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North Vietnam's Military Intentions During  
the Next Three to Six Months

Overview

Throughout the war in Indochina, research on North Vietnam's military and economic resources has provided some insight into the enemy's strategic military intentions. However, such resources have generally been well in excess of actual requirements, and, therefore, the estimative process has necessarily taken many factors into account beyond those related to raw military capability alone. Analysis of capabilities has provided a reasonable view of what the enemy could do and what the enemy could not do, but only a limited perspective of what he might do.

In the current very fluid situation, it is possible to make only the most tenuous judgments about North Vietnam's intended resource allocation plans, but the traditional bellwethers of military preparedness -- manpower recruitment, logistical activity, and economic priorities -- do permit a few conclusions concerning North Vietnam's military outlook in the very near term. The following discussion concerns these three aspects of military capability and what they tell us about North Vietnam's intentions over the next three to six months.

The overall view expressed in this memorandum is that North Vietnam has yet to make a clear and unequivocal commitment to peace. Indeed, there are many signs that Hanoi continues to

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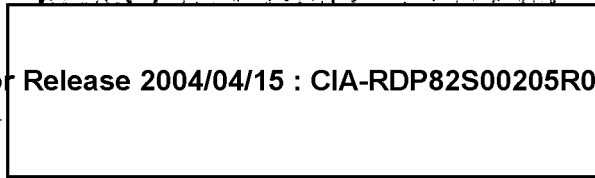
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pursue a deliberate (though not frenetic) policy of military preparedness. None of our evidence points to the kind of manpower and logistic buildup that we observed prior to the TET Offensive in 1968 and the Spring Offensive in 1972. Such activity that we do observe, however, does not preclude the possibility of resumption of military endeavors by North Vietnam at an uncomfortably heavy pace. Countering this evidence, there are certain signs of growing interest in economic reconstruction and related "peacetime" pursuits (though very little actual performance). We have yet to see any economic rebuilding which could be unequivocally read as "peacetime" oriented. Indeed, we are reminded that a major economic rebuilding program was underway full tilt during the two years prior to the massive commitment of North Vietnam's military strength in South Vietnam.

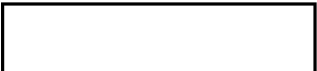
In a word, Hanoi currently exhibits a wait-and-see attitude. If opportunities arise for a pursuit of its political objectives by military means, the resources are in place and ready. Whether or not they will be used depends on a number of political factors unrelated to the resources situation: notably, what would be the consequences. At the least, the judgment must by now be firmly implanted in the minds of North Vietnam's leaders that any blatant resumption of main force military activities would lead to prompt and massive retaliation by the US. In the final analysis, this consideration may be a highly persuasive one to Hanoi.

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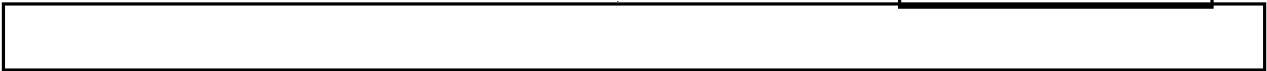
Logistics

The Communists' logistic position in South Vietnam, while strong, has not yet been rebuilt to the peak attained just before the 1972 Spring Offensive. The current logistic effort, however, probably is ahead of that achieved by this time last dry season and, if sustained for the next several months, the North Vietnamese would be capable of logistically supporting a major military activity throughout much of the country. Although postcease-fire reporting has been inconsistent, we believe that significant supply movements are continuing.


Beginning on 28 January, detected logistic activity in the Vinh area was curtailed sharply. By 2 February, however, vehicle (and rail) activity had returned to significant levels, and although some supplies previously destined for South Vietnam have been diverted to northern Laos, 


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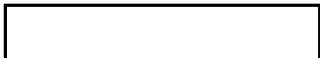
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 To date, there have been no indications that the logistical system built along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and its extensions is being dismantled. In any event, the North Vietnamese probably could withdraw 75% of their logistic personnel and still maintain a high level of resupply in a non-bombing environment.

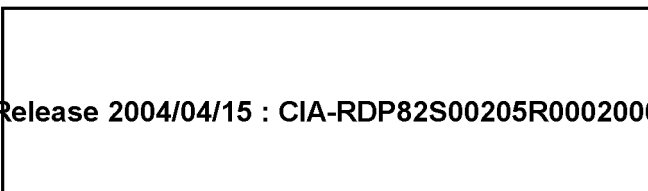
In the North Vietnam border areas, 

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sustained vehicle activity moving into southern



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Laos -- particularly through the Ban Karai Pass. Inside Laos there have been sporadic but significant reflections of activity:

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on 3 and 5 February, large-scale vehicle activity was detected in the eastern Panhandle.

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There is evidence of Communist supply movements across South Vietnam's borders farther south.

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On 4 February 75 loaded trucks were observed moving south from Cambodian border base areas toward the Tay Ninh Province/GVN MR-3 area. Moreover, in Communist-controlled parts of Quang Ngai Province, there are recent indications that over-the-beach infiltration of supplies is occurring. To reduce the logistics burden from external sources, the Communists apparently intend to procure more goods internally than in the

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past by improving access to local markets and in manufacturing small ordnance items in workshops in southern South Vietnam.

The Communists have undertaken other measures to ensure the continuing viability of their logistic system. Between 15 and 23 January, they restored through rail service from the China border to Vinh. Air defenses have been bolstered by the emplacement of at least three operational SA-3 missile sites forming a defensive ring around Hanoi -- the first such sites detected in North Vietnam -- and major redeployments of NVA air defense elements into and within southern Laos may signal significantly improved protection for lines of communication there. Finally, the North Vietnamese are resuming maritime activities -- domestic and international. At least four ships already are lightering their cargo outside the minefields near Haiphong. Along the southern coast of North Vietnam, a flurry of coastal watercraft has been detected recently -- reminiscent of the post-Rolling Thunder period. All of these developments should enhance North Vietnam's short- and long-term logistic capabilities.

In summary, the North Vietnamese logistic system has been operating in high gear for several months, and there does not appear to have been a marked slowdown coincident with the cease-fire. Tens of thousands of tons of supplies have been put in the logistics pipeline along with large amounts of armor and artillery. The result is that substantial quantities

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of supplies have already filtered into most parts of South Vietnam, and as the peak dry season months progress, a sustained effort would place the North Vietnamese in an extremely strong logistic position.

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Manpower

Manpower indicators, both in North Vietnam and throughout Indochina, suggest that North Vietnam intends to maintain a strong military posture while warily observing cease-fire developments. Most evidence suggests that Hanoi's likely path in South Vietnam for the immediate future will be keyed to defense and consolidation of occupied areas, strengthening of the infrastructure, command reorganization, and maintenance of a capability to resume main force offensive activity, should that decision be taken. The principal constraints under which North Vietnam operates are not those of manpower availability or forces in-place but are considerations of possible US retaliation for serious and protracted cease-fire violations and a reduced ability to conduct main force warfare in all but GVN MR-1 -- owing to heavy losses suffered during the 1972 offensive.

Capabilities

In North Vietnam, available evidence suggests a rather normal pattern of recruiting practices following the cease-fire agreement. The traditional December-January induction phase apparently continued through mid-January in some provinces, with only minor dislocation resulting from LINEBACKER II. Limited evidence suggests that the spring induction phase -- which normally commences in March-April -- will be held as

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scheduled. For example, a 17 January Hanoi Moi article states that "youth were making themselves physically fit to be ready to leave for military service during the spring inductions." If the North Vietnamese are consistent with past practice, the spring induction phase will be roughly the same order of magnitude as that of the December-January phase. Since raw manpower availability is not considered a significant constraint in Hanoi's ability to maintain a high level of military preparedness, the induction indicator suggests that the enemy will maintain inductions at a level commensurate with his view of manpower needs in the south. Currently, there does not appear to be a "crash" recruitment program, supporting the view that Hanoi is "watching and waiting."

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Given the current Communist order of battle and force distribution, VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam have a reduced capability over the next three to six months to initiate the type of major offensive operations that existed in the spring of 1972. This appears to be the case throughout South Vietnam, except for northern MR-1, where enemy combat forces are estimated to have been brought back up to about peak offensive strength. This is not to say that the Communists could not score some temporary gains by seizing additional territory if they chose to violate the cease-fire, particularly in the more rural areas held by GVN territorial forces or where ARVN forces are spread thin. They also have the capability for temporary LOC interdiction and rocket and sapper attacks on urban areas. VC/NVA forces probably would not be able to take and hold any major, well-defended GVN target -- as exemplified by the recent military confrontation over Tay Ninh City.

### Intentions

#### Military

At the present time, the signs indicating North Vietnam's possible courses of action in the near future are clearly mixed. There is evidence of intentions to make use of the military forces in place in South Vietnam to build a political base for a struggle in that sphere; there is equally good evidence of planning for military contingencies.

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Throughout South Vietnam the VC and NVA forces are basically in a defensive military posture. What limited information we have suggests that Communist intentions in the near term are to strengthen command structures of units now deployed and to hold onto territory now occupied. Communist local forces apparently intend to continue to take advantage of targets of opportunity in populated areas. Beyond this, there is no current evidence to suggest more elaborate military plans in the next three to six months. However, in many parts of South Vietnam -- particularly MRs 1 and 2 -- substantial main force offensive activity could be launched with little or no advanced warning.

#### Political

Throughout South Vietnam there have been indications that the Communists are devoting a substantial portion of their efforts to rebuilding the VC political apparatus, and the North Vietnamese are assisting in this effort. In Phu Yen Province, for example, the VC are selecting their most trusted "hard-core" cadre to become permanent residents of a particular hamlet or village primarily to ensure a greater degree of VC political control during the cease-fire period. In Quang Ngai Province, the Communists have created a new organization tasked with the responsibility for waging a political struggle during the early stages of the cease-fire period. Entitled the "Vietnamese People's United Committee in South Vietnam," this apparatus is to encompass a number of previously established

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sections of the VC political organization at the district level and below, such as those for security, military proselyting, and propaganda, as well as a province-level committee for administrative purposes. Efforts such as these are undoubtedly being launched in other provinces of the country and probably will intensify in coming months.

A COSVN resolution issued late in January has focused on the importance of the political struggle, emphasizing such political activities as local proselyting and subverting the GVN's local militia forces. However, the resolution also emphasizes the continued development of the Communist combat forces in case hostilities resume or clashes with ARVN occur.

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Economic

In inspecting economic factors that might provide evidence of North Vietnam's intentions, it is important to remember that the Vietnam cease-fire is a new learning experience for Hanoi. The sorts of contingencies for which Hanoi will plan over the next 3 to 6 months will be constantly sifted and re-evaluated in the light of the emerging new relationships with Washington and Saigon and a better understanding of their respective positions.

At the present time, the most that can be said is that North Vietnam has yet to get a large-scale industrial reconstruction program off the ground. We have seen some evidence of the return of a few technicians from other Communist countries and the makeshift repair of vital electric power facilities, but as yet no signs that major rebuilding is underway. This circumstance could simply reflect the delays associated with the sheer complexities of deciding on long-range industrial policies, Hanoi's uncertainty as to the risk which would be involved in such an undertaking, and such retarding factors as a relative shortage of skilled planners and engineers. Unfortunately, from the point of view of judging North Vietnam's intentions, Hanoi's "hesitancy" could equally reflect a determination to resume military action that might risk US bombing reprisal.

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Whether or not the North Vietnamese intend to work generally within the frame of the peace settlement, they will probably begin their reconstruction efforts by surveying damage and determining what machinery has been saved or can be salvaged. Should they conclude that consolidating the currently dispersed industry is an acceptable risk, they would then need to choose sites for the use of the surviving equipment, assemble work forces for both cleanup and subsequent plant operation, and relocate some transportation equipment for factory supply and distribution. Such a major program would, at a minimum, take 3 or 4 months, even if done hastily.

As the North Vietnamese develop a longer experience with freedom from bombing and mining, certain more clearly defined courses of action reflecting a commitment to peacetime planning may emerge. For example, if the DRV intends to adhere to the broad terms of the cease-fire, they would likely feel it safe to redevelop extractive industries for mineral exports. This could entail inviting Japanese and other non-Communist raw material buyers to discuss seriously repair and expansion of existing facilities. Other projects that might at least get underway in the next 6 months should the North Vietnamese feel they probably had a final surcease from US bombing and/or mining would include: resuming work on the Bac Giang Chemical Fertilizer Plant, which was at an advanced stage of construction

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in 1965 but has since lain idle; repairing damage at the Viet Tri Chemical Complex, the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Combine, and textile plants at Nam Dinh and Hanoi; going ahead with plans to build a new capital city, on which work was initiated in 1971. At this point, none of the above steps has been observed.

We should, of course, bear in mind that the North Vietnamese officialdom and press have already commenced speaking in glowing terms of reconstruction. Similarly, Hanoi has already begun to solicit economic aid for reconstruction. This sort of activity will, by itself, demonstrate very little, however, for much of the machinery and equipment needs in a reconstruction period are consistent with remobilization of new warfare, and there is no serious domestic cost to broad discussion of reconstruction.

The evidence on Viet Cong actions in the economic field in the postcease-fire period is becoming a bit clearer, but it says relatively little about military intentions per se. The temptation is strong to suggest that current VC plans for an economic "offensive" represent a channeling of the conflict into new lines. However, the reported plans of the VC to offer loans, land, and free food and tools to lure South Vietnamese into their areas and to disrupt commodity sales in GVN-held areas could as well neatly complement a continued pattern of purposeful and well-planned cease-fire violations.

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