

Memo

Hanoi's Motives

3 April 1968

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Motives

NOTE: This memorandum represents the conclusions arrived at after discussion by analysts from CIA, INR, and DIA.

1. Hanoi's move almost certainly does not forecast a change in its war aims, but the statement of 3 April is a significant departure in tactics. The North Vietnamese leaders have abandoned their adamantly-held position that there could be no official contacts at all before the bombing totally ceased.

2. There is one possible motivation which we would virtually rule out: while Hanoi may have been concerned by the mounting costs of an accelerated military effort, it was not constrained by inability to carry on the war. It may -- though we doubt that this was important -- have felt that the President had left himself free to carry out a major escalation of the conflict if the response was negative or long-delayed.

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3. The quickness of Hanoi's response suggests that it may already have decided, before the President's statement, to go over to "talk-fight" tactics if an opportunity offered itself during the winter-spring offensive. However this may be, we believe that DRV motives were (a) to assure themselves that the respite in bombing which they now have will continue, and hopefully to force the US to a complete cessation of all bombing of the North; (b) to exploit sentiment within the US in favor of ending the war, and if possible to lead the US Government to a point where US public opinion would not tolerate a reversal towards heightened conflict; (c) to intensify divisions between the US and the GVN; and (d) to accelerate disarray in Saigon and undermine the willingness of the South Vietnamese to fight.

4. It is possible that Hanoi read the President's statement as a decisive change in US policy -- an admission of unwillingness to continue the war, and a first step towards accepting the consequences. At least, from Hanoi's point of view, the situation in both the US and South Vietnam since Tet must seem much more vulnerable to talk-fight tactics, and to offer an opportunity for Hanoi to explore the possibilities of a settlement on terms favorable to it. For the North Vietnamese must, after all, be

- 2 -

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conscious of strains in their society arising from the war, as well as of the opportunities offered by the present situation.

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