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28 July 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The North Vietnamese "Offensive" in French-Speaking Africa

1. The Communist regime of North Viet Nam (DRV) has sent to Africa some major exploratory missions since the spring of 1960 in order to reconnoiter the possibilities of achieving wide diplomatic recognition in the newly independent countries of that continent. The DRV has evidently concluded that the French-speaking nations offer a particularly inviting target for exchanges which would help to enhance North Viet Nam's status in the non-Communist world. Their knowledge of the French language is an important asset for this purpose. In addition the North Viet Nam's recent emergence from colonial status might also be useful to the Bloc but there is no evidence of active Soviet sponsorship of the North Viet Nam campaign.

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2. North Viet Nam established a diplomatic mission in Guinea in 1959 and in Mali early in 1961. Recent DRV exploratory probings indicate that North Viet Nam's immediate objective -- to secure wider recognition and diplomatic exchanges as expeditiously as possible -- may not be very difficult to attain. France, which itself maintains a diplomatic representative at Hanoi, probably would not interpose strong objections against DRV relations with the former French colonies in Africa. However, DRV Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem, who led a sizeable delegation to Africa in March-April 1961, met with indifferent success in his initial efforts to secure recognition. Foreign Minister Ung was received in very few of the former French African states and managed to extract a promise of diplomatic exchanges only from Morocco and a rather indefinite expression of interest from Tunisia and Senegal.

3. For the present, the greatest potential for DRV influence is confined to Guinea and Mali. The leaders of both nations have disagreed violently with France in the recent past and have proved highly receptive to aid offers and other connections with the Communist Bloc. The DRV

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concluded several cultural and trade payments agreements with Guinea earlier this year, as well as a cultural arrangement with Mali promising the latter needed teachers, lawyers, and doctors. However, the ability of North Viet Nam to make any meaningful contribution to these two African states is quite restricted. After a well publicized visit to the DRV by Sekou Toure' in 1960 and the existence of diplomatic ties for more than a year, the DRV Embassy at Conakry consists of only three officials. These officials have not established very close or effective relations with the Guineans. Moreover, Guinean President Sekou Toure', as well as Modibo Keita of Mali, are quite aware of the limited resources of North Viet Nam and almost certainly look directly to Moscow, Prague, and other major Bloc suppliers when in quest of Communist assistance.

4. Despite these negligible beginnings, the DRV probably will have more success in the not too distant future in securing acceptance and recognition among not only French-speaking, but other newly independent African states as well. The DRV makes no protest against concurrent recognition of South Viet Nam, and present indications are that Saigon has become reconciled to the inevitability of sharing diplomatic

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honors with Ho Chi Minh in Africa. For their part, the bulk of conservative African leaders, under mounting pressure by local radical nationalists to adopt neutralist foreign policies, will find recognition of the DRV an attractive means of demonstrating their neutrality in the Cold War.

5. Despite the advantage of the common use of the French language, the DRV has only limited capabilities for extending economic, technical, cultural, or other types of assistance to former French controlled African states. Moreover, while North Viet Nam can trade on its reputation as the champion of anti-French colonialism in Asia, most of the erstwhile French African territories maintain relatively harmonious relations with France and do not feel themselves in need of identification with the DRV.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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