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briefing notes

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current situation in vietnam

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CURRENT ASSUMPTIONS BY VIETNAM WAR PARTIES

(November 1969)

I - Assumptions by All (4) Sides:

1. That the US largely will be out of Vietnam by the end of 1970, logistics assistance and limited air cover being the exceptions.
2. That the name of the game is Vietnamization, which is not a cover word for US bug-out but a genuine concept of the transference of the burden of war (and peace) from the Allied-Vietnamese partnership essentially to the Vietnamese.
3. That specifically Vietnamization involves a test of a) the stability of Saigon establishment b) the competence and spirit of the RVNAF and c) the effectiveness of the socio-political- economic programs in the country's 2500 villages collectively known as pacification.
4. That by the very nature of the U. S. role it will count steadily for less with the passing of each day.

II - Assumptions by the U. S. :

1. That it is committed to disengagement but not to bug-out (i. e. panic withdrawal).
2. That given a reasonably slow disengagement schedule, the GVN, RVNAF and the pacification program can be stabilized, trained and strengthened with little prospect of chaos or disintegration developing.

3. That this process will end, at worst, in a stalemated condition in Vietnam and this will eventually cause the DRV to alter its strategy. That thereby the U.S. objective, that there be no DRV take-over in South Vietnam, would be assured for the foreseeable future (say 5-10 years minimum).

III - Assumptions by the DRV:

1. That it is largely locked-in to the U.S. disengagement timetable, at least in terms of present strategy-tactics.

2. That its spoiling effort -- about which it is reasonably optimistic -- has this order of priority: undercut the fighting elan of RVNAF proving that it cannot stand and fight alone; destroy the stability of the Saigon establishment chiefly by violent means, i. e. assassinations, kidnappings, etc. (rather than by political overtures and similar inroads); develop social pathology or anarchy at the village level, chiefly by destroying villagers' faith in the stability of the Saigon establishment and the competence of RVNAF; increase American casualties so as to hasten and make more precipitous the U.S. withdrawal.

3. That it must do this chiefly with its own forces (of about 130 battalions of PAVN - 105,000 men) and that it cannot rely upon its apparatus in the South, that is the NLF, the Alliance and the PRG.

4. That (and this is the most dubious of the assumptions) if it cannot achieve its goal of collapsing the society in the south by the end of 1970 it will radically alter its strategy; the war as we now know it, will end. (This does not mean the DRV will abandon its goal of unification which it has been pursuing steadily since 1954; it will mean it will seek to achieve unification by other than the present means, big unit war).

IV - Assumptions by the GVN:

1. That it can assume the burden of war and peace if American disengagement is not precipitous, if material aid continues and if it is not abandoned by other Asian nations.

2. That what it must do it fragment and absorb the enemy indigenous elements in the South (NLF, PRP, Alliance, PRG) and blunt the DRV assault.

3. That there is no need for a drastic change of Saigon political structure; that the general strategy of the establishment will be to work for the support of the largely unorganized villagers while fending off political challenges from the various opposition elements in Saigon.

4. That a drastic overhaul of economic institutions is required.

V - Assumptions by the NLF-PRG-Alliance:

1. That its days in its present organizational arrangement, are numbered. That it counts for little at the moment and its prospect as a group, is that it will count for even less in the next year or so.

2. That its goal -- political power in the South -- was never more remote.

3. That the choice it faces is three-fold: make an accommodation with the Saigon establishment; throw in entirely with the DRV (and accept DRV objective of unification rather than its objective of political power); or begin once again to rebuild the organizational structure at the village level which in effect means going back and starting over.
