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Copy No.
19 January 1979

ALERT MEMORANDUM

83

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Security Council
SUBJECT: China-Vietnam-USSR

Attached for your information is an alert memorandum on China-Vietnam-USSR. The Chinese appear to be completing a deployment of forces and a propaganda groundwork that will enable them to take military action against Vietnam at a time of their choosing. There are formidable political objections to such action but considerations of prestige appear to play an important part in Chinese calculations. Should the Chinese initiate action, a drive into Vietnam followed by relatively rapid withdrawal is the most likely option. Action could occur even before Vice Premier Deng's visit to the US. Soviet response to a Chinese attack on Vietnam will be contingent on the extent and severity of the Chinese action.

Stansfield Turner
STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachment: [Redacted]

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

[redacted]
Copy No.
19 January 1979

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ALERT MEMORANDUM

CHINA-VIETNAM-USSR

Since our Alert Memorandum of 5 January, which warned of possible direct Chinese military action against Vietnam, China has continued its military buildup along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier. The manner of the buildup, its timing and the mix of forces involved suggest offensive rather than defensive preparations. Chinese propaganda is building a case that the Vietnamese are intruding on Chinese territory, and Chinese officials abroad are spreading the word that China is prepared to "strike hard" in retaliation for Vietnamese troublemaking. A few officials have asserted that China is deliberately seeking an occasion to "teach the Vietnamese a lesson." In sum, the Chinese appear to be completing a deployment of forces and a propaganda groundwork that will enable them to take military action against Vietnam at a time of their choosing. [redacted]

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There are formidable political objections to such action. The Chinese must weigh the impact of military action on Sino-US ties and the risk of undermining domestic support in the US for the normalization arrangements just worked out. China must also consider possible Soviet reaction to any action against Vietnam, as well as the effectiveness of the Cambodian resistance. Considerations of Chinese prestige and a desire not to be considered a "paper tiger" by nations in Southeast Asia, on the other hand, appear to play an important part in Chinese calculations. These points have particularly been stressed by the more candid Chinese officials. [redacted]

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Should the Chinese initiate action against Vietnam, they would certainly attempt to avoid a protracted conflict with their southern neighbors. A drive into Vietnam territory, limited in time and distance, followed by a relatively rapid withdrawal, in the manner of China's 1962 conflict with India, is the most likely option. We still cannot rule out more forceful action nor can we rule out a miscalculation that would make an early Chinese withdrawal difficult, thus extending and raising the level of action. The Chinese could strike at any time -- even before Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-ping) arrives in the US. [REDACTED]

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Soviet media, while maintaining a drumfire of criticism of Peking for border provocations against Vietnam and for using military pressure, including troop concentrations, in an effort to "intimidate" Vietnam, have avoided addressing the contingency of direct Chinese military action against Vietnam, much less characterizing it as imminent.

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The failure of Soviet media to raise the Chinese attack contingency, relieving Moscow of the need to address the question of Soviet response, suggests either that the Soviets do not regard it as a serious possibility, or if they do, that they wish to avoid committing themselves to any particular course of action in response. In any case, they have not issued any clear public warning designed to deter Peking.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

We believe the Soviet response to any Chinese attack on Vietnam will be contingent on the extent and severity of the Chinese action and its political effects. The USSR may conclude that a shallow and short-lived Chinese incursion would not threaten important Soviet interests and might generate important political benefits for Moscow and Hanoi without requiring more than demonstrative measures of support for Vietnam, short of direct military action. Such measures might include consultations, additional conspicuous aid, a naval show of force, and troop movements on the Soviet side of the border. A deeper and more sustained Chinese invasion would be more likely to evoke more significant Soviet actions. These might include demonstrative air and ground patrolling, and ultimately to some sort of military action, probably measured, for example, reoccupation of one or more of the Sino-Soviet border river islands now held by the Chinese.

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Top Secret [redacted]
The Director of Central Intelligence

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Washington, D.C. 20505

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Copy
5 January 1979

ALERT MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Security Council
SUBJECT: China-Vietnam

Attached for your information is an alert memorandum on China-Vietnam.

Stansfield Turner
STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachment: [redacted] 25X1

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[redacted]

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Top Secret [redacted]

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

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Copy
5 January 1979

ALERT MEMORANDUM

CHINA-VIETNAM

[redacted]

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Beijing's inability to forestall the Vietnamese invasion amounts to a major setback to Chinese prestige and security interests. The Chinese likely feel compelled to demonstrate in some tangible way their determination to resist any further expansion of Vietnamese "hegemony" and shore up China's credibility as an Asian power. To this end the Chinese are preparing to support resistance forces based in the western half of Kampuchea and hope to embroil Vietnam in a costly and protracted military involvement in Kampuchea. [redacted]

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In considering their next move, the Chinese must weigh the political and economic costs of a protracted military conflict with Vietnam. The Chinese may choose to engineer a strong localized demonstration of Chinese power along the frontier--perhaps the temporary occupation of disputed territory as they did in India in 1962. But we cannot rule out more forceful action such as Chinese airstrikes deeper into the country. Nor can we rule out miscalculation that could lead to a level of conflict both sides would prefer to avoid. [redacted]

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If the Chinese escalate the level of hostilities, we would expect Moscow to respond first by conspicuously stepping up its military aid to Vietnam, by making a naval show of force off the coast of Vietnam, perhaps even a port visit, and by holding high-level consultations under Article Six of the recently concluded Friendship Treaty. If none of the above appeared to be deterring the Chinese, the Soviets might then begin a campaign of intimidation along the Sino-Soviet border--including demonstrative military air and ground patrolling, military maneuvers and ultimately, some sort of limited military provocation. [redacted]

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PROCEDURES FOR PREPARING AN ALERT MEMORANDUM

Attached are interim technical procedures for producing Alert Memoranda. NIO/W wants to emphasize that these memoranda normally have a high priority and should be produced and disseminated as quickly as possible.

1. Alert NFAC Registry that an Alert Memorandum is being prepared and give them an approximate time when they can expect it.
2. Get an Alert Memo # from NFAC Registry.
3. If codeword, get appropriate # from NFAC Registry.
4. Give NFAC Registry a copy of the Alert Memorandum distribution (see attachment) on which you have filled in the appropriate office designations on Pages 2, 3 and 4.
5. The length of the Alert Memorandum will be kept to a minimum; therefore it is the responsibility of the appropriate NIO secretary to type the copy.
6. When the Alert Memorandum is typed, include on the first page the standard footnote which explains the purpose and reason for an Alert Memorandum (see attachment). (This footnote will be modified and reduced in size in the near future.)
7. The Alert Memorandum package will consist of the Alert Memo itself with a covering memo for the DCI's signature transmitting the document to the NSC (see attachment).
8. The correct clearance procedure for an Alert Memorandum is as follows:
 - A. Appropriate NIO
 - B. NIO for Warning (can be omitted when matter is urgent)
 - C. Director, NFAC
 - D. DDCI
 - E. DCI (for signature)
9. NFAC Registry will be responsible for the following procedures:
 - A. Issuing appropriate Alert Memo and Codeword numbers.
 - B. Xeroxing the copies for distribution.
 - C. Xeroxing coversheets (if appropriate).
 - D. Distributing copies both inside and outside the Agency.

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Next 4 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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Washington, D. C. 20505

(Date)

ALERT MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Security Council

SUBJECT : (Alert Memo Title)

1. _____

2. _____

STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachment

NI IAM _____

ORIGINAL CL BY _____

DECL REVIEW ON _____

DATE FOR REVIEW _____

REASON _____

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

Date

ALERT MEMORANDUM*

(Title)

**The Alert Memorandum is an interagency publication issued by the Director of Central Intelligence on behalf of the Intelligence Community. The Alert Memorandum was in use from 1974 through 1976 and the procedures for this intelligence alerting device were last approved by the United States Intelligence Board on 9 January 1975. I recently reorganized the warning structure within the Intelligence Community and appointed a National Intelligence Officer for Warning to oversee the development of procedures and to assist the Community in developing an increased awareness of its warning responsibilities. The revival of the Alert Memorandum is undertaken as a part of those responsibilities. Comments on the procedures for warning should be addressed to the National Intelligence Officer for Warning [] STAT*

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