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182

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CIA says Hanoi assists in POW search

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Hanoi has increased cooperation with U.S. investigators searching for American prisoners from the Vietnam War but is still keeping secrets, including information on captured U.S. soldiers sent to Russia during the conflict, according to a CIA report released yesterday.

Noting assistance generally has improved, "we think Hanoi has not been completely forthcoming on certain POW/MIA matters," said the report by the National Intelligence Council.

"In some instances we believe full disclosure would prove embarrassing to the regime," the report said. "For example, Hanoi continues to deny that U.S. POWs were mistreated while in captivity."

U.S. intelligence agencies also believe Hanoi is withholding records that "would discredit its denials of mistreatment" of U.S. prisoners.

Sen. Robert C. Smith, New Hampshire Republican, a member of the Armed Services Committee, said the report contradicts claims made by President Clinton in normalizing relations with Vietnam in

U.S. pleased despite lingering secrets

1995 that Hanoi is fully cooperating on POWs. "There has not been good faith, full disclosure by Hanoi," Mr. Smith said in a statement.

Soldiers who returned from the conflict told stories of systematic torture and abuse at the hands of their Vietnamese captors.

"A few reports of transfers of U.S. POWs to Russia and other countries are unexplained and the books remain open," the report said.

U.S. investigators have conducted 120 "live-sighting" probes — information about living POWs possibly left behind since the end of the conflict — but "none has generated any credible evidence of American POWs left in Vietnam," the report said.

The three-page summary of the National Intelligence Estimate on Vietnamese cooperation on POW issues was released by the Pentagon, which is in charge of the issue.

The Vietnamese have protested having to investigate reports that POWs remain in the country, "but

reports appear regularly — most recently on five POWs possibly being held in Laos," the report said, noting that procedures exist for "resolving" the cases.

Vietnamese cooperation was described as "excellent" or "good" for field operations to recover and return remains of U.S. servicemen; help with probes in third countries, such as Laos; and providing documents, personal artifacts and equipment, the report said.

The report said the unresolved POW issues will need continued close attention by the U.S. government.

Two obstacles must be overcome to achieve success, it said. The first involves "technical problems" with retrieving archival material, contacting leads and carrying out field activities. The second problem is "overcoming political obstacles" — Vietnam's reluctance to cooperate due to issue of sovereignty and "obstructionist tendencies" by the Communist government.

U.S. intelligence agencies also

reviewed two documents obtained from Russian government archives that show larger numbers of American prisoners were held captive than the Pentagon estimated. They dismissed the reports as false.

Disclosure of the two documents was sensational because they bolstered the claims of many POW/MIA advocacy groups who have alleged the Pentagon has a "mindset to debunk" all reports of POWs left behind.

The so-called "735 report" is a Russian translation of a report by Vietnamese Workers' Party Secretary Foang Anh to a 1971 conference.

The second document, the "1205 report," was a translation of a report to the Vietnamese ruling politburo by Lt. Gen. Tran Van Quang on Sept. 15, 1972, stating that 1,205 U.S. POWs were in captivity. That was more than twice the number of American prisoners returned in 1973 Operation Homecoming.

The Pentagon believes 2,081 U.S. military personnel are unaccounted for from the conflict in Southeast Asia. Since the end of the war, the remains of 502 Americans have been repatriated from the region.

Marchers win the right to rally in Harlem

By Liz Trotta
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

NEW YORK — Civil rights activists yesterday hailed a federal court decision that will allow a massive march for young people to

difference to me."

Asked about possible anti-Jewish expressions at the event, he replied: "The Jews have nothing to do with this march. We wouldn't go to Crown Heights and tell them who's going to be the convener of

unconstitutional. He rejected the city's argument that Malcolm X Boulevard could not accommodate the huge numbers expected to attend the rally.

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, who has branded the event "a hate

hammad as a friend of the court, hailed the decision as a victory "in the finest tradition of federal courts in this country who have historically been the safety valve to protect citizens' First Amendment rights."