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ANNEX 12

THE EFFECT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION
ON VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PLANS AND OPERATIONS

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ANNEX X

THE EFFECT OF THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CLIMATE ON
VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PLANS AND CAPABILITIES

I. World Public Opinion

The evidence shows that the Vietnamese Communists believe popular opposition throughout the Western world to US policy in Vietnam can be an important factor in restraining the allied hand against the insurgents. Virtually every significant Vietnamese Communist statement on war strategy has stressed the necessity of mustering the maximum amount of world opposition against allied--principally US--action in the conflict.*

Also significant in the eyes of the Vietnamese Communists are the "liberation movements" and other outbreaks of civil unrest and rebellion which occur elsewhere in the world against Western authorities. Hanoi and the Viet Cong see these, in part, as developments which hopefully will draw a direct American military or economic reaction which will distract and weaken the US war effort in Vietnam.** Such "people's action" is also regarded as encouraging the morale

*In an important speech setting forth the DRV's terms for settling the war in April 1965, for example, Premier Pham Van Dong devoted nearly a quarter of his address to this theme. "Strong and unrelenting opposition" from the "world's people," Dong said, "has the effect of checking and repelling" the "aggressive and warmongering plots" of the enemy. In the face of this opposition, he claimed, "the rear" of the enemy is "disintegrating" and "contradictions" in his ranks are increasing.

**According to the DRV chief of staff, Van Tien Dung, the US cannot put "all its economic and military potential" into action in Vietnam if it has to "cope with the situation in many other countries and in many fields...to repress other peoples."

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of the Communist rank and file in Vietnam by demonstrating that they are not alone in their opposition to Western "imperialism and colonialism." Largely for these reasons, Hanoi has frequently urged greater cooperation and unified action by the Soviet Union and China during the last two years in support of the world "liberation movements." The North Vietnamese apparently consider such action a matter of great significance to Vietnamese Communist interests, since North Vietnamese usually refrain from offering advice to the rest of the bloc.

If the situation in Vietnam develops to the point where the Vietnamese Communists are forced to make a decision on whether to continue to support large-scale insurgency in the South, it is probable that their estimate on the extent of world popular opposition to allied policy in Vietnam and of the strength of the various "liberation movements" would be a significant factor in influencing their decision. It would, however, almost certainly not be a critical factor.

II. Domestic Opposition in the United States

A more important issue in any Vietnamese decision on continuing the war would be the extent and effect of opposition to American policy from within the United States. It is clear that the Vietnamese realize general Western agitation against the allies will never be particularly effective unless accompanied by important opposition in the US.*

The Vietnamese Communists do not view this opposition as simply a manifestation of moral reticence among American intellectuals and leftists over Washington's war policy, but also believe that important opposition may develop as a result of the economic pinch of the war on the American public and business, and that such opposition may be further fanned by the continuing American casualties in Vietnam. It is clear that the Vietnamese believe the US will

*This has repeatedly been a theme of Vietnamese propaganda in such assertions as "the struggle of the American people plays an important role in the common struggle of the peoples to check the acts of the US Government in Vietnam."

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be forced to go on an extensive wartime footing eventually and that this will greatly increase domestic opposition.*

There have been other indications in private that the Vietnamese believe domestic opposition in the US, if developed strongly, would seriously inhibit US war options. Vietnamese Communist cadres have been told by their leaders that the "increase in anger in world opinion over US activities in Vietnam" could be "among the more important factors," in addition to "casualties and economic costs," which would cause the "American government to desist and decide to give up and get out."**

It is hard, however, to assess just how far the Vietnamese Communist inner councils really believe domestic opposition to US war policy has developed to date. In their view of the American situation, the Vietnamese are doubtless influenced to some extent by their overall lack of sophistication on American politics and by their earlier successful experience in bringing significant pressure from French public opinion to bear on French war policy in 1953-1954. In private conversations with visitors to Hanoi, the North Vietnamese have sometimes compared the present war with their own experiences against the French.

Their lack of sophistication and eagerness to seize on evidence of mounting US domestic opposition can perhaps

*We have the word of North Vietnamese party first secretary, Le Duan, on this. Late last year, he told a visiting Western Communist that he was sure the US would have to mobilize a reserve force of 1,200,000 men in order to support a force of 400,000 men in Vietnam. The US, he said, could not maintain that kind of war effort without being forced eventually by opinion in the US to re-examine and change its policy.

**Western statesmen have been told by Vietnamese Communist spokesmen that they believed the opposition to US policy shown by some congressional leaders and by well-known American journalists indicated a basic "lack of confidence" in the administration's policy. According to the Vietnamese, the "US is suffering from a lack of a clear objective which would unify American public opinion" behind the American policy on Vietnam.

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best be seen in their reaction to the American student protests over Vietnam policy which reached at least an initial peak in the fall of 1965. There was an increasing air of optimism over the strength of the student agitation in Vietnamese Communist propaganda at that time, capped by an announcement from Hanoi on 24 October that a "united front of the Vietnamese and American people has de facto taken shape." The propaganda strongly suggested that the Vietnamese were overreading the extent and depth of the protests in the US.* It is possible that the optimistic tone of the propaganda was intended in part to give a boost to the Vietnamese rank and file by demonstrating the sympathy which allegedly exists for their position in the enemy's own camp.

There has been some evidence in Vietnamese Communist materials during 1966 of substantial realism regarding the potential for domestic opposition in the US. This could be seen, for example, in General Vo Nguyen Giap's assessment of the war situation in the DRV party journal in January 1966. Giap placed US domestic opposition last when reviewing American weaknesses in the war. He indicated that the opposition would exercise a restraining effect on American options in Vietnam, but implied that it would not be decisive in determining US staying power in the conflict. Giap placed more emphasis on US limitations in maintaining strong economic and military positions throughout the world while pursuing a large-scale commitment in Vietnam. He did not, however, assess even this latter problem as critical in determining the outcome of the conflict.**

*Communist misjudgment of American opinion was also evident in Hanoi's threats recently to take punitive action against US flyers, and in its public abuse of the pilots. When Hanoi realized the depth of feeling in the US over the issue, it hastily stopped its propaganda regarding trials. Its willingness to do so is indicative of the importance it assigns to influencing US opinion.

**In private, visiting Western officials in Hanoi have been given much the same line during the past few months. One official was told that the DRV was "not counting" on US opinion to win the war. The same theme has been reflected
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It would appear that the Vietnamese Communist leadership does not expect any important difficulties for Washington in the near future, at least, as a result of popular opposition to the war or because of economic/military stresses caused by the conflict in the United States. Thus, in any basic decision taken on the war by the Vietnamese Communists over the next few months, the status of domestic American opposition would probably not be regarded as critical. If over the longer pull, however, the US was not forced into extensive wartime mobilization measures and strong domestic opposition was not triggered as Hanoi appears to expect, the situation could possibly become a very important factor in any basic Vietnamese Communist decision on prolonging the fighting.

III. Cambodian Attitudes

Phnom Penh's attitude toward the Vietnam war is of importance to Hanoi's own plans chiefly on two counts: (1) Cambodia's ties to the 1954 Geneva agreements and, (2) its contiguity with Viet Cong operational bases in South Vietnam. By appealing to the nationalistic proclivities of Cambodia's leader, Prince Sihanouk, the Asian Communists have been able to gain a substantial amount of political support for the Vietnamese insurgents during the past several years. This has included Cambodian condemnation of the US role in South Vietnam as well as accusations that the US presence there is, as Hanoi claims, in violation of the Geneva agreements. Both of these themes are regarded by the Vietnamese as important foundation stones in their own political policy on the war.

On the physical side, Cambodia has served as a source and a transit channel for limited amounts of both food and other supplies for the Viet Cong. The Cambodians have also taken a primarily neutral stance in permitting limited use of their territory as a refuge and a secure base for the Vietnamese Communist forces.

in the remarks of DRV diplomats abroad. In May, a French newsman was told by the DRV representative in Paris that Hanoi was greatly interested in encouraging the efforts of students and intellectuals in the US in their opposition to US policy, but realized that they represented only a minority.

The Communists, nevertheless, do not have an ally or even a constant sideline supporter in the Cambodians. Cambodia's ambivalent foreign policy has frequently been at odds with Hanoi's stand on such issues as Indo-Chinese neutrality and the exact terms for settlement of the Vietnam war. The Communists have thus had to adopt a basically cautious policy in exploiting Cambodia for their war effort. They are probably reluctant to make any really large scale or far reaching plans for the use of Cambodian territory by the Viet Cong, and they cannot automatically count on receiving consistent and favorable political support from Phnom Penh.

On balance, the situation probably tends to exert a restraining influence on Vietnamese Communist policy options in the sense that it forces the Vietnamese to focus primarily on better strategic use of South Vietnamese and Laotian territory in their efforts to cope with the growing allied military pressure on their operational bases.

IV. The Effect of Links With Western Leaders

The Vietnamese Communists also regard the establishment and preservation of adequate links to leaders and key officials of Western countries as an important element in their war strategy. There are a number of reasons for this apart from a natural inclination to enhance Vietnamese Communist prestige at the international level. Such contacts, for one thing, offer the Vietnamese an opening to promote opposition to allied policy on Vietnam among influential individuals in the free world.

This can be seen in Hanoi's treatment of the Indian Government. Although Indian proposals for settling the war have consistently been rejected by the Vietnamese as unacceptably generous to the allies, Hanoi has been very careful to avoid direct attacks on the Indian Leaders in its propaganda. It has assiduously cultivated its diplomatic relations with New Dehli and treated Indian representatives visiting North Vietnam with considerable courtesy and friendship. The Vietnamese doubtless believe the Indian outlook has an important influence on over-all Afro-Asian opinion about the war. Hanoi apparently also regards some Indian leaders as potential channels for floating Vietnamese views about the war to the allies.

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During 1966, the Vietnamese seem to have given special attention to the use of Western statesmen as third party channels to the allied leadership. This development has been most evident in Hanoi's treatment of the Canadian representatives who have visited or have been stationed with the ICC in Hanoi. The North Vietnamese have frankly told them that they wish to preserve the channel which the Canadians provide to the US, and have suggested that Canadian visitors be empowered to discuss more than just ICC business while in Hanoi.

From what has been learned of third party contacts with the North Vietnamese, it does not appear that the greater Hanoi interest in talking to prominent Westerners during 1966 represents any softening as yet in Vietnamese resolve to continue the war. It probably does mean, however, that the Communist leaders realize it might become necessary at some point to change their tactics and actively consider a political settlement of the conflict. At such a time, third party contacts could prove especially valuable, in part because they would provide a channel to the allies that did not first filter through the bloc. At such a critical point, the Vietnamese might not see eye to eye on strategy with bloc leaders.

V. The Public Posture of the National Liberation Front (NFLSV)

Since the creation of the NFLSV in 1960, the Vietnamese have made a continuous effort to demonstrate that the Front enjoys broad political support and control throughout South Vietnam and that its "growing strength" is supplemented by mounting recognition of Front claims and position in international circles. The results of this have been disappointing at best for the Communists. Front influence in South Vietnam is limited chiefly to the rural areas under Communist control; even in those areas, the Front is widely regarded as a facade to cover the operations of the hard core Viet Cong (see ANNEX III for a discussion of the numerical strength and influence of the Front in South Vietnam).

On the international side, although there is a substantial body of opinion in the free world which holds that the insurgency in the South is an indigenous, patriotic and legitimate revolutionary movement, the Front's own activities have contributed relatively little to the spread of this belief.

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The Front is widely regarded in the West as more or less a voice for the Communist view on Vietnam. Efforts to achieve quasi-diplomatic status for the Front have not been very successful. Even some of the bloc countries where the Front has opened "permanent representations," have made it clear that the NFLSV is accredited only to local national front organizations and not to the bloc government itself.

The best evidence, perhaps, of the weak position of the Front lies in its failure to establish a provisional national government in South Vietnam. While both North Vietnamese and Front officials have hinted on several occasions in the past year that such a move was in process, it will probably not take place in the predictable future. Such an action would pose formidable problems for the Communists and actually further expose the lack of public support for the Front. It would almost certainly alienate politically active groups in the South, such as the Buddhists, who do not entirely support the Saigon government and have political ambitions themselves. The Front would also find it difficult to establish a satisfactory seat of government in South Vietnam.*

Despite the weaknesses of the Front, however, there are compelling reasons for the Vietnamese Communists to continue to operate under its banner. It provides, for example, a formal medium under which all facets of the insurgent political and military activity in South Vietnam can be organized. Although it does not yet pretend to formal government on a national scale, it does establish for the Communists a needed organizational alternative to the Saigon regime. It is also useful as a platform for advertising the broad program of political and economic objectives which the Communists have set forth as their alleged goals in South Vietnam.

*The leadership of any provisional NFLSV government would have little attraction among politically conscious elements of the population in South Vietnam not allied with the Communists. Movement toward the opening of negotiations on the war, should the Vietnamese Communists decide to do so, might also be complicated by the establishment of a Front government.

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