



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
26 July 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Current Agricultural Situation in North Vietnam

1. Current prospects point toward another below-average rice crop in North Vietnam this year. Production in 1966 was at least 300,000 tons below the average of recent years. For the current year, the spring rice crop - normally about one-third of the annual harvest - is tentatively estimated at about 1.4 million tons, or some 200,000 tons below average. Reduced acreage was a primary factor in this shortfall. Increased production of subsidiary foods such as manioc, sweet potatoes, corn, and green beans compensated for some, but probably not all, of the decline in spring rice output. Prospects for the more important fall rice crop are also dim because of a current drought which appears to have intensified during the first three weeks of July. The outlook for this crop could change sharply, however, before the beginning of harvest in late October.



2. Food imports in the first half of 1967, mostly from Communist countries, totaled almost 240,000 tons - an all-time high. This high level of imports probably will continue, in view of the mediocre spring rice harvest and the inauspicious start for the fall crop, and no critical food shortage is expected. To the extent that interdiction of the rail and road transport system interferes with the distribution of food, minor food shortages may occur in the cities.

The 1967 Spring Rice Crop

3. The 1967 spring rice crop - normally about one-third of the annual harvest - was transplanted during the winter and harvested in late May and early June. Production is tentatively estimated at about 1.4 million tons, or some 200,000 tons less than the average spring rice crop for recent years. This estimate is supported by an editorial in the 14 July edition of Nhan Dan in which it was admitted that the spring rice harvest was below last year's mediocre harvest. The shortfall of this crop was caused by reduced acreage, delayed transplanting, shortage of rice seedlings, and insect blight. The

[redacted]

[redacted]

bombing attacks contributed to this shortfall through interruption of farm work, although it is difficult to determine the extent of this contribution. The reduced acreage was at least in part the result of a decision last fall and winter to substitute the more reliable subsidiary crops - particularly sweet potatoes - for the preferred rice in some of the marginal fields.\*

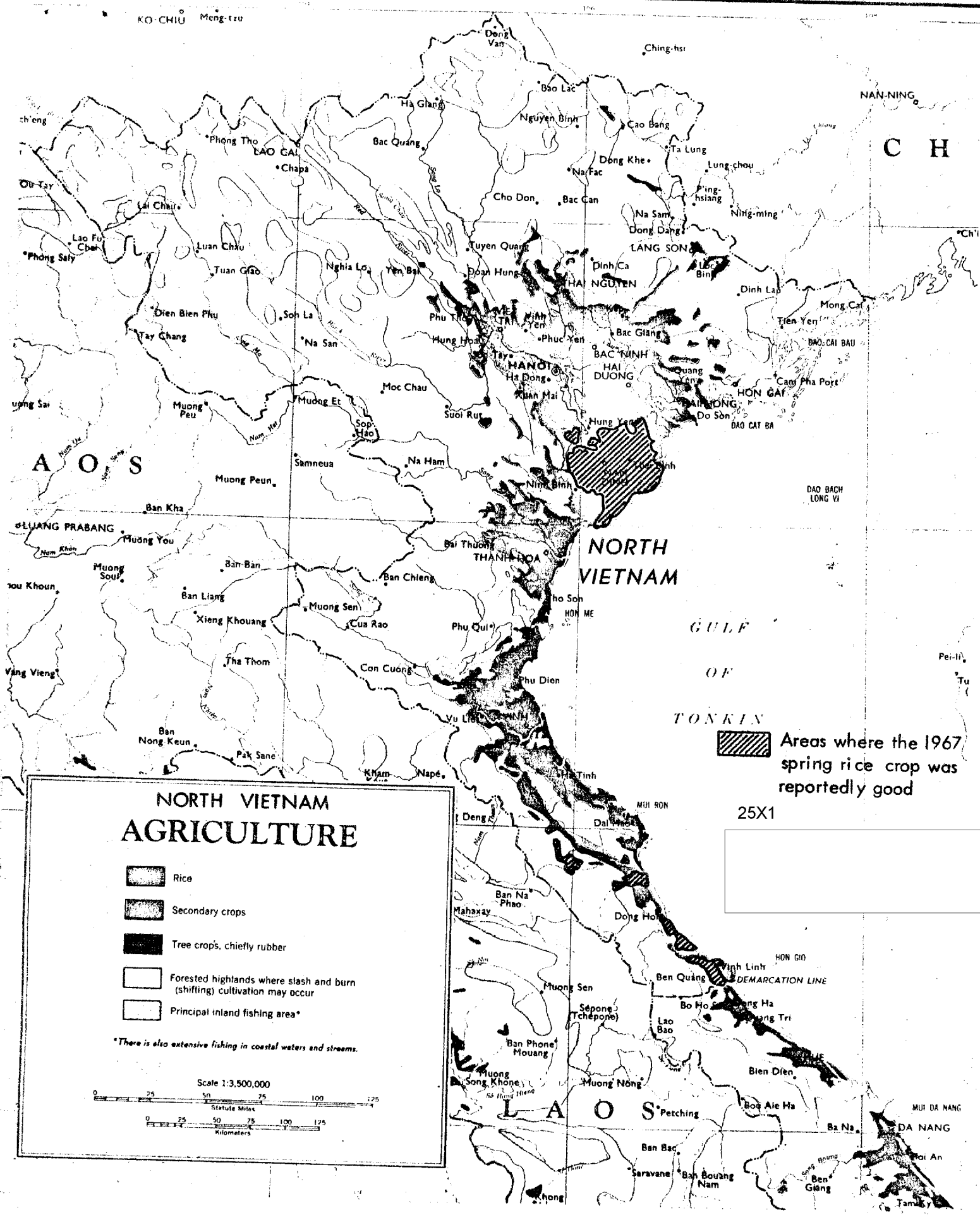
4. This office has relatively little information on the provincial breakdown of spring rice production. The attached map locates the main rice-producing areas and includes those provinces where good spring rice crops were reported - Vinh Linh Special Zone, Quang Binh, Thai Binh, and Nam Ha.

25X1

25X1

[redacted] soil moisture conditions in May-June in Thai Binh and Nam Ha provinces in particular were better than in the other rice areas. The relatively good crop claimed for the southern portion of the North Vietnamese panhandle is of some importance since this area is normally a rice-deficit area.

\* A 22 July release from North Vietnam indicated that yields of the spring rice crop were above those of last year. No total production comparisons were given, however, suggesting that the higher yields failed to compensate for reduced acreage.



The 1967 Fall Rice Crop

5. Drought conditions - somewhat unusual for this time of the year - may have delayed transplanting of the fall rice crop. This crop, which makes up most of the remaining two-thirds of the annual harvest, normally is transplanted in July and harvested in late October and early November.\*

25X1

25X1

as of 7 July the level of the Red River was from two to three meters below normal; this could handicap irrigation efforts to overcome the drought.

25X1

25X1  
25X1  
25X1

in the first part of July the drought was spreading and the irrigation systems might have trouble delivering the necessary water.

25X1

6. Weather information indicates substantially below-normal rainfall in the main rice-producing areas of North Vietnam in May and June. This information suggests that, in spite of above-normal rainfall in April, the dry, hot conditions in May and June had caused soil moisture conditions in these areas to deteriorate appreciably

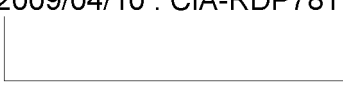
\* There is also a midsummer rice crop - normally less than five percent of the annual harvest. We have received no information on the prospects of this crop, which is normally harvested in August.

25X1

by the end of June. Preliminary weather information for the first three weeks of July indicates an intensification of the drought. It is too early, however, to forecast the effect of the current drought on the final outcome of the late rice crop. Favorable weather conditions from now to harvest time could change the prospects considerably.

The 1966/67 Subsidiary Crops

7. The subsidiary crops - manioc, sweet potatoes, corn, and green beans - are important food substitutes for the preferred rice. In the 1966/67 winter-spring season, when most of the subsidiary crops are normally grown, the North Vietnamese attempted to make up for the poor rice production in 1966 by expanding the acreage of these rice substitutes at the expense of the marginal areas of spring rice. While this may have resulted in a substantial increase in the production of subsidiary foods, it is believed that the production of these crops was not sufficient to make up for the rice deficit in 1966 and the first half of 1967.



The Effects of the Harvests on Food  
Availabilities

8. The land area now comprising North Vietnam was historically a food-deficit area - normally from 150,000 to 300,000 tons of rice were shipped from the south annually. Since 1959 the per capita production of rice - the mainstay of the North Vietnamese diet - has been declining. In addition, the per capita production of rice and subsidiary foods, combined on a rice equivalent basis, has declined although at a slightly slower rate\* (see the attached chart). The production of rice in 1966 was estimated at no more than 4.2 million tons, or at least 300,000 tons below the average of recent years.\*\* Since the normally tight food situation in North Vietnam has been exacerbated by poor harvests in the last 18 months, North Vietnam has been compelled to step up imports of bulk foods substantially. During the first half of 1967, almost 240,000

\* Subsidiary foods are converted to rice equivalents on the following basis: one ton of paddy rice equals 4 tons of manioc or sweet potatoes, three tons of green beans, and one ton of corn. These conversion factors are based on the relative caloric value of these foods.

\*\* No official production figures for rice or subsidiary crops were released for 1966. We cannot, therefore, estimate the production levels of the subsidiary crops, and the 1966 rice production estimate is not firm. Reports from Hanoi have suggested that the 1966 shortfall may have been as high as 1 million tons. While it is difficult to credit such a high figure, it is possible that the 1966 shortfall was above 300,000 tons.



Per Capita Production of Food Crops - North Vietnam  
1959 - 1966  
(in Kilograms per Capita)



\* Subsidiary foods are converted to rice equivalents on the following basis: One ton of paddy rice equals four tons of manioc or sweet potatoes, three tons of green beans and one ton of corn. No information on the production of subsidiary foods in 1966 was available.



tons were imported - or about three times the amount imported in all of 1966. Nearly all of these imports originated from Communist countries and did not involve use of valuable foreign exchange, although the terms of agreement with these countries are not known. The greatly increased imports of bulk foods during the first half of 1967 contributed to the increased port congestion in the Haiphong harbor. However, except for a decrease in the importation of chemical fertilizers in May and June, the importation rate of other goods has not decreased.

9. The poor performance of the spring rice crop suggests that the imports of bulk foods will continue. If the estimate of the spring rice shortfall of about 200,000 tons is approximately correct, it is likely that these imports will continue at the current rate of about 40,000 tons a month. The North Vietnamese can handle their current rate of food imports without difficulty and will experience no critical food shortages in the near future if the Communist countries continue to provide them with grain. The North Vietnamese have been able to maintain the level of their basic rations of staples although, in some cases, increased substitution of non-rice staples has been reported.



Food Distribution Problems

10. The shortfall of 200,000 tons in the spring rice crop will not raise new distribution problems in North Vietnam but will aggravate present problems. Distribution problems started in early 1965 with the initiation of US bombing of the lines of communication and the inability of the state marketing organization to cope with the additional tasks imposed on it by the evacuation of part of the urban population. Marketing difficulties were intensified in 1966 by the shortfall of at least 300,000 tons in the rice crops that required substantial increases in imports, by additional evacuation of people from urban to rural areas, and by continued interdiction of the lines of communication.

11. Both the urban and rural areas have suffered from marketing problems as a result of the evacuation movement. In the cities, many of the small free traders who were not part of the state distribution system were evacuated, restricting an important marketing facility. The state stores, despite a reduced demand from a smaller population, have been unable to compensate for the loss of the small traders. In the rural areas the evacuees were expected by the



regime to subsist on local sources of food, but when this plan proved unsuccessful, the state was compelled to organize additional purchasing and selling cooperatives to serve the evacuees. The North Vietnamese press indicates that the regime has not been successful in solving the problems even with the creation of additional distribution cooperatives. The current shortfall will mean that more of the grain distribution will be made up from imported stocks. To the extent that less grain is available on the free market and that there is a consequent increase in demand on the state distribution system, the current shortfall could increase state marketing problems.

12. Transportation problems may be minimized by the shortfall as a greater share of the domestically produced rice will be consumed in the producing areas. The peasants have preferred to sell their rice on the local free market rather than to sell it to the state. The urban dwellers, therefore, may have to rely increasingly on rice and other grains imported from Communist countries.