

Mr. Holdridge
Orig. to Mr. Hughes
copies to Mr. Howells
Mrs. Avery

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Mr. W. Dean Howells

Fred Greene

INR

Next Stages in the Vietnam Project

Based on your memo, I proposed in a conversation with Mr. Hughes -- and he concurred -- that the Project proceed along the following lines and be done in the sequence enumerated below.

1. Thematic summaries be designed to trace the evolution of INR's positions in four general categories -- the war in the South; political and administrative developments in the South; the war against the North; and negotiations. In discussing each theme, we would cover the period as a whole and endeavor to discuss patterns or trends in INR's analytical position, methodology, and the perspective (i.e., changes in significance) with which it viewed the subject at hand. There would also be a brief discussion of points at which major policy implications existed, primarily to identify issues which will be discussed below. (See #2 and #3.)

Please note that I've dropped the "internal" and "external" war titles for two of the categories because they don't enable us to handle problems of northern unit forces in the South, a major problem, or provide a suitable slot for considering infiltration. We also must consider the degree to which we should try to expand the discussion of INR's role in negotiating.

2. Comments would be provided as a separate section, to be added to each chapter of the study as it now stands. This would be primarily an appraisal of the Bureau's record measured against actual events. This critique would be as comprehensive as possible in setting forth an evaluation of INR's estimates of the situation, the relative importance it attached to the various factors involved, its projection of trends, and its response to requests for evaluations of US policy proposals or possible courses of action.

In making these comments, we would have to consider not only (a) the substantive issues on their merits as noted in the above paragraph but also (b) the bureaucratic position of INR: generally, in accordance with the differing patterns that appear to accompany different types of issues, and in the special circumstances prevailing in specific instances. Involved would be the point in time along the sequence of events at which INR entered into the problem, the amount of information available to it, and the role it was to play. Naturally, the substantive and bureaucratic aspects interact most intimately and they are to be treated with this consideration foremost in mind, and not necessarily sequentially when doing the comments.

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3. The decision-making process and the role of intelligence. We might in these comments also distinguish the occasions on which INR entered the problem on its own initiative, and see if this category lends itself to generalizations different from those occasions on which it was asked to participate as part of the Intelligence Community as a whole, or when it was given a request by a principal officer of the Department. This three-fold distinction might enable us to move into the more nebulous and difficult tasks of commenting on the decision-making process as a whole and the role that intelligence played. Mr. Hughes, Mr. Holdridge and I are all uncertain as to whether the scope of this paper (from the vantage point of one Bureau) would allow for a general, governmental-wide commentary. However, we might be able to approach the problem, acknowledging the partial and limited aspects of the discussion, by using the approach noted in the first sentence of this paragraph. Some generalizations, if carefully drawn, and rooted in a sufficient number of specific instances that involved INR intensively, might then be worth making.

In short, we are dubious about this aspect of the study but it may be worth a try if it follows items #1 and #2 and is undertaken with the serious limits in mind.

4. Concluding Observations. These should encompass, as you note, both substantive and bureaucratis-operational observations.* The observations in this section could focus on any or all of the following: "lessons learned," a discussion of the Bureau's conceptual and methodological approaches to estimates (e.g., about the role of China, or the policy of Hanoi), explanations of accuracy of certain appraisals (from various categories listed in #2), causes of errors in judgments, institutional and procedural strengths and difficulties in the intelligence function (as viewed from the Bureau's vantage point or more generally).

This discussion on conclusions should be considered highly tentative. I did not discuss it in detail with Mr. Hughes, and we may find that we lack the time, cannot do anything so comprehensive, have really covered the main points elsewhere, etc. Its scope, content and structure are thus more amorphous than the previous items. In sum, we are to do #1 and #2; take a stab at #3; do #4 if it seems worthwhile after the others are done.

* To avoid interrupting the flow of the previous items, especially #2, I suggest that commentary of the significance of INR's position for policy decisions be woven into this section if at all. Otherwise it would keep being injected into the critique of INR's performance, making it disjointed; also what do you do in #2 with INR observations that were off target in terms of their implications for policy had they been adopted?

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