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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
15 May 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

North Vietnamese Intentions in Regard to the War

Summary

The Vietnamese Communist leadership clearly retains its high level of motivation and displays every intention of continuing the war. Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants are convinced that they can outlast the US in Vietnam and they have programmed their tactics to fit that theory.

It is unlikely that the Communists will attempt to launch a direct, conventional ground attack across the Demilitarized Zone or that they will commit their assets in South Vietnam to one large campaign at any time in the near future. They are more likely to continue along basically the same lines as at present,

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attempting to wage a grinding war of attrition, which, they believe, sooner or later will force major concessions on the part of the US. To this end, they will probably continue to infiltrate sufficient replacement personnel to keep existing units at combat level and they will also move additional units to South Vietnam as needed to counter the introduction of more allied units.

There seems little chance in the foreseeable future that Hanoi will seek the commitment of large numbers of foreign combat troops for South Vietnam. It is always possible that for propaganda purposes, an "international brigade" will be formed and sent South but only the Chinese Communists are readily available in sufficient strength to pose an actual threat. Hanoi probably does not believe that foreign volunteers will be needed in South Vietnam and apparently does not expect the Chinese Communists would make troops available to fight in South Vietnam even if they were needed.

Judging from Hanoi's military plans for the next few months as revealed by a North Vietnamese officer who recently defected in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese believe that they can go on the offensive in the northern half of South Vietnam. Their experience

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over the past several years has undoubtedly confirmed their belief that the allied forces, with the men now in South Vietnam or with even a considerably expanded force, will not be able to drive the Communists from the field. They seem to believe that they can continue to fight as they have over the past several years, taking heavy casualties but inflicting increasing casualties on the US in return. Captured documents reveal that the North Vietnamese have concluded that a military stalemate will eventually result in a political victory for them because they believe the US will not be able to tolerate such a stalemate as long as they can.

In North Vietnam, Hanoi has already called in substantial foreign personnel to aid in the air defense system. Chinese Communist antiaircraft artillery units, North Korean jet fighter pilots, and Soviet surface-to-air missile operators have all been active thus far against US aircraft. In addition, on several occasions since late April Chinese Communist jet fighters have attempted to engage US aircraft operating over northeast North Vietnam. It is probable that Hanoi will call for further help in this field as the bombings do more and more damage and as North Vietnamese defense efforts prove inadequate.

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The North Vietnamese, however, are unlikely to call for foreign ground troops unless a US invasion should threaten the heartland of the DRV, the Red River Delta. There is a possibility that Hanoi would ask for Chinese troops to man defensive positions in the strategic delta area if the bulk of the North Vietnamese Army had to be committed in the southern area of the DRV. On balance, however, it is more likely that Hanoi would not deplete its own forces in the delta for operations farther south. In numerous articles over the past several years, North Vietnamese military leaders have discussed the possibility of a US invasion and have laid out the general outlines of the DRV response. The plan calls for the North Vietnamese to wage almost the same type of war that is being fought in the South, a mixture of conventional and guerrilla warfare. They believe that such tactics, together with the war in the South, would force the US to commit more men to the war than it would consider acceptable.

Should such tactics fail, the North Vietnamese leaders would undoubtedly call for the Chinese Communists to come to their aid. Despite the age-old antipathy of the Vietnamese for the Chinese, Hanoi's

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actions thus far in the war indicate that the present leaders would much prefer to see the Chinese enter North Vietnam in force than to suffer defeat by the US. When faced in early 1965 with the problem of whether to call for Chinese Communist help to offset US air strikes or to negotiate an end to the war as the US requested, Hanoi decided to invite the Chinese to send logistic and antiaircraft troops to North Vietnam to meet the attacks. Faced with the reality of an invasion by the US, there is little doubt that the North Vietnamese would appeal to the Chinese again.

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North Vietnam: Motivation and Intentions

1. The decision as to whether or not the Vietnamese Communists will persist in the war in South Vietnam rests with the 11 men who form the politburo of the Vietnam Workers Party. The determination shown by this small group in pursuing a war that has brought great destruction to North Vietnam as well as heavy losses to the ranks of Communists and their supporters in South Vietnam stems largely from two factors.

2. One is their complete and militant dedication to the precepts of Communism, including the most doctrinaire revolutionary aspects of Communist theory. In numerous public statements, the official party journals and leading party spokesmen have made it clear that the Vietnam Workers Party (VWP) rejects the Khrushchevian notion of "peaceful coexistence" as far as South Vietnam is concerned and that it opposes the "modern revisionist" advice that political methods are preferable to violent means in "wars of liberation." In the area of Communist ideology, the VWP has left no room for doubt that it is far closer in viewpoint to the philosophy of the Chinese Communists than to that of the USSR.

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3. Ho Chi Minh and his top lieutenants are battle-hardened revolutionaries who fought and defeated the French. They are convinced that their success was due in large measure to the fact that they correctly interpreted and properly applied Communist ideology to the situation in Vietnam. These men genuinely believe that the "immutable" laws of history, as interpreted by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao, have assigned them the duty--and the glory--of leading the Vietnamese people in a struggle for independence. They also see themselves as the battle front commanders in the world-wide struggle against the "number one imperialist," the US.

4. The second chief factor influencing Hanoi's determination is a strong spirit of nationalism, which finds its expression in bitter anti-Americanism. Ho and his aides are thoroughly convinced that the US deliberately set out to undermine the 1954 Geneva agreements and the provision therein for national elections in Vietnam in July 1956. The VWP hierarchy remains convinced that had those elections been held, Vietnam today would be united under a government headed by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnam Workers Party. They lay at the feet of the US the entire blame for

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the situation which developed after 1954, including the success of Ngo Dinh Diem in creating a viable government and particularly his increasingly effective campaign to roll up the Communist cadre left behind in the South after 1954.

5. The Vietnamese Communist leaders believe deeply that they were the victims of US duplicity in the years after 1954. They believe that they were fully justified in turning to the use of force in order to overthrow Diem and unify the country after the repeated refusal between 1954 and 1956, and even later, of Diem to respond to North Vietnamese offers to hold meetings preparatory to national elections. In their eyes, they had little choice but to take up arms once again against what they termed "My/Diem," roughly translated as "US-Diem." They do not see themselves as aggressors attempting to seize control of a neighbor nation but rather as the legitimate authorities of a national government denied control over half their country by a foreign invader. The initiation of US air strikes against North Vietnam in February 1965 and the introduction of US combat forces into South Vietnam in 1965 further inflamed

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the Hanoi leaders' feelings and reinforced their view that the US was bent on denying them their rightful place at the head of a unified Vietnam.

Current Evidence

6. That the North Vietnamese leaders are still fanatically devoted to their goal is indicated by all the current evidence on the subject. Recently captured North Vietnamese soldiers from the fighting near Khe Sanh in western Quang Tri Province, for example, state that three additional regiments from the 325th Division have moved across the Demilitarized Zone since March. The continued dispatch by North Vietnam of combat units to South Vietnam indicates that, at least over the next few months, Hanoi intends to stay in the fight. Moreover, the increased use in northern Quang Tri and the DMZ of Communist mortars and artillery, coupled with plausible reports that the Soviet Union has agreed to provide more artillery, adds further evidence of an intention to continue the fight.

7. Other similar indications include the early April trip to Moscow by DRV Premier Pham Van Dong during which he reportedly discussed additional Soviet

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military aid. The appearance of Chinese Communist jet fighters over northeast North Vietnam on several occasions beginning on 24 April and their efforts to engage US aircraft in that area--the first such actions since September 1966--suggests a North Vietnamese willingness to continue to rely heavily on Peking rather than agree to negotiate. [REDACTED]

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8. The negative results of US efforts to arrange peace talks with Hanoi further indicates Hanoi's intention to keep the war going. The North Vietnamese have consistently stuck to their refusal to offer some quid pro quo in return for a cessation of the bombings. Hanoi's release on 21 March of the exchange of letters between President Johnson and Ho

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Chi Minh was the act of a nation which had decided, at least for the time being, to reject the role of secret diplomacy in regard to a negotiated settlement of the war. Captured enemy documents giving details of Hanoi's attitude toward negotiations disclose that the North Vietnamese regard them primarily as a tactic to be used in conjunction with continued warfare in order to extract maximum concessions from the US. There is nothing in the documents to suggest that the North Vietnamese entertain any notion of withdrawing from South Vietnam as a result of negotiations.

9. It is, perhaps, inherent in the very fanaticism of the Vietnamese Communist leadership that they should prefer to make the war a test of wills. They are convinced that their motivation is stronger than that of the Americans. Thus, they have programmed their effort to take over South Vietnam to be a grinding war of attrition. They believe that a military stalemate in South Vietnam will suffice for their purpose, whereas, in Hanoi's assessment, the US must either win quickly or settle on terms favorable to the Communists.

10. Given this long range strategy, it appears unlikely that the North Vietnamese intend to make

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any dramatic military move such as an overt invasion across the DMZ in the near future. They are more likely to continue the same basic approach as in the past, infiltrating sufficient replacement personnel to keep existing units at combat level and introducing additional combat units to the South as needed to maintain or perhaps gradually exceed a relative balance with US and allied forces.

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11. [REDACTED] a North Vietnamese officer who recently defected, claims that Communist plans for the upcoming year include a major military campaign in the western highlands of Kontum and Pleiku. This is to be coordinated with two other moves in the northern half of the country. One will be a thrust in northern Quang Tri and Thua Thien and the other will be in the coastal areas of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. The North Vietnamese must realize that their successes, if any, in these campaigns will be relatively modest. They will probably be satisfied if these campaigns result in heavy US casualties, even at the cost of heavier Communist losses.

12. Captured documents, as well as articles in the press by North Vietnamese military leaders, disclose that there has been considerable concern among

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Vietnamese Communist leaders over the way the war in South Vietnam has been going. This concern has been manifested in a lengthy debate among the Communist military leaders over the proper military tactics to be used against US forces in South Vietnam. One group advocated a policy emphasizing large unit offensive actions directly against US units. Another group believed that the role of guerrilla warfare was being underplayed in the South.

13. For the present, judging both from Communist action in the field and from recent articles in the DRV press, a compromise solution has been reached--although some aspects of the debate appear to be continuing--with heavier emphasis being given to the guerrillas than in the past two years but primary weight is still being given to large unit actions.

14. One of the major points of dispute within the Vietnamese Communist military establishment has been the relative number of casualties the Communists believe they can afford to take in comparison with the losses of the allies. For example, Nguyen Chi Thanh, chief military and political officer for Communist forces in the South, in July 1966 criticized those who claimed that the Communists needed a two

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to one troop superiority in order to defeat an ARVN unit and at seven or even nine to one to defeat a US unit.

15. Complicating this problem for Hanoi is the difficulty in getting accurate details of the battlefield situation in the South. Captured documents indicate that local Communist commanders report their own losses accurately. There are some indications, however, that local commanders grossly exaggerate the number of casualties their units have inflicted on US units. Hanoi has several means at hand to overcome this problem. One is the fact that in recent months the Hanoi High Command has been greatly expanding its direct radio communications contacts with North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam. Hanoi has also been sending an increasing number of top level North Vietnamese general officers to command positions in the South. Moreover, total US strength figures are available to Hanoi not only through battlefield commands but also through an extensive and very competent intelligence network which seems to have penetrated all levels of the South Vietnamese Army. At present, therefore, it seems likely that Hanoi has a fairly good appreciation

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of the actual situation in the South.

Foreign Volunteers for South Vietnam

16. It is unlikely that Hanoi or its National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) will at any point seek substantial help from Communist China, the Soviet Union, or the rest of the Communist bloc in the form of combat personnel for the war in South Vietnam. In part this is because the Vietnamese Communist leadership appears confident that the manpower available to them in North and South Vietnam is sufficient to carry on the war. A recently captured notebook contained what appears to be notes from a lecture to Communist cadre in the South on Hanoi's "12th Central Committee resolution" on war policy. According to these notes, the Communist High Command anticipates that the US may raise its force level in South Vietnam to one or one-and-a-half million men. The Communists are confident that they can defeat even that large a force, according to the notebook, and no mention was made of foreign volunteers.

17. In part, Hanoi's attitude probably stems from a realization that no significant foreign ground combat force is likely to be made available for fighting in South Vietnam. Although there is always a

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possibility that at some point an international brigade type of volunteer unit will appear in South Vietnam at the behest of the NFLSV, such a unit would be primarily for propaganda rather than combat purposes.

18. Certainly Hanoi is under no illusions that the Soviet Union or any Eastern European country is going to send substantial ground forces to South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese also appear to believe that there is little prospect of significant Chinese Communist intervention in South Vietnam. A captured document containing an analysis of the war by party first secretary Le Duan pointed out that "South Vietnam's resources in manpower and material is in the north." Le Duan went on to state that it is possible the US will attempt to move into Laos in order to cut off the supply lines from the north to the south. He asserted that in such an event "the US troops would have to clash with the North Vietnamese main force." In neither case did Le Duan suggest that foreign troops would enter the fight.

19. Le Duan also stated his belief that the US had been encouraged in sending troops to South Vietnam by the fact that a situation existed in which

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"our camp's unity was seriously impaired," and therefore the US would not become "involved in a major war" encompassing the entire socialist bloc.

20. Another captured notebook, containing excerpts from a lecture by a Communist official named Vinh, asserted that the Chinese would enter the combat "if the war is expanded to North Vietnam," implying that China will not enter as long as the war is confined to the South. Thus, it is clear the leadership did not want to raise any hopes that the Chinese would step in to save the day for the Vietnamese in South Vietnam.

21. Hanoi's handling of the subject of foreign volunteers in its propaganda also suggests that it does not intend to raise any hopes among Viet Cong supporters in the South of massive Chinese intervention on their behalf. On 22 March 1965, the Central Committee of the NFLSV issued a statement containing a warning that it would call for foreign volunteers if the US and its allies continued to send troops to South Vietnam and continued "to expand the war to the North and Laos." When Hanoi rebroadcast this NFLSV statement, however, it added the caveat, "when needed." From then on, both the

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NFLSV and Hanoi inserted that or a similar caveat whenever referring to the possibility of foreign volunteers.

22. Moreover, after the summer of 1965, Hanoi appears to have attempted to lump the threat of foreign volunteers for South Vietnam together with the possibility of volunteers for the North. Hanoi spokesmen and news media now use such terms as "the Vietnamese people" will call for foreign volunteers "when needed," thus blurring the issue as to which half of Vietnam these volunteers would be sent. At no time have Vietnamese Communist spokesmen specified any point at which foreign combat personnel would be requested, and all available evidence suggests that Hanoi does not expect that point ever to be reached.

23. Even in the event that Communist main forces in South Vietnam were defeated and the guerrillas and political infrastructure destroyed, it is unlikely that Hanoi would call for Chinese Communist assistance in the form of combat personnel for the South. This is due, if for no other reason, to the fact that Hanoi undoubtedly understands that Peking would not respond favorably to such a request. Lin Piao's famous September 1965 treatise, "Long

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Live the Victory of the People's War," stated in unmistakable terms the Chinese position that oppressed peoples must wage wars of liberation--and Vietnam was held up as the prime example of such a war--largely with their own resources. Le Duan's letter, mentioned earlier, stated that one of the chief requirements facing the Communists is to "persuade the socialist bloc to be also resolute like us to foil the US aggression in the South," suggesting that Le Duan thought the rest of the bloc was not providing as much assistance as it might.

Foreign Combat Personnel for North Vietnam

24. North Vietnam has already accepted foreign air defense personnel and probably will ask for and receive additional help of this kind as the demands on its air defense system are increased. Foreign air defense personnel known to be in North Vietnam at present consist of Soviet surface-to-air missile operators, a few Soviet jet pilot trainers, North Korean combat jet pilots, and Chinese Communist antiaircraft artillery batteries. In addition, since late April, Chinese Communist MIGs have been engaging US aircraft over northeast North Vietnam.

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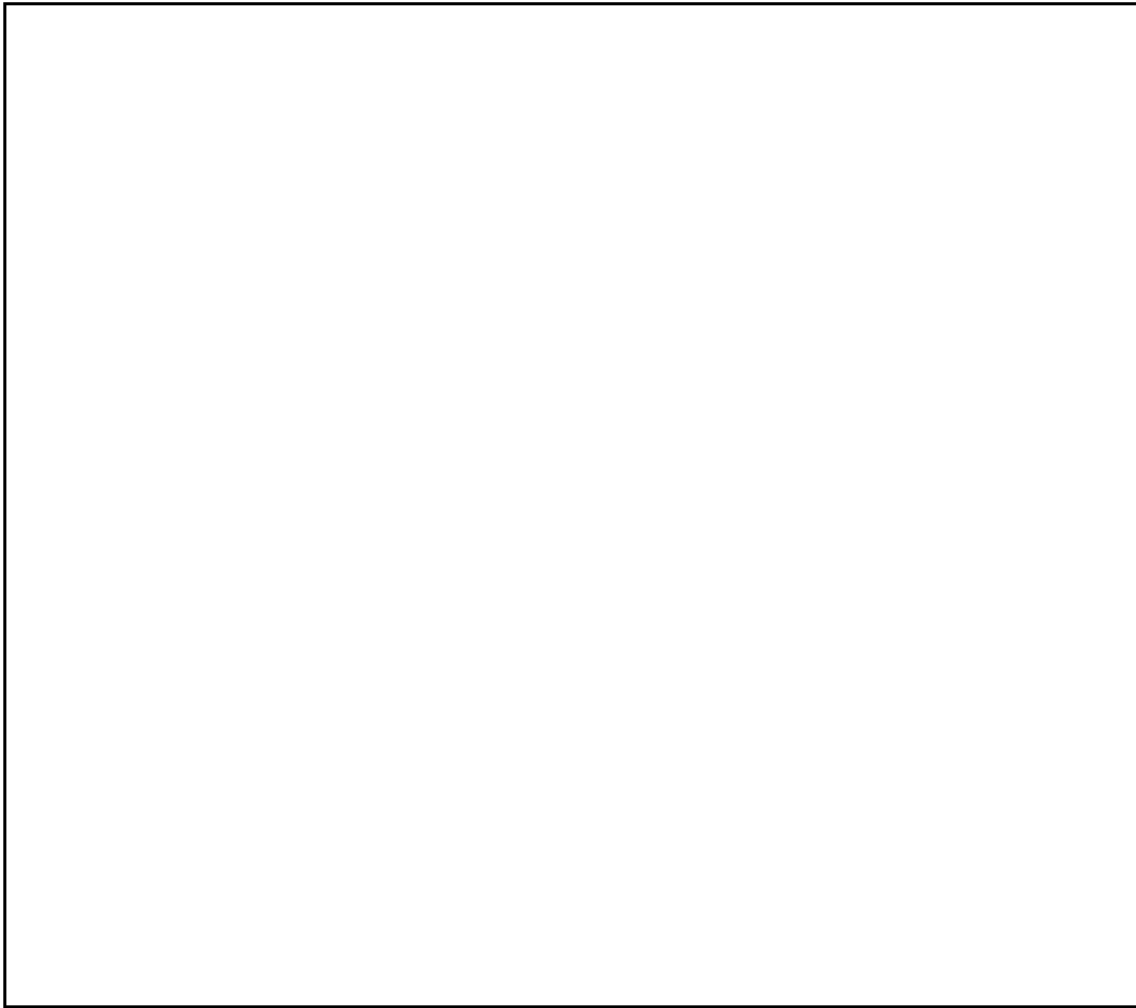
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26. Hanoi was probably motivated to seek foreign personnel to aid in its air defense because of its realization that its own efforts in this area were totally inadequate. When the first SAMs appeared in North Vietnam, there was abundant testimony [redacted] that the Vietnamese preferred to man the missiles themselves rather than to allow the Soviets to do so.

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In part, this was due to Hanoi's desire not to provoke the Chinese, who did not and still do not want to see substantial numbers of Soviets in North Vietnam.

27. When it became clear by June 1966, however, that North Vietnamese - fired missiles were not doing the job expected of them, the Soviets took over control of several operational sites. The Soviets claimed in private that their missiles were good and that the poor showing was due to the inability of the North Vietnamese to fire them properly. The Soviet missilemen, however, failed to score any better record of shootdowns. By September 1966 it appeared that North Vietnamese had resumed control over all the firing sites.

28. In the case of the Chinese, it is likely that Peking insisted on providing its own anti-aircraft defenses for its engineers working in North Vietnam. It is also likely that Hanoi was glad to have some help in this area, thus freeing its own anti-aircraft artillery resources for duty in other areas of the country. [redacted]

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30. If US air strikes continue to hit key targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, the North Vietnamese can be expected to request an additional commitment from their allies for air defense. This could include an appeal for Soviet and East European "volunteer" pilots, regular Soviet SAM units, a Cuban jet pilot contingent and Chinese Communist jet interceptor units as well as additional Chinese AAA.

31. There is little likelihood that US air strikes will bring the Hanoi regime to such straits that it will request the introduction of Chinese Communist ground combat forces into the war. The North Vietnamese have made extensive preparations for the evacuation of their government offices from Hanoi and have already begun to disperse some offices to the countryside. Even under the heaviest bombing attack, the regime could probably continue to function well enough to continue to support and direct the war in South Vietnam. After more than two years of intensive bombing, the North Vietnamese are still capable of moving substantial quantities of goods and men to South Vietnam and there is little reason to believe that this capability will diminish enough

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as the result of air strikes to end the war. Moreover, captured documents such as the notebooks mentioned above, state Hanoi's intention to confine the war to South Vietnam. Le Duan particularly dwelt on this aspect, calling it a duty of the Vietnamese Communists to contain the conflict within that area.

32. North Vietnam probably would not rule out a call for foreign ground force help (in practice this would have to be primarily Chinese) in the event of an invasion of its territory by US ground forces. The lecture by Vinh to Communist cadre in South Vietnam stated flatly that the Chinese Communists will enter the war if it is extended to North Vietnam. It should also be recalled that in 1965 Hanoi was faced with the decision of whether to ask for Chinese help, including the presence of large numbers of Chinese personnel, to cope with the effects of US air strikes. At that time, despite its ingrained antipathy to having large numbers of Chinese in their country, the North Vietnamese decided to invite in the Chinese. Faced with the even greater threat posed by a US invasion, it is likely that Hanoi will take the necessary step of inviting

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further Chinese presence. It is possible that Hanoi would call for Chinese troops to replace North Vietnamese forces sent to counter a US invasion of the southern DRV but it is more likely that Hanoi would wait until it determined whether the US forces intended to remain near the DMZ or whether they intended to move farther north. Hanoi would also wait until it made certain its own forces could not contain the US troops before calling in the Chinese.

33. Hanoi might also call for volunteers from other countries but only the Chinese could offer an effective ground combat force. Any Communist ground force operating in North Vietnam would be almost totally dependent on supplies coming through China.

34. In the event of a US invasion of North Vietnam, Hanoi could decide to opt for negotiations as proposed by the US. It is more likely, however, as long as Hanoi is convinced it can rely on the Chinese for support, ultimately including the commitment of ground troops, that the North Vietnamese would continue to fight. A number of articles written over the past several years by top-level North Vietnamese military leaders have addressed the question of how North Vietnam would handle an invasion

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by the US. They all indicate an intention to fight rather than negotiate in such an event. According to these articles, the North Vietnamese intend to use tactics similar to those used in South Vietnam.

35. Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap in an article published on 22 December 1964 stated that "if the enemy wages an aggressive war against North Vietnam...standardized warfare and guerrilla warfare will be simultaneously used in the war launched by our people to protect the fatherland." The deputy chief of the North Vietnamese Army's General Staff, Hoang Van Thai, wrote in December 1964 that "in case of war in North Vietnam," both "conventional and guerrilla warfare will be used." These and other such articles also stress the fact that Hanoi will wage a "protracted war" in its own defense, just as in South Vietnam. Other more recent articles by leading North Vietnamese echo this theme. They all reflect a determination on the part of the North Vietnamese leadership to fight such an invasion and the tactics they say will be used suggest that they believe, in combination with the war in South Vietnam, they can effectively wear down the US as they did the French.

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