prospect that the Viet Cong would gain ground in the course of a coup. Earlier, to be sure, INR had gone along with estimates that rated Communist chances for exploitation much higher than the Bureau had done in its own writings. INR could clarify differences, but also sharpen them by stating its position separately in a footnote to the NIE, or it could by compromising induce others to compromise and so edge them toward its view. The path of compromise proved here, and at other times, to be an effective way of bringing about changes in the general consensus. Its drawbacks are that it muffles actual differences at the time when they may be most relevant to operations, and that it relies on a process of change through adjustments which is bound to be slow in bringing about extensive alternation in the Community's basic position.

The Bureau's appraisals were particularly timely during the Buddhist crisis of 1963, in judging the intensity of the Buddhists' feelings, the legitimacy of their claims, and most particularly the unreliability of the Army as an instrument for suppressing the surprisingly activist Buddhists. They may have been less accurate in estimating that any of several possible alternatives to Diem might serve US interests, that success of Tho and the junta offered a good prospect of avoiding a military power struggle, and that in that case the counter-insurgency effort would not suffer a major setback. Thus certain judgments of INR, particularly on the capacity of the US to control factional conflict after a coup, or on the ability of the new leadership to work as a coalition and to prevent a polarization of domestic politics, were to prove ill-founded. In

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particular, its expectations that the civil-military combination behind the coup would act with self-restraint reflected a serious underestimation of the strength and will of the military to assume and maintain power in Saigon.

The Minh and Khanh Regimes. The major misjudgment by the Bureau during this period stemmed from its belief that Minh, largely by dint of his popularity, could unite disparate political elements into an effective regime. Recognizing in 1962 his military talents and potential appeal as a political leader, INR had observed that Diem's failure to give Minh a position commensurate with his importance could lead him to join in coup efforts. Once Minh was in power, the Bureau tended to judge his regime's performance with optimism. There were reasons for giving him the benefit of the doubt, since revelations regarding the difficult state of affairs at the end of 1963 reflected honest reporting by the new regime about a general situation that had developed under Diem--a situation, furthermore, concerning which Diem's regime had given false or inaccurate reports that made matters seem better than was actually the case. The Bureau had already judged the situation to be worse than Diem had reported, so it was not as shaken as others were by this year-end news. Also, it argued that the regime was taking the right steps to re-establish effective government and regain momentum in the war effort. In these respects it differed markedly from the judgment expressed in January 1964 by Mr. McCone following his trip to South Vietnam; he took a most gloomy view of the government's stability and capacity to maintain the war effort.

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It is difficult to decide which view was more accurate. The INR approach certainly rested on a deeper historical perspective and a more comprehensive view of the prevailing situation, in light of its analysis of the trends in South Vietnam during Diem's last year. Perhaps, as INR itself believed, Minh was not in power long enough for INR's estimate of his potential to be given fair trial under reasonable circumstances. While the success of Khanh's coup that followed so soon reflected poorly on Minh's capacity for effective and unifying leadership, knowledge of American dismay over the performance of the Minh-Tho government was also a critical factor. (The extreme pessimism expressed by the DCI and Mr. McNamara thus may have had a self-fulfilling force by revealing deep uncertainty about Minh's regime.) The same may be said for Minh's inability to regain power during Khanh's era of rule: for, although his failure to capitalize on Khanh's lack of political support and an adequate power base testified to Minh's ineffectiveness, he also was hindered by the evident American preference for Premier Khanh.

As to Khanh, the converse could be said of INR's judgment: it had earlier commented on his ineffectiveness as a military commander and now was quite accurate in depicting his inadequacy as a political leader. The judgment that he could not constructively reshape a dynamic and revolutionary situation proved all too sound; INR was correct in its military judgment as well, and soon observed that the counter-insurgency situation was worsening as Khanh failed to revive momentum in the war. On the other hand, for most of 1964 the Bureau underestimated the tenacity with which he would cling to power.

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The New Political Atmosphere in the South. Since the Bureau felt that Minh was a more popular leader than Khanh, it traced much of the political instability of mid-1964 to Khanh's effort to discredit Minh. In effect it judged correctly when it argued that Minh's presence in the regime was essential to Khanh's own political survival; but it erred in concluding that Khanh would recognize this fact and endure his colleague's presence. INR was therefore surprised by Khanh's effort to exile Minh, and his success in doing so. However, INR had correctly predicted that under these circumstances the Khanh regime would become increasingly unstable; in fact, it did not last more than another half year.

On a broader political canvas, the Bureau performed a notable service in setting the political turmoil of this period in a useful historical and ideological setting. It noted that, after decades of suppression, a genuinely revolutionary political atmosphere -- and one that was truly non-Communist -- followed the coup against Diem. It felt that there were important constructive and positive aspects inherent in this seemingly chaotic situation--in particular, that the disorder had to be measured against growth of a sense of national identity and greater popular involvement in the political process. These trends, it observed, contained the seeds of the genuine political development so necessary for effective prosecution of the war. It was in this setting that INR found Khanh particularly wanting. If it overestimated Minh, who was out of power, it at least provided a sobering balance to officers in the US government who saw in Khanh's appearance of incisiveness and alleged commitment to action the makings of an effective national leader. In the Bureau's judgment,

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Khanh could neither broaden his regime effectively nor deal with the upsurge in strong popular sentiment; instead, his policies generated greater tension and added to the factionalism that was growing throughout the country.

However, INR was also aware of how fragmented these interest groups were. The Bureau repreatedly observed that the great flaw in their insistence on participation in government was their disposition to use power essentially to foster or protect their own interests, and to give little thought to the needs of the nation as a whole. Still, it saw in this resurgence of popular interest, however disruptive it might be at first, a long, if early, step toward the political integration of this beleaguered state. In this context, it accurately perceived both the potential and the danger in the grouping of military and Buddhists that finally overthrew Khanh in February 1965. It signalled the possibility that a coalition of civilians and military might make a more cooperative approach to government; but it also warned that the leaders in both camps were still all too prone to sacrifice political stability for personal power. In short, the Bureau took the position that a genuine non-Communist social and political revolution was emerging and was now extending itself beyond the environs of Saigon, with great constructive potential--but of a sort not conducive to orderly or responsible government in the short run.

The implications for policy were that the US would derive maximum benefit from keeping both tracks open, with contacts to both the established and the upcoming forces, thus giving the country its best chance for political

rejuvenation and, ultimately, an effective war effort. INR was to take a critical position, once the military leadership had firmly established its control in Saigon, toward the policy the US then adopted that, in its view, placed too much emphasis on political stability. The Bureau held that, formal constitutional progress notwithstanding, this policy did not devote sufficient effort to cultivating true popular involvement and participation in the central processes of government, even at the risk of generating a degree of instability.

Appraisal of the Buddhists. For the most part, the Bureau provided accurate and timely analyses of the political role played by the Buddhists in the pivotal years 1963-1966. It correctly appraised their revolutionary temper as well as their capacity to generate great crises. However, while it recognized that their political power did have limits, the Bureau at times overestimated their capacity for sustained political action. Generally the Bureau proved most accurate in the 1963 crisis, and somewhat less so during 1966-67, at least in estimating the consequences of the uprisings.

In the spring of 1963, INR correctly forecast the crucial role of the Buddhists in the burgeoning crisis with Diem; it observed that he failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation and arbitrarily rejected the quest of the Buddhists for legal equality, which was based on a position of strength in both the urban and rural sectors of the society. Well ahead of others, the Bureau judged that the Buddhist crisis presented a greater threat to Diem than the Communists did. INR also differed markedly from

Embassy Saigon that summer when it described the Buddhists' negative response as warranted, and as justifiable to the Vietnamese, in view of the regime's repressive measures.

Similarly, in 1964, the Bureau thought that Khanh's removal of the Huong Cabinet afforded the Buddhists an exploitable issue which they could use to advantage. As noted above, this judgment was sustained when the coalition of military and Buddhists ousted Khanh. However, after the military assumed power and prospects for a coalition ended, INR returned in 1966 to the theme that the Buddhists were awaiting their opportunity to challenge the regime. INR felt that the Buddhists were centrally concerned with the timing of promised elections by the Ky regime, and that those in the I Corps area used the ouster of General Thi, the commanding officer there, as the occasion to try to compel the regime to restore civil government immediately. The Bureau rightly noted that this crisis was a showdown, presenting the most serious challenge to government since the fall of Diem. In all likelihood, the Buddhist challenge ultimately derived from fear, not of the military reneging on its timing, but of the regime carefully working out a program that would in the end leave the military still in power.

The Bureau respected the Buddhists' ability to generate a crisis, but it made a more modest estimate of their political strength, judging that they could not dominate an election as an organized political force. It did, however, overestimate Buddhist strength when, after the Ky government, backed by the US, quelled the disturbances, it judged that the situation remained explosive and that Ky was premature in judging these challengers to be beaten. Actually they were, and the Buddhists did not again mount a serious challenge.

In another example of sound judgment during the 1966-67 period, INR pointed out that the Buddhist challenge had the constructive aspects of providing for political expression while reducing Communist chances to exploit dissatisfaction. This interpretation signified, at least by inference, that the Communists enjoyed a low degree of appeal among Buddhist and other groups, and that the Viet Cong had limited capacity to disrupt democratic processes, even those weakly rooted and under grave pressure. INR also, after noting in 1966 that the Buddhists could boycott an election, in the following year estimated correctly that a campaign of this sort against the choice of a Constitutional Assembly would meet with little response. But this judgment was marred when INR again overestimated Buddhist strength (or misjudged its intent) in adding that if Buddhists and Communists combined to exert pressure they could make it very easy for Vietnamese voters to abstain. In fact, the Vietnamese voted in what were then record numbers.

The Maintenance of De Facto Military Rule. The advent of stable military rule during the premiership of Ky again led INR to question the assumption that continuity of rule under these conditions was preferable to change toward a truly responsible civilian regime. On its side of the argument, the Bureau could point to the regime's lack of popular support, and its inability to change fundamental political conditions in the country, which thus far had not been conducive to a successful war effort. It further made the point, often overlooked elsewhere because the new political stability in Saigon compared so favorably with the turmoil of previous years, that this regime was much like its predecessors--essentially

a "do-nothing" government in terms of the activities necessary for effective administration, reducing corruption, mobilizing resources to conduct the war, and gathering popular support. It thus favored efforts to press Saigon, already committed to a constitutional regime, to make this government genuinely civilian, with popular support; it considered this change preferable to continuation of a de facto military regime in constitutional clothing, even if some instability should follow. Arguing in 1967 that the US would fare better if it did not favor order at the expense of active political self-expression, the Bureau maintained that the political situation would eventually gain strength from a freer play of political forces and a more genuine popular participation. INR estimated that by committing itself to this process, the US would prevent a recurrence of the type of military coups that had occurred in recent years.

It is of course impossible to judge in any way definitively whether this position was correct, because the alternative was not attempted. When, to be sure, it is a matter of evaluating a particular military regime, centering on the personalities of the specific military leaders in power as in the competition between Ky and Thieu discussed below, it is possible to approach a conclusion. But the general principle remains difficult to judge, even granting the Bureau's major assumptions. It was not simply misdirected policy that led the US government generally to go along with a group in power even if, as with Ky, it had not desired this type of outcome but had, in fact, unsuccessfully pressed for a reversion to civilian

rule in 1964-65. The problem reaches down to the most fundamental of issues--how the US, even if it desired to do so, could achieve a major shift in the domestic political balance of an allied state. The question of viable alternatives in political leadership was never satisfactorily answered; and the Bureau itself was on record to the effect that the political groups in the country were heavily self-centered in their interests, lacked commitment to a higher national purpose, and were split into conflicting factions within themselves. More realistic and sympathetic than others in its appraisal of the Buddhists, the Bureau nonetheless noted this group's inability to organize itself as a coherent political force or to stand for a constructive policy. Thus the policy burden of its analyses would have been to put upon the US the double task of getting military elements, who were fully aware of political power, to transfer office to civilians at the same time that it fostered among these civilians new qualities of political cohesion and administrative competence. Still there was much to be said for INR's position, the strongest argument being that the continuation and legitimizing of the existing arrangement would at best only maintain the stalemate; the country would under this arrangement be unable to realize the political potential it had shown in recent years so as to construct a dynamic machine that could cope with the Communists.

INR was on much stronger grounds regarding the immediate issues involved in the transition to a constitutional regime, especially in its estimates of the damage Ky could do even to these more modest prospects

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of sustaining a stalemate. After the constitution was promulgated and the issue centered on the choice of a president, the Bureau pointed up Ky's illegal preparations to subvert the elections by misusing the police apparatus and engaging in other activities reminiscent of Diem's era. It noted that a continuation of these practices would jeopardize the basic US objective of maintaining the credibility of the elections and so give the Communists a decisive political victory. For this reason, but especially because it did not believe that Ky had the presidential nomination in the bag, the Bureau argued during the first half of 1967 that the US should not throw him its support. In contrast to opinions widely held in the US government, INR estimated as early as December 1966 that Thieu had a stronger position among the military and would probably win a free election. The Bureau therefore recommended that the US should not support any one candidate. This aspect of its argument was validated in mid-1967 when Thieu emerged at the head of a joint ticket with Ky.

The Meaning of Voting Patterns. A series of elections took place during the 1960's, including Diem's victory in 1961, the provincial election of 1965, the choice of a constituent assembly in 1966, and the election of a president in 1967. In general, INR noted that the elections were mechanically honest, and that the returns were not altered by manipulation of voters. However, it attributed the regime's triumph in 1961 and 1966 to the suppression or default of an opposition. In 1966, for example, the lack of an effective challenge as well as the massive US presence that insulated the regime from the consequences of its weaknesses, seemed to the Bureau to

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explain the surprisingly large turnout. Yet in fact the Bureau had said that the central issue in the 1966 vote would be its size rather than which assembly candidate would win, and INR was admittedly surprised by the turnout of 80.8 percent, topping the level of 73 percent in the relatively tranquil provincial elections the year before. The turnout of 81 percent the following year (Thieu winning with 35 percent) indicated a fairly consistent high voter turnout.

This pattern certainly deserved, and still deserves, closer scrutiny than it has received thus far, not only by the Bureau but by the Intelligence Community as a whole. Does it, for example, validate the INR view that the populace is getting politically more sophisticated and anxious to participate in a process that would represent and reflect its views? It seems inadequate to attribute a large turnout and victory for the "ins" solely to the presence of US forces and the lack of a strong alternative. Issues of passivism as against activism, patterns of policy preferences, traits in voting and other political behavior, might be extrapolated from a careful study of election campaigns and results. A most important issue, of course, is the degree to which the peasantry is committed to a non-Communist regime, even if not to the one that conducts and wins the particular election in question. Communist efforts to have the populace boycott elections never were successful and, as the Bureau repeatedly observed, the Viet Cong felt itself limited in its capacity to use terror as a deterrent to voting for fear that thwarting popular desires by this method would cost it dearly in political appeal.

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Finally, electoral patterns could be compared, admittedly in a limited way, to estimates of security control over the countryside. Thus, at the start of 1966, MACV noted that 52 percent of the rural area was pacified, in contrast to the more bearish 30 and 25 percent estimates of Thieu and Ky. Is there any consistent national correlation between these totals and voter turnout? Do useful regional or provincial patterns of correlation occur? Given the possibility that a peasant might be free to vote even though some Communist influence--such as infrastructure, political support--may exist in a region, can these aspects of the complex political situation in the country be discerned from a comparison of figures of voters (and voter preference) and pacification?

Stability of the Thieu Regime and Negotiations. During the negotiations in Paris between Washington and Hanoi during 1968, INR consistently observed that Saigon desired to keep the discussions bilateral, related only to matters directly of concern to the two parties and away from consideration of the political future of the South. The Bureau judged that Saigon, having accepted talks in this context, would do its utmost to prevent discussions from extending to its vital political interest, and would stress the need for sustained military pressure. This appraisal proved generally correct, though the Bureau overstated Saigon's will (or capacity) to resist the extension of negotiations to embrace the political future of the South. Similarly, Saigon did not pose as great a problem as the Bureau had anticipated with respect to scaling down the war effort, as when the US completely ceased bombing the North.

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The Bureau was, however, closer to the mark than most policy makers were in its doubts that Thieu had accepted the "our side, your side" formula in the summer and fall of 1968. Its ability to write on this subject was severely circumscribed because much information was inaccessible to all REA personnel save the Office Director, and even to him on a limited basis. Nevertheless, in oral conversations with EA in the fall of 1968, the Director judged that Saigon was not on board regarding this formula, because it had not, according to the information at hand, accepted what in its mind was the equality of treatment these arrangements afforded the NLF. In any event, the Bureau had long been on record as estimating that, whatever the arrangements, Thieu would engage in delaying tactics on political negotiations and do his utmost to minimize the role played by the NLF, for fear that to do otherwise would undermine his political position at home and open the way for the NLF to gain too great a role in the future of South Vietnamese affairs. As events developed in October 1968, this issue turned out to be of major importance and, as INR had predicted, led to a considerable delay in the opening of formal negotiations to end the war.

However, on the more general subject of the capacity of the Thieu regime to maintain its stability under the pressure of conducting negotiations with a diminished US war effort, the Bureau was somewhat too pessimistic. It felt that this situation might unravel the constitutional system, unleash irresponsible political activity, cause a general decay in morale, and increase the possibility of a military takeover, even against Thieu. The Bureau did conclude that these dire conditions would not come to pass if the

talks were widened, estimating that the regime would accept a widening of the talks without great damage to its own position or to the general political stability of the South. However, it added that this relatively favorable estimate had only a slightly better than even chance of eventuating, a judgment that proved excessively pessimistic. Apart from this problem, the Bureau did not devote much attention to other possible political repercussions from negotiations, apart from noting that the new American position could temporarily bring about a reduction in factionalism within the GVN, spurred by the realization that the US commitment to the ground war could no longer be taken for granted. Yet INR did not estimate whether, or how, this improved mutual cooperation among Saigon leaders could be sustained, or whether Thieu would prove able and willing, as he later did, to pave the way for a reasonable GVN negotiating position regarding a political settlement.

Viet Cong Political Strengths and Weaknesses. This has been and still remains a great gap in the political analysis of the situation in the South. INR never undertook a systematic and thorough analysis of the Viet Cong's organization or its political strengths and weaknesses, nor did it establish benchmarks for measuring the degree of its political attraction, the causes of its appeal, and changes that occurred in these factors over the years. Pressure of time and shortage of personnel were important considerations that do much to explain this gap; another important factor has been the difficulty of garnering a sufficient body of reliable

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information regarding the Viet Cong. Still, as in the case of learning more about infiltration, had this become a high priority matter, the Bureau might have insisted successfully that more US government resources be devoted to reducing this gap in our information. There now have been various RAND studies on organization, ideology, recruitment of cadre, and Viet Cong morale, but these studies were slow to come out and generally reflected the situation as it stood a few years earlier. Systematic and continuing coverage by the Intelligence Community on as current a basis as possible was and remains a most rewarding possible use of the Community's resources. The Bureau did perform a useful service in challenging some RAND reports in 1966 that deduced a major problem in enemy morale from interviews with prisoners and defectors. INR repeatedly pointed out that the level of defectors was too low to justify concluding a morale crisis existed in the core of the enemy's key personnel, and that captured documents that stressed the problem of morale also indicated that the enemy was endeavoring to cope with this problem. The Bureau also noted frequently and consistently that enemy morale and discipline in combat remained high and gave no indication of significant deterioration. This analysis proved to be one of the major factors affecting our next topic, INR's appraisal of the war in the South.

II. THE COURSE OF THE WAR IN THE SOUTH

General Assessment. The Bureau provided reports that for the most part accurately depicted the basic military situation in the South throughout the decade. It judged that the two sides were of relatively equal strength, the enemy had capacity to persist, the allies were failing to break the stalemate, and ARVN was unable to carry its proportionate share of the burden. It repeatedly expressed these judgments in its intelligence reports to senior officers in the Department. These appraisals had a salutary effect in balancing reports, especially from the field, that presented too optimistic a picture either of the combat operations or of the pacification program as it went through its several metamorphoses. The Bureau's analysis did fall short of the mark on occasion, particularly in underestimating the extent to which the enemy would resort to main-force warfare, involve the NVA in the South, and undertake major novel operations, particularly the Tet offensive of 1968. However, for the most part the Bureau's record on the major trends of the war was very good, and contributed heavily to the realistic picture of the military situation in South Vietnam that prevailed in the Department.

Among its achievements was to stress from the outset the unconventional nature of the war, and particularly the importance of internal subversion, in contrast to the GVN's initial and repeated stress on the threat of overt aggression, which was accepted at first by many in the US government. Of

high significance was the Bureau's estimative analysis of the atypical kind of military effort needed to turn the course of the war, combined with its criticism of the manner in which policies of this kind were implemented--from the strategic hamlet program of 1962-63 to the rapid pacification program of 1967-68. It focused on the Saigon regime's inadequate grasp of the concept of pacification, its limited commitment to implement the concept, and its inability to move ARVN out of the conventional mold to cope with the new type of combat required. It reported on the inadequacy of conventional tactics in general, and was especially critical of the heavy use of air and artillery, emphasizing the harmful political effects they would have on the effort to win the support of the people. A particular target of criticism by the Bureau was the concept of "two wars" developed by MACV in 1965: INR held that the main-force and counterinsurgency efforts should not be treated essentially as separate wars, and it pointed out how the main-force effort was receiving by far the major share of emphasis in the allocation of combat resources.

Most important, INR estimated throughout the decade that the war at best remained a stalemate and that the enemy retained the initiative in launching attacks. In contrast to recurrent optimistic reports, especially in late 1962 and 1967, the Bureau, together with CIA/OCI, maintained that the enemy was showing capacity to sustain his infrastructure, territorial control, adequate morale, recruitment, and infiltration. It took particular pains to stress that the enemy was not committed to one style

of attack, and, if he shifted to higher stages of combat, did not feel compelled to stay at those levels; rather he was quite flexible and pragmatic, able to use a combination of combat styles and to apply these components in varying proportions.

Among defects in the Bureau's analysis would be, at the start of the decade, a slight underestimation of the degree to which the enemy was committed to a rapid progress in a real war, even if conducted unconventionally. In addition, as a consequence of having to argue against the erroneous view that the troubles in South Vietnam were solely a result of Northern intervention, the Bureau may have inadvertently downplayed the importance from the outset of the Northern material contribution to operations. The infiltration of Northern personnel was more critical in terms of quality than the proportionately small numbers involved would indicate. Although INR did note that the North always had the capacity to raise the level of infiltration, the tendency to under rate the importance of the Northern military contribution persisted when the Bureau debated the issue whether regular NVA units would be sent into the South. The entire Intelligence Community consistently held that Hanoi would not send regular units for fear of stimulating the US to retaliate and, as INR particularly emphasized, because Hanoi did not then think they were needed to make sufficient progress. There was, perhaps, too great an emphasis on how the indigenous Viet Cong could keep themselves going, and, similarly a slight overstatement of the degree to which the South was separate from the North in operational terms, though the Bureau from the outset did state that the Communist forces throughout Vietnam were part of a unified infrastructure.

The Bureau also stressed somewhat too much the enemy's commitment to a program of low-level attack. While this emphasis served as a salutary corrective to other analyses that had the Communists inexorably moving to main-force operations and persisting in them, INR tended to overstate the commitment to the lower levels of operations and to treat important changes in the combat mix as relatively minor variations in Communist tactics. Thus INR missed the full significance of the change that occurred in the fall of 1967 when the enemy came to put much greater reliance on large-scale attacks--a change that cost him dearly in casualties. Similarly, INR described the Tet offensive as essentially a continuation of the enemy's basic approach, although the Bureau did quickly note the political purpose in carrying the war to the cities. In fact, thought should have been given to the possibility that these two developments had the larger objective of decisively gaining the upper hand in less time than was required by the more traditional approach of protracted war.

Still, INR was correct in pointing out that the enemy could always return to lower levels of attack in order to sustain his war diplomacy and to demonstrate that he could not be defeated. In this regard, the Bureau soon noted that as the ARVN fell back to protect the cities the way was opened for the Communists to reap great advantage in the countryside.

This analysis, which proved valid, drew considerable criticism from readers who had absorbed the original INR estimate that centered on what the Communists might have hoped to achieve within the cities. In fact, with the assault on the cities checked, the Communists did revert to low-grade attacks and to efforts to hold their own in the countryside as the military counterpart to protracted negotiations.

The General Course of the War. Throughout the 1960's INR consistently argued that the war was at best a stalemate and that optimistic estimates regarding its eventual outcome had inadequate bases in current fact. The Bureau's work was particularly valuable in downgrading arguments that pointed to victory within a short period of time. Its most telling themes dealt with the government's inability to muster support for itself or for the war effort; the allies' inability to seize and hold combat initiative for any length of time, or to reduce the rate of infiltration to levels considerably below what the enemy desired; the Communists' ability to control substantial portions of the countryside and to persist there with an effective political and administrative infrastructure; and the enemy's ability to adjust the mix of his styles of combat so as at least to maintain territorial control, force structure, and size of army in a measure that would support his extreme political war aims.

Behind this fundamental issue of determining what progress was being made in the course of the war, the Bureau faced the problem of obtaining and weighing accurately the types of information which could serve as indices of

progress. At times the difficulty was to obtain figures or measurements that were correct; on other occasions, it was to appraise and agree with other interpreters on the validity or meaning of a whole category of information. An example of how the significance of a category could change in the course of the war is to be found in the use of captured enemy weapons as an indication. It offered important clues to the state of enemy morale early in the war when weapons were scarce and when the saving or retrieving of a unit's weapons formed an important element of Communist discipline. Later in the war, although it continued to be treated as a major indicator in weekly combat reports, its importance actually decreased, after the Communists began to receive adequate supplies from abroad, and also after the count came to include weapons discovered in large hidden caches.

As early as 1962, when the new US effort began to enhance the capabilities of ARVN, the Bureau soon saw the need to emphasize that old liabilities persisted and were affecting the overall balance of forces more than did the new factors. Also in that year, INR was most suspicious of statistics provided by Nhu and Diem, citing against their conclusions the low morale in ARVN and the rise in the rate of desertions. In fact, its estimate in the early autumn of 1963 was so much more pessimistic than those of the US military that the Bureau got into an altercation with the Defense Department. The revelations of the regime that followed Diem thus affected INR largely by confirming its views, but, as noted in Part I, for other interpreters the shock led to harsh judgments on the Minh-Tho regime. Again, during the latter half of 1967, an impressive array of

statistics emanated from Saigon to demonstrate considerable progress in both combat and pacification. INR once more stressed the irrelevant nature of many indices which, it observed, were designed to measure the situation as if the enemy's main objectives were to destroy the allied forces when in reality he was more intent on undermining the allied governments' will to persist. Hence the ability of the allies to curtail Communist large-scale operations or enter into Communist-controlled territory did not constitute a sufficient indication of progress, given the enemy's demonstrated ability to initiate low-level attacks and the GVN's inability to progress in the pacification program (the gauging of which occasioned another major "battle of indices").

Communist Tactics in the War. The Bureau can be faulted for slowness in recognizing the degree and speed with which the enemy would move to large-scale (third stage) warfare later in the decade. It placed too great stress on the continuity in his tactics and so downgraded the proportionate importance of this new factor in the combat mix. The Bureau was, of course, correct in noting that the Communists never abandoned their lower stage efforts and therefore did not make an irrevocable switch in their combat approach. Still, the extent of the graded changes that did occur had an importance in both the military and negotiatory fields that the Bureau may have consequently understressed; that is, the enemy may have felt that he could not simply sustain protracted warfare indefinitely and that he had to try for major victories if he was to have adequate support for his extreme negotiating position.

INR was in a much sounder position when it argued that the enemy had a large capacity to react swiftly to changes in allied military emphases and to adjust accordingly his own reactions, threats, and initiatives. The Bureau recognized that, while Hanoi remained wedded to a basic doctrine, it did not operate in the extremely rigid and inflexible manner that might be inferred from an approach that was strictly graded through stages. Field initiatives and adjustment-responses played a much greater role in the enemy's behavior than would be allowed for by concentration upon the importance of doctrine, foreign Communist influences, or even the restrictive impact of allied forces. Here again the Bureau contributed to a more realistic understanding of the war on the part of the Department's senior officials.

An appraisal in late 1966 illustrates both the shortcomings and the strengths of INR's approach. The Bureau argued, as it turned out incorrectly, that the enemy would not move to a third-stage type of attack that used main-forces in direct field engagements. The Bureau reasoned that he lacked the strength for such an effort, which in any event offered no real prospect of victory, and so that he would not expose himself to US power unless he were desperate to begin negotiations--which he was not. INR thus over-emphasized the Communist commitment to guerrilla tactics, but at the same time was right in noting how much the enemy benefitted from this approach and how inadequately the allies had coped with it. Actually, with the failure of his large-scale effort to strike the decisive blow, the enemy has reverted to the level of protracted combat--a capability for adjustment

that the Bureau had emphasized--and has achieved what, from his point of view, are adequate results. This policy included guerrilla combat, intermittent, occasional spectacular assaults, and a high and rising level of terror, harassment, and sabotage. Finally, in 1968 after the Tet offensive, the Bureau stressed that although Hanoi might be pushed toward negotiations by the fact that it did not have adequate combat strength to gain the upper hand decisively, its capability to sustain effective protracted warfare remained unimpaired.

Evaluation of ARVN. From the beginning the Bureau underlined the very limited capabilities of ARVN. INR identified several causes of this weakness: use of ARVN by various regimes for political purposes, the army's own involvement in politics, its being cast at the outset in a conventional mold, and the general administrative inadequacy and corruption that beset South Vietnam. In 1961, the Bureau correctly pointed up the army's excessive reliance on static defense that flawed the application of the doctrine of counterinsurgency. In the next year, it noted that, while proper tactics required small units and unconventional approaches, ARVN persisted in conducting conventional operations with large-scale units, and made matters even worse by relying heavily on air power and artillery.

The crisis over the problem of ARVN's effectiveness reached a peak in March 1965, when DIA, in line with the view of MACV, dissented from a finding of CIA and INR that ARVN could neither defeat the enemy nor conduct an effective pacification program. Then, just three months later, the Defense Department suddenly stressed ARVN's great weakness and held that

the war would be lost, given the deterioration in the situation, if US ground troops were not immediately deployed. The Defense Department's position appeared all the more inconsistent in that the Secretary of Defense had called for US troop deployment in March on the totally opposite grounds that advantage should be taken of a supposedly favorable trend in the war to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion "within an acceptable time frame." If the earlier Defense position was too optimistic to be tenable, the same could be said for the INR rejoinder in June that opposed deployment of US troops. The Bureau held that, with all ARVN's weaknesses and enemy strength, a radical shift in the overall balance against Saigon was not imminent. One factor not adequately considered by INR in the mid-year debate was how Hanoi's decision to commit regular NVA units to the war in the South entailed a clear and imminent danger that the balance of forces would change decisively to the ARVN's disadvantage. By the year's end, the Bureau argued correctly that the allies were not approaching victory but had only achieved a stalemate. In so doing, INR acknowledged that even this standoff resulted only because the US combat presence denied to the Communists, then reinforced by NVA units, the victories they had previously enjoyed over ARVN.

Since then, both INR and CIA have stood by their low appraisal of ARVN, recognizing its inability to offer prolonged effective resistance to NVA units. The Bureau has repeatedly stressed the following major shortcomings: poor leadership, low morale, bad popular relations, and low operational capabilities. In addition, ARVN has not improved in its handling of the

paramilitary forces, a key component in the concepts of unconventional warfare and pacification. Here too the Bureau was very much on target.

Allies' War Concept. INR consistently postulated that the allied doctrine of unconventional warfare and the related program of pacification were, however refined in concept, sorely underdeveloped and misdirected in practice. This criticism was most clearly exemplified and validated in the Bureau's strong criticism of MACV's concept of "two wars", developed in 1965 as US combat forces arrived. MACV noted that the Communists were expanding their conventional threat along with the traditional guerrilla and terrorist campaign. It proposed that the bulk of ARVN and the paramilitary forces, which had up to then been devoted respectively to main-force and guerrilla warfare, be lumped together to cope with the guerrillas, while the US forces and certain elite South Vietnamese units engaged the enemy main-forces in the sparsely settled parts of the country. INR quickly and correctly pointed up two major problems. First, the enemy main-forces could not be induced to fight battles in a manner that would enable the allies to find, fix, and destroy their units; possessing the initiative to make contact and able to manipulate even his large forces in an "unconventional regular war," the enemy could still evade combat when he wished. Second, the protecting of populated areas and the discovering and effectively disposing of guerrilla forces and infrastructure have proven to be among the most difficult aspects of modern warfare. How a South Vietnamese army that had shown itself to be inadequate in every way could cope with this task remained beyond the

Bureau's capacity to grasp. On the other hand, the Bureau held that ARVN had done moderately well in some main-force operations against the Viet Cong, and that this "downgrading" was therefore inappropriate because ARVN had at times shown itself capable of coping with a main-force foe better than with a guerrilla opponent.

To this argument INR added a third and most important criticism--that the creation of two types of combat generates an artificial distinction in a war that has organic unity and can be handled only from that perspective. For one thing, the separation meant that the two types of endeavors could go on simultaneously but without mutually supporting one another, as when an enemy main-force was cleared out of an area but the pacification force was totally unprepared to occupy that territory and consolidate the gain with the required political, administrative, and security apparatus. For another, given a separation of the "two wars," the US gave high priority to its own operations, which veered toward the conventional side and emphasized mobility, destruction of the enemy, and concentration of forces, to the neglect of the principles of counterinsurgency that required uninterrupted control over specified target areas, protection of population, and dispersal of units.

Pacification. Official claims notwithstanding, the counterinsurgency effort received a very low priority, as exemplified by the poor support given from the outset to the key element, the paramilitary regional and militia forces. Even at the start of the 1960's the Bureau observed that the government, because it did not adequately apply sound principles, failed

to make inroads into Communist strength in the countryside, despite the advantages of US aid and peasant antagonism to the Communists. The strategic hamlet program of 1962, highly favored by the Bureau, was quickly found to suffer from poor direction, inefficient operations, and unrealistic quotas. Again in 1966, the Bureau provided timely and accurate appraisals regarding the new pacification program, taking particular exception to the Ky government's plan to convert ARVN to this assignment in half a year. INR argued that the GNV still had only a vague grasp of what was involved and little commitment to its success. During most of 1967 the question of progress occasioned a battle of statistics that ended only with the Tet offensive. Even before that attack, it was evident that the Bureau was correct in its low appraisal of ARVN's ability to cope with this new and difficult assignment, especially on a crash basis.

As the Bureau observed at the start of 1967, pacification remained the most challenging of all assignments, and was not amenable to quick results. Only unremitting long-term action, under the closest scrutiny and the highest priority, offered any prospect of success. To act otherwise, it warned prophetically, was to risk repeating the costly mistakes of the past on a still larger scale.

To sum up thus far, the Bureau was most accurate in its estimates of ARVN weaknesses and the enemy's relative combat strength, and in its judgments about the inadequacy of US combat doctrine--especially as it pertained to the application of counterinsurgency principles--and the readiness of the Communists flexibly to employ various types of combat. It was less effective in recognizing the extent and significance of changes

in the enemy's combat mix, the importance--at first--of ground forces in maintaining a stalemate, the intense Communist commitment to a breakout, and the significance to negotiations of the shortfall in Hanoi's large-scale effort of 1967-68. But the Bureau, along with CIA/OCI, was closer to the mark than others in its sober appraisal of the main course of the war, and in its appreciation that the Communists had the capability to revert to, and sustain, an intermediate level of combat during the protracted negotiations that began with the President's speech of March 31, 1968.

The Role of the North.* The Bureau consistently held that the VC apparatus was an integral part of a Vietnam-wide Communist organization under the leadership of Hanoi. Within the intelligence community, this matter was not at issue; for, although the details of the operations of the system were obscure, the fact of Hanoi's commanding position was evident to anyone with access to intelligence from all sources. Thus, reference to "Viet Cong" actions in many INR products does not imply that INR thought they were acting independently. Nevertheless, in the early 1960's, the Bureau did exhibit a tendency to downgrade the importance of the Northern military role for Communist progress in the South. This proclivity may have been an unintentional result of INR's correct analysis that unconventional combat and internal subversion compromised a more serious threat than the overt and conventional aggression which the GVN and top military officials stressed. INR argued that local recruitment was more critical than infiltration and that Southern insurgent operations were self-supporting; it recognized, but may not have emphasized sufficiently, that the Northern component was more important qualitatively than the Southern. By stressing indigenous

* INR's analysis of the role of the North is discussed more extensively in Part III, "The War Against the North and the Role of China."

capabilities in the period through 1964, the Bureau performed a valuable service in focusing on Communist strength and GVN weaknesses in the South, but it did so at the price of understating the Northern contribution to the sinews of war.

In the period before the arrival of NVA units in 1965, INR often challenged Defense figures on infiltration. Others seemed to overstate the comparative importance of these numbers in their desire to stress aggression from the North; they drew their conclusions on a weak evidential base, as INR noted, and more significantly, played down the numerically more substantial recruitment in the South. Later in the decade, intelligence showed that the Defense statistics were roughly accurate but this still meant that the far greater proportion of enemy forces before 1965 were recruited in the South. If INR is to be faulted, it is for its failure to put equal weight on the fact that substantial infiltration could occur during this period without detection. The tendency to scrutinize the statistics almost too closely, combined with a mistaken analysis of Hanoi's intentions as discussed in Part III, also accounted for INR's tardy recognition of the fact that Hanoi had decided to commit its own regular forces to combat in 1965.

INR's position on infiltration did bring a better sense of proportion regarding the North's role and, of greater immediate significance, a gradual improvement in the gathering of intelligence on the amount of external support received by the Communists in the South. This area of collection had been weak at the start and, with less justification, remained so for several years; at last, in 1964, coverage of the Northern war effort was strengthened, thanks primarily to strong pressure by CIA/ONE and INR, exerted in the course of a post-mortem on an SNIE in March of that year.

Further, although the Bureau allowed that Hanoi had a considerable capability to raise the level of infiltration, it often treated this

simply as a defensive or counter-offensive device which would be employed to balance an increase in the US-GVN effort in the South or in response to an attack against the North. Similarly, though it frequently predicted the enemy's actions with great accuracy as to timing and detail, the Bureau treated too many of them as responses to US action or, within a larger framework, as deterrents against US decisions to intensify the war. In reality, the war effort in the South had a far greater dynamic and purpose of its own than this stress on reactive operations would indicate. In short, INR did not give adequate credit to Hanoi for initiating major changes, and, in all fairness, neither did many other components in the Intelligence Community.

The Tet Offensive. We have already remarked generally that the Bureau put too much stress on the tendency of the Communists to be consistent in their combat patterns, and most recently that it interpreted operations in the South too much in terms of reaction to US actions. A classic case of surprise on both counts was the Communist urban offensive of late January 1968, a thrust that took the entire Intelligence Community by surprise. An offensive of some sort was expected, but the surprise lay in the targets--Southern cities that had been untouched by the war--the efficient tactics used by the attackers, and the extent of the operation.

INR had raised warning signals in past years regarding the possibility of an attack on the cities, as in 1965 when it observed a modification in Communist attack patterns that might portend an effort to bring the war to the urban population. The Bureau recognized the major importance of such an assault but it concentrated less on the physical-military aspects and

more on indications of Communist emphasis on political and subversive factors--very real and important issues in their own right. Later in October 1966, the Bureau noted that the enemy was seeking to bring the war closer to the hitherto immune cities. Again it stressed the political inroads the Communists expected to make by exploiting negative popular reactions to the US presence, adding that the enemy sought to achieve an unacceptably high level of conflict that would make the war intolerable to the urban population in the South.

In general, both the Bureau and EA strongly emphasized how vulnerable was Southern resolve to continue the war; they pointed to intense nationalism that did not take well the heavy US presence and direction of the war, and to morale that had been weakened by setbacks. If the Tet offensive demonstrated anything, it was that between the US and the South Vietnamese it was the US that had the lower level of tolerance for the stalemate that the Tet offensive revealed when it brought down all the hopes built up in 1967. Though the war became much worse thereafter for the Vietnamese urban populations, this development did not destroy the US political base in South Vietnam for continuing the war. However, INR's judgment that a high degree of urban security was essential to the Saigon regime received support when the Thieu government insisted on the termination of intensive attacks on the larger cities as one of the terms under which it could accept a complete halt in the bombing of the North later in 1968.

In its analysis immediately after the attack, the Bureau pointed to the importance of the urban targets, and held that the Communists intended

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to prove that the allies were not on the path to victory but would have to treat their enemy at least as battlefield equals who had to be accommodated. This is indeed how matters developed, but the Communists may actually have had larger aspirations in the offensive. They took great risks and suffered enormous casualties, seemingly out of proportion to an effort that would merely extend and intensify existing patterns. It is possible that, believing they had popular support in the cities, they placed great hopes in an urban assault as a stimulus to the "general uprising" which their documents predicted. (Incidentally, the Bureau had in 1965 accurately pointed out the weakness of their popular support and political infrastructure in the cities, and had correctly predicted that their hate campaign against the US would be a total failure.) The very tactical military success, especially in Saigon, that afforded many urban residents the opportunity to join the Communist cause underlined all the more the magnitude of their political failure when the city residents did not respond. This failure may have played an important part in the Communists' decision to move to negotiations. As to the immediate consequences, the Bureau was more accurate than other observers in estimating not only the serious effects of the Tet operations on urban communities but also on the pacification program, however unanticipated that aspect of the offensive may have been. Finally, as the Bureau had anticipated, the Communists showed a will to persist and an ability to revert to protracted warfare and negotiation--their offensive having ended allied hopes of victory, as well as the intragovernmental "struggle of statistics" over the rate and extent of progress in the war.

Southern Morale--and Bombing the North. The Intelligence Community as a whole took grave exception in 1964-65 to the argument by advocates of a bombing program that it would have a salutary effect on Southern morale. Allowing that morale might rise at first, the Community held that, should the results of these attacks prove ambiguous or unsuccessful as seemed likely, morale would deteriorate rapidly--especially if the war dragged on and military and terrorist activities of the enemy increased. In February 1965, the Bureau took particular exception to the argument by leading policy makers that a bombing program would raise the morale of the Saigon leadership and give the US leverage to induce the political factions to join together in forming a more effective government.

In retrospect, the Bureau and others were correct in noting that any increase in morale would soon fade with the failure of the bombing to break the stalemate. It was certainly justified in discrediting the idea that the attacks would bring political dividends in Saigon. However, the Community's judgment that a bombing program that did not win the war would cause morale to sag below current levels never received an adequate test because US ground troops were deployed to South Vietnam a few months after the bombing started, thereby supplying a major new factor of support for morale. In general, there has been a recurrent tendency, as in the urban offensive noted above, to treat Southern morale as more fragile than it has actually been. The very continuation of the bombing had a steadying effect on morale, both because it demonstrated the US will to persist and because it was the one way of wreaking retribution on the North for the havoc it was

causing in the South. And in 1967 the Bureau modified its earlier stand, noting that the bombing may have been of more than marginal value in sustaining morale and public confidence at a key point in the war. This effect, of course, made the partial halt and eventual termination of attacks against the North that much more difficult for Saigon to take and so contributed, as INR observed, to the difficulties the Thieu regime had in accepting this aspect of de-escalation. As noted, a military quid pro quo was relief from major attacks on its larger cities.

On a more general level, the Bureau was undoubtedly correct in paying careful attention to problems of political morale in the South for the country, already burdened by poor government, suffered terrible punishment in the war. Moreover, there were repeated manifestations of political unrest, as in the Buddhist incidents and in Dzu's strong campaign for the presidency as a peace candidate. Yet the Bureau never did look thoroughly at the other side of the coin, to inquire why a perennially weak country like South Vietnam could absorb so much punishment and still prove able to cope to a degree. For example, in 1965 the Bureau credited the South with considerable durability at the time of the debate over the despatch of US ground troops. A key question for policy makers then becomes--just as in 1965, prior to the arrival in strength of NVA and US ground forces--what is the South's own capacity to cope with an enemy that is not sustained by regular NVA units?

Limited Importance of Cambodia. INR consistently and correctly judged that Cambodia was of limited value to the enemy's war effort. In the early 1960's all members of the Intelligence Community agreed that supplies and

some munitions were arriving by that channel but in quantities of little significance. The Bureau held to this position in later years, adding that Cambodia also played a limited role as a route for infiltration and as a sanctuary. INR did, when new evidence appeared, alter its view that the RKG was not involved, but it adhered to the position that Laos and South Vietnam itself were far more critical as channels and sources of supply to the Communist war effort. This issue acquired major importance in 1967-68 when the US military put great stress on Cambodia's role in the war and sought to take remedial action; the Bureau played a leading role in rebutting this argument. With the rise of Communist insurgency in Cambodia and when the RKG recognized the extent of incursions by the Viet Cong and NVA (in part thanks to American documentation) this issue receded.

The Relation Between Security and Political Stability. A final problem worth brief mention is that of the interrelationship between the popularity and stability of a political regime and the degree to which physical security exists in the country. Clearly, with a rapidly changing set of conditions in the South, a single pattern may be impossible to discern; one needs only to recall the political turmoil of 1963-64, or the security dilemma of the Tet offensive. So it may be understandable that the Bureau was somewhat inconsistent in treating this question. At times it treated these factors as interdependent, almost mutually supporting, but at other times as separate, almost independent, variables. At still other times it gave prior importance or significance to one, and seemed to relegate the other to the role of dependent variable.

Thus, the Bureau would emphasize the importance and extraordinary complexity of the security problem and focus on it when a political situation appeared to be relatively stable, as when the constitutional system took effect in 1967. At other times INR would hold that it was the absence of a politically attractive government, and the existence of regimes deficient in administrative efficiency and woefully lacking a sense of identity with the populace, that were the primary obstacle to undertaking an adequate unconventional security campaign. At times a balancing of the two factors was at least implied, as in the treatment of Diem's regime in 1961-63 and in the discussion of the value of a civilian regime in 1967, but for the most part--due primarily to the demands of crises and the need to focus on the immediate situation--INR would isolate the political or security situation, whichever was the more pressing, and focus primarily on that aspect of the overall problem.

III. THE WAR AGAINST THE NORTH AND THE ROLE OF CHINA

A. The War Against the North

General Assessment. The Bureau was consistently sound in judging Hanoi's determination and capacity to persist in pursuit of its objectives in the South. All too frequently, this fundamental aspect of the war failed to receive adequate attention among policy makers in the early years and was later underestimated when measured against the US bombing program and its punishing impact. INR's consistent judgment that Hanoi was determined to persist on a hard-line course contributed to increased realism in estimates of the general situation by the Intelligence Community, and thus eventually had a major impact elsewhere in Washington. The chief criticism that can be made of INR's handling of this problem concerns its feeling, generally shared in the Intelligence Community, that the North would act more prudently and less provocatively than it actually did.

In considering the direct physical effect of the bombing of the North on the course of the war, both INR and CIA held steadily, and under considerable pressure of criticism, to the view that it did not significantly damage the enemy's capacity for combat. This judgment certainly proved true insofar as interest focused on compelling the Communists to reduce or end hostilities on terms favorable to the allies. However, even though the bombing did not provide the key to victory, it did have greater effect than its more skeptical appraisers at first acknowledged. Its cumulative impact in the military and diplomatic

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fields was a factor that led eventually to some de-escalation in combat and to a start in negotiations, even though the enemy's concessions were very limited and not compromising to his core position.

The North's Determination. It is difficult to elaborate on the obvious once it has been proved to the satisfaction of all concerned, yet it must be pointed out that in the early years of the decade, INR stood out, often alone, in its grasp of the essential fact that the North Vietnamese were determined to pursue their objectives, no matter what obstacles they faced. The Bureau never departed from a judgment expressed by the Intelligence Community in 1961 that the North was able and willing to go on with the war even if US troops fought in the South and the US attacked the North. By the time these eventualities came to pass four years later, the rest of the Community had come to feel that the North might dissimulate or make some compromise on its position, but INR continued to hold to the original judgment on this vital point. It restated this position constantly, holding in 1962 that the North would not back down before a bombing threat and would, however reluctantly, accept Chinese intervention to redress the balance. The North's compulsion to gamble and to keep up its efforts in the South, INR judged, rested on what Hanoi viewed as a favorable situation there, on the North's ability to raise the level of Communist effort there, and on its judgment that the US would not intervene massively. Further, INR observed, Hanoi probably thought that if the US did intervene it would

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be ineffective, considering how bad the political situation in the South was, and how difficult if not impossible it would be for the US to cope with the Communist style of unconventional warfare.

In sum, with direct bearing on key policy issues, INR judged that action against the North would not compel Hanoi to call off the insurgency or cease its support of the Viet Cong. The basic assumption underlying this issue, though not frequently articulated, was that Hanoi determined its policy far more by its reading of the situation in the South than by concern over the effects of direct US action against the North, although this prospect admittedly was a factor that the North Vietnamese took into account.

If there are any faults to find in this INR position, they exist at secondary levels concerned with the style and emphasis in Hanoi's execution of its determined policy rather than in the basic analyses. One point of criticism lay in the Bureau's overestimation of Hanoi's confidence in the existing pattern of insurgent activities, from which INR derived the judgment that Hanoi's way of intensifying its effort in the South would be to heighten the tempo of what it was already doing. This view was to impede thinking in terms of unexpected departures by the North from existing forms of activity when Hanoi judged that these actions were not bringing adequate results. The Bureau did note one type of change in patterns available to Hanoi, indicated by the Communists' threat to intensify the war and launch spectacular attacks in

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retaliation for US military actions. This repeated emphasis on retaliation as the force that would motivate the Communists to change patterns of action or to launch all-out attacks is a second point of criticism. This approach placed the Bureau in the position of seeming to imply that, if not driven to retaliate, the Communists would be satisfied to continue on whatever course of action they were then following. Yet at times the Bureau took a different, and in retrospect more realistic, view. For example, throughout much of 1964 it argued that the North was willing to risk some retaliation from the US as the consequence for pressing its attack more intensely in the South; again in mid-1965, it agreed with the entire Community that Hanoi was willing to suffer considerable punishment as the price for so doing. In each case INR departed from the argument that only US escalation in combat would bring about a marked change in or intensification of Communist action in the South.

The Deployment of NVA Units. It could be argued that there were several reasons why Hanoi might intensify the war; for example, to seize a favorable opportunity, to retaliate, or to deter or counter an increase in US combat involvement in the South. However, the prevailing impression derived from INR studies up to 1965 when the US embarked on full air and ground involvement is that the North was determined to persist in the campaign to win the South but to avoid clear-cut acts of provocation that could trigger US attacks. The key operational issue was the thesis that

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heightened support for Viet Cong efforts, in terms of augmented infiltration plus better and heavier weapons, and a more aggressive campaign of increased countrywide attacks and urban terror would do the job. The Intelligence Community as a whole repeatedly rejected the notion that Hanoi, if unprovoked, would on its own initiative deploy NVA regular units to the South, for the two reasons that the war was progressing satisfactorily for Hanoi under existing patterns and that this act would be so brazenly provocative as certainly to bring on retaliation by the US. INR, to its credit, did argue, as a dissenting minority in 1964, that Northern regular units would be sent South if the US began bombing the North, because the deterrent effect inherent in the threat to bomb would dissipate once the air attacks began.

Since the Bureau came so close to an accurate portrayal of Northern motives and behavior patterns, it is tempting to ask why it did not take the last step and argue that Hanoi would not hesitate to deploy its own regulars if it concluded that they could finish the job and so attain the North's most cherished objective. Since the Bureau was on record to the effect that Hanoi was willing to suffer retaliation for an intensified war effort, INR must have been restrained from foreseeing Hanoi's action by the other consideration--that events were developing satisfactorily under the existing modes of action. The Bureau may then have misread Hanoi's analysis of the situation at the end of 1963, and have assumed that the Politburo felt a much greater optimism and sense of achievement than it actually did. Paradoxically, upon the fall of Diem and the

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ensuing turmoil, Hanoi may have felt that the job could now be completed speedily but that the type of forces then in the South would not accomplish this task. This combination of anxiety and opportunity, at the same time that the supply of Southern returnees dried up, probably led Hanoi to make the momentous decision to send its own regulars into the war.

In early 1964, when this step was probably taken, the Bureau did report that the North had reached a crucial decision to follow a hard-line policy, would probably intensify its military pressures, and make a greater contribution to the war effort in both men and material. However, INR added, it would not do so on a vast scale, which would be both unnecessary and unwise in Hanoi's view. At this point, in March 1964, the Intelligence Community judged that Hanoi would not make a significant commitment of major NVA units to the war, almost precisely at the time that the preparations to commit forces were in fact begun. The Bureau even noted at that time that Hanoi was making defensive preparations and undertaking closer ties to China, but it did not link these actions to a decision to send Northern units to the South and to the likelihood that Hanoi would expect US retaliatory action as a result. Rather, the Bureau adhered to its argument that Hanoi would intensify the existing pattern in the South, i.e., with action short of open provocation, and that its defense preparations in the North reflected a genuine expectation that the US would initiate air attacks simply as a result of Viet Cong gains

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in the South. With these defensive preparations, INR reasoned, Hanoi was also seeking to demonstrate that the prospect of US air attack (presumably avoidable by this lower level of action and the deterrent threat of NVA deployment) would not compel Hanoi to alter these plans for the South.

It was the crowning irony of the war that the heated arguments of early 1965 about beginning the bombing never included the issue of retaliating for incursions of NVA units--at just the time when incursions were beginning to occur in force. In defense of intelligence work, it must be said that analysts faced one of the most difficult of all intelligence problems--the discerning from ambiguous and inevitably inadequate evidence that the enemy has made a radically new decision. Thus, though new NVA units were noted in south central Laos, it was assumed that the deployments were preparation for the usual dry-season offensive to improve the Communist position in that country. In the end, then, neither the US capacity to bomb nor the North Vietnamese ability to deploy forces achieved deterrent effect. Instead, the two parties made independent and parallel decisions, which they developed and executed almost simultaneously, but which they took independently of each other's escalatory action.

Once the regular NVA units were known to be in the South, the Bureau attained a high degree of accuracy in estimating their political purpose and approximate strength. In 1965, MACV estimated that the Communists meant to establish a government in the Central Highlands and that this

objective was one reason for the upsurge in Communist infiltration and the despatch of NVA forces. The Bureau challenged this view as well as other appraisals that similarly pointed toward the creation of a rival territorial state, objecting that they were not in keeping with the enemy's flexible strategy of combat or with Hanoi's method of handling the delicate task of preserving full political control over the Communist effort in the South while maintaining the appearance that the movement there was truly autonomous. On the question of the strength and role of enemy forces, at first, in mid-1965, INR gave relatively little weight to the impact of the NVA formations, as part of its calculation of that time that ARVN could sustain the stalemate. It held that NVA elements would need a great deal of time to organize logistics to sustain any projected large-scale operation, and so it failed to appreciate the immediate and devastating impact that encounters with NVA forces had on ARVN units. However, once the war again became stalemated at a new and higher degree of intensity, the Bureau was ahead of the others in recognizing that the enemy would at times use his large formations to supplement and sustain lower-level activities and not simply to supplant more traditional guerrilla actions. Finally, by 1967 the Bureau took the lead in the Intelligence Community in stressing the extent to which the enemy's overall structure of forces, especially its NVA Order of Battle, had grown. It produced late that year timely and accurate reports demonstrating that the enemy's main force had grown to levels far above those conventionally reported by the military and accepted until then by senior Department officers as a valid depiction of enemy strength.

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The Tonkin Gulf and the Question of Prudence. Inherent in the reasoning that Hanoi would not despatch its own forces is the argument that it was committed to a policy of maximum caution consonant with its ambitions to take the South. This attribution to Hanoi of a high degree of prudence in the execution of its plans prevailed throughout the Intelligence Community. It accounted for the widespread belief that Hanoi would be careful in allocating help to the South, lest a substantial increase appear too provocative. The most spectacular illustration of this issue was the Tonkin Gulf affair of mid-1964 in which the North Vietnamese engaged American destroyers on the high seas off the Northern shore, following some relatively minor maritime operations by the GVN against Northern coastal installations. It could be argued that the pairing of GVN actions and US patrols on two consecutive occasions may have led Hanoi to fear a major thrust was in the making; more generally, there were other minor GVN incursions against the North and Hanoi may have been determined to retaliate for this string of harassments. However, when one considers how little damage was done to the North, how very likely it was that Hanoi realized the destroyer patrols portended no immediate serious assault, and what political costs might flow from opening the path for direct US action against the North, the Northern naval attacks made little sense in terms of the Bureau's traditional view of Hanoi's motivation. It is only when one places much lower value on Hanoi's commitment to prudence and greater emphasis on its claim to sole moral right in the war that the action becomes understandable.

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The interpretation which INR put forward after the fact was sound--that Hanoi was determined not to be faced down by the threat implicit in the Allies' maritime actions and in the President's warning, nor to give the appearance of being cowed by US pressure. Moreover, the Bureau correctly judged Hanoi's temper after the air strikes that followed as well as the Communist reactions to them, anticipating that North Vietnam would be determined to persist, would appeal for and receive help from abroad, and would launch retaliatory action in the South. The Bureau also played a major role in halting further patrol operations proposed by the Pentagon in the fall; it argued from the sound ground that the intelligence required could be obtained by other means that did not run the risk of triggering another incident and again raising the question of reprisals.

The Decision to Bomb the North. The Bureau set a remarkable record for accuracy on this major issue both before and after the decision to attack the North. INR consistently argued that the bombing would not have a significantly favorable impact on the war in the South, in that it would not reduce Hanoi's commitment to the war, physically impair its military support, or compel Hanoi to negotiate a de-escalation or make other substantive concessions in order to get the bombing stopped. The course of events bore out these pessimistic views expressed by INR during the 1964-early 1965 debate, and they also validated the Bureau's stand, frequently taken alone once the bombing began, that intensification of the program would not affect Hanoi's position as the US desired.

During 1965-67, the Bureau stood by its belief that the bombing would not drive the North to the negotiating table--nor would the offer of a halt if couched in terms of reciprocity. Along with CIA, it held steadily to the position that the North could withstand the physical effect of the assault without undue strain. However, it did modify its view in 1967-68 and reported that the cumulative effects were having a more harmful impact than seemed apparent in the first years of the program.

On occasion in 1964 INR did go along with the majority view in the Community that Hanoi, to stop the attacks, might respond to bombing with diplomatic moves like invoking the Geneva machinery, but without making a significant concession. Most of the time, however, the Bureau vigorously opposed the judgment that Hanoi would make any accommodation, real or feigned, to get the bombing stopped; from October 1964 on, it held to the view that Hanoi would react aggressively and unyieldingly. It was not until June 1965 that the majority, its stand disproven by events, moved temporarily toward INR's position. Nonetheless, three months later, CIA and DIA again took the view that an increase in air strikes and an extension to additional targets would move Hanoi toward de-escalating Communist attacks, and toward more conciliatory diplomatic gestures--though without meaningful concessions. Once more INR proved correct in its dissenting opinion that Hanoi would not bend even to this extent but would pursue its war effort more vigorously than ever. To this end, the Bureau predicted, Hanoi would step up its infiltration, as indeed it did.

The course of events thus validated the INR position, though the increase in infiltration was undoubtedly more a response to needs and opportunities in the South than a retaliation for the augmentation of the bombing.

The correctness of the INR position is all the more striking when one considers the persuasive arguments that could be marshalled in Hanoi for following the scenario favored by the majority in our Intelligence Community--that the GVN was so weak that it could readily have been subverted under a de-escalation or cease-fire; that the North could make a good case at a conference and, in any event, possibly deter a renewal of the bombing while its power in the South remained intact; and that a halt in the war might well have led the US public to oppose any renewed intensification of the bombing. In fact the theme that Hanoi might move for a rapid de-escalation was raised as a dangerous North Vietnamese ploy by other American analysts on later occasions, as in the fall of 1968 by Embassy Saigon. As in 1965, INR correctly held that this ploy was out of tune with Hanoi's views of its strategy in the war, of the proper course of negotiations, and of the interrelationship between the two.

To INR the compelling arguments lay in North Vietnam's willpower and determination, in Hanoi's view that it held a strong diplomatic position and had within reach a prize whose value far outweighed the damage to be suffered from air attacks. Further, INR reasoned, Hanoi believed that to concede even a bit meant to invite more demands, increased attacks, and lower communist morale in the South. INR clearly had the better perspective on Hanoi's motivation in decision-making, and the Bureau's