

SNIE 10-3-66

**Probable Reactions to a Possible
Course of Action in South Vietnam**

19 May 1966

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SNIE 10-3-66
TS 185947
19 May 1966



(b) (3)

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 10-3-66

PROBABLE REACTIONS
TO A POSSIBLE COURSE OF ACTION
IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Submitted by

ACTING DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

19 May 1966

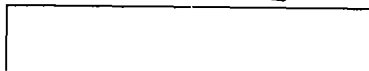
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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the NSA, and AEC.

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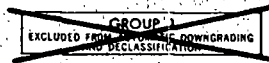
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TS 185947

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

19 May 1966

SUBJECT: SNIE 10-3-66: PROBABLE REACTIONS TO A POSSIBLE COURSE OF ACTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable reactions to the possible deployment of Chinese Nationalist troops to South Vietnam during the period 1966-1967. It is assumed that initially a force of one or two divisions with attached support troops, totalling perhaps 20,000 - 30,000 troops, would be dispatched.

THE ESTIMATE

I. NATIONALIST CHINA

1. The GRC would almost certainly comply with a US request for combat troops. The GRC leaders would regard such a proposal as a significant breakthrough in US policy. They would interpret it as an expression of US willingness to disregard Peking's reaction and to accept a military role for

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GRC forces outside Taiwan itself. Most important, they would also anticipate a growing chance of a war between the US and Communist China which would advance their own chances of returning to the mainland.

2. Nevertheless, the GRC would probably place some limitations on its commitment. The GRC's first concern would be to maintain an adequate military posture both for defense of Taiwan and for any opportunity to attack the mainland. Before undertaking larger deployments, it might also want to test the combat effectiveness of its contingents, particularly the Taiwanese soldiers. Initially, therefore, the GRC would probably prefer to send no more than one division.

3. The GRC would bargain not only on the extent of its commitment but on the price the US might be willing to pay. At a minimum, the GRC would expect the US to finance the entire deployment. It would also expect substantial additional military assistance of all types, probably including support for an increment in its armed forces equivalent to the troops sent to Vietnam. And it might expect a renewal of economic assistance. The GRC would probably try to obtain specific security guarantees for the Offshore Islands. It might press for a voice in the councils of war and in any peace negotiations, and urge the US to undertake combined planning for military action against mainland China. In general, the GRC's bargaining price would rise if the Chinese Communists responded by putting new pressures on the Offshore Islands and in the Taiwan Strait.

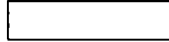
4. Outside the government, especially among the Taiwanese population, there would probably be some apprehension that the presence of GRC combat troops in South Vietnam would expose Taiwan to military retaliation by Peking. The prospect of Taiwanese* being killed far from home would be unpopular. It is unlikely that opposition on Taiwan would soon grow to major proportions, much less get out of control, but over the long run the issue would add still another reason for Taiwanese opposition to the Nationalist Government.

II. SOUTH VIETNAM

5. There would be little popular support in South Vietnam for the participation of the GRC. There are animosities toward Chinese and unpleasant memories of the Nationalist occupation of northern Vietnam at the end of World War II. There would also be fear that the use of GRC troops would bring Communist China closer to outright intervention. The presence of the GRC troops would provide a political issue for exploitation by elements opposed to the government. In particular, Buddhist and other political leaders might view the introduction of GRC troops not only as further weakening South Vietnam's national sovereignty, but also as

* In the GRC armed forces today Taiwanese account for almost one-half: 87 percent of the privates, 20 percent of the NCOs, and 5 percent of the officers.

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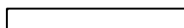


strengthening the position of the military leadership in government and reducing South Vietnam's flexibility on how best to end the fighting. Any such criticism would almost certainly be directed at least partly against the US.

6. Though concerned to some degree about popular reactions, the military leaders of South Vietnam would probably agree to the deployment of GRC troops. They would welcome the increase in combat strength and would perhaps hope that GRC influence would be helpful in opposing a negotiated settlement of the war. A civilian government, particularly if dominated by Buddhists, would be less willing to accept GRC participation. In determining whether to accept GRC troops any South Vietnamese government would be motivated more by the desire to remain in harmony with Washington and to commit the US more deeply than by any wish to see the GRC become a belligerent.

7. Over the longer term, the South Vietnamese reaction to the GRC presence would be conditioned in large part by the conduct and combat performance of the troops. There was some apprehension when ROK troops were first deployed to South Vietnam, but this has been largely dispelled by their good record both in combat and in relations with the local populace. However, Vietnamese antipathy to ethnic Chinese is considerably greater than to Koreans.

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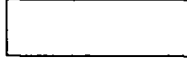


III. COMMUNIST REACTIONS

8. North Vietnam. Hanoi would be more concerned over the political implications of the GRC deployment than over its immediate military importance. Hanoi would seek to exploit the presence of this force to show that the Saigon regime was a tool of foreigners and lacking in nationalist spirit and support. In some circumstances, Hanoi would probably see the use of GRC forces as evidence of US difficulties in continuing to support the war. However, there would also be a general concern in Hanoi that the US, recognizing the possibility of a sharp Chinese Communist reaction, was nevertheless willing to accept greater risks of escalation.

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9. Fearing that the US might be building toward an invasion of North Vietnam, Hanoi would feel it desirable to deter a further buildup of GRC forces. To this end, it would probably call on Peking for further demonstrations of support. Thus far, Hanoi has made no effort to exploit the presence of Chinese military forces in North Vietnam. Indeed, this presence has not been admitted by either Peking or Hanoi. But the introduction of GRC forces might persuade Hanoi that the time had come to publicize the presence of Communist Chinese forces within North Vietnam, probably under the guise of volunteers. However, Hanoi would probably not want any large influx of new Chinese Communist contingents, lest this add to the very escalation it hoped to deter.



10. Communist China. Peking would interpret the GRC deployment as a significant change in US policy, with two potentially serious implications: a possible buildup for an invasion of North Vietnam, and beyond this, an attack on the mainland by GRC forces in alliance with the US. Accordingly, the Chinese Communists would believe it essential to respond with more than propaganda. This feeling would be reinforced by their desire to appear resolute in the eyes of other Communist countries and of the world at large.

11. Chinese Communist reactions would be those which held some promise of deterring a further buildup of GRC troops in South Vietnam and discouraging any plans for a GRC attack on the mainland. Such actions, however, would be those the Chinese Communists believed carried the least risk of precipitating a direct confrontation with the US. Among the possible reactions might be overt troop and aircraft deployments to coastal areas opposite Taiwan, stepped-up harassment of GRC air and sea units in the Taiwan Strait area, heavier shelling of the Offshore Islands, and perhaps seizure of one or more of the smaller islands. The Chinese Communists might also reinforce their forces on the North Vietnamese and Laotian borders. If requested by Hanoi, they would probably publicly acknowledge the presence of Chinese Communist military forces in North Vietnam and agree to add to them. With Taipei directly involved, Peking would also increase its pressure on Hanoi to hold out for total victory in the South and resist negotiations.



12. We think it unlikely that Peking would move "volunteers" into South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese would be reluctant to change the nature of the war in this manner. And Peking itself would probably prefer to wait to judge the effects of its own moves on the further course of US and GRC policy.

13. We also think it unlikely that Peking would attempt a large-scale attack against Taiwan. The Chinese Communist leaders almost certainly recognize that their capabilities for an attack are limited and that such a move would result in a direct confrontation with the US.

14. The timing of this course of action could be an important factor in the Chinese Communist reaction. It is likely that deployment of a GRC force in the near future would not trigger any greater Peking reaction than indicated. However, Chinese Communist reactions might be sharper if the deployment occurred after some further escalation of the war, especially if such escalation had brought Peking closer to direct involvement.

15. Soviet Union. The primary Soviet concern would be that a Sino-US war had moved one step closer, and that the Soviet Union could be drawn into an increasingly dangerous situation over which it exercised decreasing influence. The Soviets would also be disturbed lest the effect of the GRC move serve to increase Chinese Communist influence in Hanoi at Moscow's expense. We do not believe that they would take any positive counteraction to the GRC deployment, but it would contribute to the deterioration of US-Soviet relations.

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IV. FREE WORLD REACTIONS

16. The initial popular reaction throughout the world would be one of alarm that the GRC deployment increased the chances of eventual war between the US and Communist China, with a risk of further expansion. This attitude might cause some difficulties for governments which have given political support to the US position in South Vietnam. Most of these countries would expect to be consulted in advance and many would express misgivings. In Japan, the Sato government would probably feel compelled to protest the US/GRC move. At the UN, the issue might become a factor in the voting on the question of Chinese representation. Among the states actively involved in the war, Australia and New Zealand would probably have mixed feelings: while pleased to see additional military strength in South Vietnam, they would be disturbed by what they would deem an unnecessary political complication to the war and its resolution. Laos and Thailand would be concerned that a broadening of the war would sooner or later bring Chinese Communist troops across their borders. Only South Korea would wholeheartedly support the move.