

Approved For Release 2004/10/28 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000800040002-4

SAVA 73-7a

8 March 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. John Huizenga
Director, National Estimates

SUBJECT : 6 March Draft of NIE 50-73

1. I have just read the 6 March draft of NIE 50-73, "Southeast Asia and the Powers -- Issues for the Seventies." Since I will probably not be able to attend the representatives' meeting scheduled for 1400 on 8 March, I am sending this note to register my office's very strong objections to certain portions of the current estimate draft.

2. Overall the estimate strikes me as very long and rather diffuse. Given this length, the references it makes to Indochina, especially Vietnam, are extremely cursory. I realize this was actually the result of a deliberate, eminently defensible, choice -- since Indochina is to be the subject of a separate, somewhat later paper. Nothing in the current draft tells a reader this, however, hence an uninstructed reader would have every reason to wonder why a major area of Southeast Asian concern -- an area whose developments are certain to have impact on the whole region -- is given such cursory treatment.

3. Some of the key substantive judgments that are made about Indochina in this paper are -- in my opinion -- open to factual challenge or so elliptically phrased that they suggest conclusions which are highly debatable or (in some instances) dead wrong.

4. Conclusion C in the "Summary and Conclusions" section, for example, states that "the Soviets lack a foundation for acquiring a significant voice in the affairs of Laos and Cambodia." This is a rather curious statement given Souvanna's relations with the Soviets and the fact that the latter have an embassy, and presence, in Phnom Penh as well as Vientiane.

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5. Conclusion J says the mainland states of Southeast Asia "see Laos and Cambodia as the litmus test of Chinese intentions." No mention is made of Vietnam, which surely is -- and will be regarded -- as at least an equally important sign of Chinese intent. The next paragraph (K) says, "There is a good chance that the Chinese will want to cooperate in stabilizing the Indochina situation." But what does this mean? The greatest contribution China (and the USSR) could make to such stabilization would be to tell the North Vietnamese, pointedly, that they should concentrate for the medium term future on political -- not military -- struggle, reinforcing this suggestion with a constriction of military aid. There is no evidence whatsoever that the Chinese (or the Soviets) have yet taken any such action.

6. In paragraph 1 of the actual estimate, the text leads off with the phrase, "Cease-fires have been achieved in Vietnam and Laos and there may soon be a truce in Cambodia" A policy-level recipient of this prose could legitimately wonder whether its drafters live in the real world. Things may be reasonably (though not totally) quiet in Laos, and an agreement for Vietnam has been signed, but anyone saying "cease-fires have been achieved" in both countries does not read his mail.

7. Paragraph 5 of the estimate says that if Hanoi wants to resume significant military action "it must plan for greater self-sufficiency in war materiel -- or ensure the continued flow of large scale Chinese and Soviet military aid." The latter, certainly; but the former is nonsense. There is no way Hanoi can "plan for self-sufficiency" without building an industrial plant capable of manufacturing weapons, ammunition, artillery, tanks, etc. DRV has no such industrial base and developing one would take years.

8. Paragraph 11, particularly its footnote (3), raises a point that has long irritated me. That footnote's second paragraph leads off with the sentence:

"There is also a case to be made for the proposition that Chinese roadbuilding in Northwestern Laos since the late 1960's has been a response to concern in Peking over the possibility of military operations in this sector

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In my opinion, there is no plausible case whatsoever that can be made for this proposition. For one thing, there were no such units operating anywhere near the area in question prior to 1970. For another, it defies logic and common sense to argue that the Chinese built the north Laos road complex, with eight engineer regiments protected by an infantry regiment and three AAA divisions because they were fearful of small bands [redacted]

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a. I have long felt that our whole institutional analytic approach to the Chinese road is rooted in doctrinaire theology: The Chinese are peaceful folk with no irridentist ambitions, therefore anything they do along their southern borders which might look bellicose, menacing or imperialist to an ignorant layman must -- by definition -- be the result of some prior U.S. provocation.

b. It seems to me dangerous for an intelligence agency to wed itself to a theological position into which evidence is subsequently shoe horned. I would have thought it much better in this instance (and all others) to start with the observed facts of behavior, in this case Chinese behavior, and try to develop plausible hypotheses to account for that behavior. In the case of the Chinese road, plausible hypotheses are not hard to develop at all. Surely the pattern of Chinese behavior in Laos, and Burma, indicates -- among other things -- a nervousness about China's southern boundaries and a desire to protect them in the classic great power fashion of establishing buffer spheres of influence along them, a policy motivated by the hard-headed, real-politik view that any fighting that might have to be done to protect one's borders is better done on someone else's territory. Furthermore, I quite fail to see why we stubbornly resist acknowledging that one purpose to which the north Laos road complex certainly could be put would be that of supporting trans-Mekong insurgent activity in Thailand.

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9. On the specific, and major, question of Vietnam, the current draft makes -- or implies -- three important substantive judgments which I think are, at a minimum, highly debatable.

a. In paragraph 78 and 79, the paper implies that Thieu and the GVN will lose any political struggle with the Communists even if the latter do not make further resort to military action. This implication is conveyed by the unadorned statement that "few regional leaders are optimistic on this matter." There is no companion statement indicating what the U.S. intelligence community thinks and the possibility that Thieu and the GVN might win a political struggle is not even mentioned as a possibility, let alone discussed. I am not suggesting that the paper should argue that the GVN necessarily will win any such struggle, but I do feel legitimate issue can be taken with what any cold reader could easily construe as the clearly implied conclusion that a Communist political victory is somehow foreordained.

b. In the same paragraphs (78 and 79), the current draft also implies that a Communist success "some months hence" in toppling Thieu and replacing him with a coalition under strong Communist influence, would have minimal regional impact since such a chain of events would "not come as a shock" to other regional leaders. The argument is then advanced that if -- and the language suggests this should be construed in the sense of "only if" -- U.S. conduct somehow appeared to contribute to Thieu's fall would other regional leaders be disturbed. This argument strikes me as emanating from cloud cuckoo land. "Some months hence" presumably translates as "less than a year." If the Communists should effect a political takeover in South Vietnam in less than a year, I think the impact throughout the rest of Southeast Asia would be major. Furthermore, under any such time-scaled scenario, U.S. conduct would inevitably be read as having contributed in a major way to Thieu's and the GVN's defeat.

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c. In paragraph 94, the paper contends that "A Communist takeover in Saigon . . . would have less impact regionally than the fall of Vientiane or Phnom Penh." With all due respect to the estimate's drafters, this is arrant nonsense. The fall of Saigon and emergence of a unified, Communist controlled Vietnam would have a profound impact throughout the whole region, and far beyond. Furthermore, if Vietnam were to be unified under Vietnamese Communist control, the Lao Dong Party would soon establish de facto suzerainty over Laos and Cambodia, whose governments would soon be reduced to the status of satellites in the orbit of their irresistibly powerful Vietnamese neighbors. Thus a "fall" of Saigon would almost inevitably portend some form of "fall" for Phnom Penh and Vientiane, though the converse is not necessarily true.

10. I realize it is late in the game, but I feel very strongly that the DCI should not be asked to sign off on this estimate without some attention first being paid to the points outlined above.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Copies to
Mr. Proctor
Mr. Walsh

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VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 8 March 1973

TO: The Director

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT: Southeast Asia Estimate Draft

REMARKS:

Attached is a copy of a note I have sent to ONE that should be self-explanatory. At this stage, I would counsel against any direct intervention on your part. If the paragraphs flagged are not modified in the version eventually submitted for your consideration, however, I think you should not sign off on the document as your estimate.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

cc: General Walters
Mr. Colby

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- 1 - VAS Chrono

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