Throughout the summer and early fall, INR saw in the contradictory signals from Hanoi indications that the North Vietnamese leaders were reviewing and debating future strategy. INR believed that Hanoi was experiencing adverse pressures, which were leading it to seek some kind of agreement by the end of 1968 or possibly not later than mid-1969. If a satisfactory one could not be reached, INR felt Hanoi would continue to fight but probably with less intensity.

By October, it appeared to INR that Hanoi was ready to concede a little on the issue of reciprocity in return for a full bombing halt; it still, however, sought US-NLF talks and opposed including the GVN in negotiations. In fact, by the end of October, Hanoi tacitly had conceded something on both the military and the diplomatic fronts, and President Johnson announced that the bombing halt would be complete and that the talks would be expanded to include the GVN and the NLF. When Saigon refused to accept the formula, INR speculated that the GVN would procrastinate for some time and, even if it joined the talks, would seek to block discussion of substantive issues. At the same time, INR cautioned against expecting rapid progress from Hanoi. Even though the

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North Vietnamese were in the long run to yield on more extreme demands, they would not move quickly in this direction; and, far from seeking an early ceasefire as some predicted, Hanoi would avoid doing so until a final settlement was negotiated.

There are several implicit and explicit themes which seem to stand out in a review of INR's analysis. First, the North Vietnamese eventually would negotiate but, being confident that their position in the South would grow stronger over the long run, they were in no hurry to undertake talks, let alone quickly seek a compromise agreement. Bombing or no bombing, they were certainly under no pressure such as to force them off their steadfast determination to avoid the appearance of yielding to coercion. INR also believed that North Vietnam was deeply suspicious of US motives and distrustful of US actions.

Nonetheless, while it cautioned against high expectations, INR was not as pessimistic as some interpreters, but at most times discerned elements of flexibility in Hanoi's behavior. Some pressures were apparently in the later years being felt by the North Vietnamese. INR often suggested that private explorations might be fruitful, both to gain insight into what Hanoi might be willing to concede without having to reveal it in public, and to allay Hanoi's suspicion that the US was basically not prepared to modify its maximum position.

In the last analysis, Hanoi seemed to agree fully with Mao Tse-tung's adage that one could not gain at the negotiating table what could not be gained on the battlefield. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese Communists

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apparently came to believe that time was not irrevocably on their side and that opportunities to gain something through negotiations had to be seized. INR thought that Hanoi's negotiating strategy was to divide an issue into the smallest pieces possible and then make only limited tactical retreats from which they would then establish a new maximum position. In short, the political track would be long and full of pitfalls but an agreement, not wholly at odds with US interests, possibly could be reached eventually, assuming that the allies were able to stay the course militarily.

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I. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

General Assessment. In appraising the various regimes in Saigon, in analyzing the crises that confronted them, and in estimating their prospects for survival, the Bureau attained a high and consistent record of accuracy. It emphasized the various governments' administrative weaknesses, lack of popular support, and inability to sustain an adequate war effort. When viewed retrospectively and in terms of their operational utility, these evaluations were realistic appraisals that were made with adequate emphasis. These judgments often ran counter to opinions that prevailed among policy makers (and sometimes parts of the Intelligence Community) in Washington and Saigon. Finally, the Bureau discerned and clearly expounded the underlying factors that brought about this dim prospect, so that it was able comprehensively to define for the policy makers the particular elements in the situation.

Correspondingly, to the degree that the Bureau did go astray, it generally erred in overdoing its concentration on the weaknesses displayed by the Saigon governments, as it did in estimating the capacity of the Buddhists to harm the regime in 1966, and in its concern over the dangers the Thieu administration might encounter upon entering negotiations in 1968. However, it also gave the South its due, and at times took a minority position in so doing, as when it argued that the country could survive coup attempts without falling to the Communists, that the political turmoil in the years after Diem reflected a strong democratic sentiment,

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and that there were important limits to Communist political appeal, particularly in the cities.

In general the Bureau was most sensitive to the risks of going along with an established order which had seriously dangerous drawbacks--whether it was the repressive Diem or an unpopular "do nothing" military regime--whereas policy officials were more sensitive to the risks inherent in change, with its potential for producing instability or causing loss of expert personnel. Such sensitivity extended even to the risks of pressing heavily upon Saigon regimes to reform. On this point of pressure, in particular, the implication of INR's position was that policy makers could exert much more leverage than they were willing to employ in impelling the Saigon government toward high performance in areas of action critical to the war effort.

Diem as a Leader. The Bureau's highly critical estimate of Diem's performance was proven valid in almost all respects. From the outset, INR's evaluations perceptively noted the risks and problems he presented to the attainment of both his own purposes and US objectives. It rightly judged his reputation for administrative efficiency to be overestimated; it repeatedly pointed up specific shortcomings in his conduct of the war; and it stressed the harmful consequences of his failure to delegate authority. In particular, it constantly emphasized that he was not carrying through on socio-economic reforms, and consequently was failing to gain the support and legitimacy he needed to counter the enemy's growing unconventional war effort. The Bureau presented the policy implications of this situation

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most graphically when, in discussing the pacification program of reform and security in the countryside, it observed that the net intent and effect of the Diem programs appeared to be to extend the regime's control over the peasants rather than to improve their condition.

On the other hand, the problems typified by the catch phrase "we can't win with Diem" were complicated by the tendency of US military elements to lay blame for lack of progress in the war wholly on Diem and other political factors, obscuring strictly military considerations. Hence, in early 1963, INR argued against an NIE section implying that in the long term the Communists could not be defeated under Diem, even though this conclusion was implicit in much of its own pessimistic analyses.

The Bureau accurately observed that the US policy of support for Diem and the war effort played a major role in sustaining Diem on his deleterious course, because it shielded him both from the consequences of his failures and from US efforts to foster reforms. A problem of this nature classically illustrates how difficult it is to distinguish sharply between policy recommendations and intelligence appraisals--in this instance because the US policy itself was a major input in an intelligence appraisal of the situation and because in executing its assignment to explore possible future developments, intelligence had to consider the alternative that the US might change its policy to make help effectively contingent on reform. In any event, the Bureau's argument that the US could exercise more control was in all likelihood correct. Just how, in concrete terms, Diem could

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be induced to operate more effectively and what could be done should he not prove responsive were questions never adequately developed by the Bureau. In all fairness, such studies would have run even more deeply into the policy field and would first have required a confrontation of sorts with the policy bureau over the premises of the approach itself. Whatever the reason, there was little in the Bureau's analysis, even inferentially, to indicate how one could cope with the complexities and hazards of this approach.

In the one area where it did make projections of this sort, the Bureau held that Diem was not irreplaceable and, on occasion, noted that Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho could be a valid alternative. Later, when the coup took place, it felt that a coalition of Minh and Tho could provide leadership adequate to give the new regime the needed stability and legitimacy. In these estimates and more generally, the Bureau proved too optimistic about there being a pool of competent leadership available in South Vietnam, as also about the capacity of South Vietnam to reconstitute a government that would provide orderly access to power and constitutional legitimatizing of a regime. In sum, the Bureau's view that Diem was replaceable may well have been right; certainly, its observation of his many faults was accurate; and its prognoses of what would happen if he continued in power seem prescient. But the difficulties of effecting change were profound and in fact derived from the very weaknesses in the body politic that INR was continually reporting; these difficulties deserved more thorough consideration in this context.

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The Coup Against Diem and Its Aftermath. The Bureau was particularly acute in judging the likelihood and prospects of a coup against Diem during 1961-63, especially in light of actual attempts made from 1960 on. Along with other components in the Intelligence Community, it found the causes in failure to handle the Viet Cong threat, discontent over methods used, and reaction to a repressive and non-reformist regime. The Bureau made its own unique contribution in arguing from the outset that the coup would be non-Communist and would in all likelihood prevail if there were no outside interference. Furthermore, the Bureau correctly held that the coup would come from within the government itself and would be led by elements committed to counter-insurgency, and that the new leadership would remain committed to prosecuting the war. The Bureau also added, whereas the US might not know the nature of the coup in advance, it could intervene to prevent a power struggle among the successors and so help keep the war momentum going in its aftermath.

This appraisal was most accurate in its repeated assurances that the Communists would not be able to exploit the coup for political advantage either to take over from the immediate successors to power or even to gain much political ground. Others in the Intelligence Community felt that the South Vietnamese Army might not be able to keep the situation in hand and that the Communists would consequently have a quite good prospect of exploiting the chaotic situation that would ensue. By the Spring of 1963, however, the other agencies came around to the INR view, though they still noted some

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