

White House Aide Says Morale Is Low in Hanoi

MAY 23 1972

WASHINGTON, May 23 (AP)—A White House official said today that North Vietnam was showing serious strains in its home-front morale and political structure as well as on the battlefield because of United States military actions.

The official, who would not allow his identity to be disclosed, attributed to unidentified sources reports of serious strains that he said had become evident since President Nixon ordered the mining of North Vietnamese harbors and full-scale bombing.

The official volunteered the briefing to a small group of reporters after reports by a correspondent of The New York Times, Anthony Lewis, from North Vietnam that indicated the new American campaign had not yet seriously disrupted life in that country.

Disillusionment Cited

Although it was learned that the White House official had called the briefing because of Administration concern over the Lewis articles, no representative of The Times was invited.

[The New York Times learned independently that the White House official who gave the background briefing was Maj. Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. A career Army officer, General Haig is deputy to Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on national security. Asked why The Times had not been invited, Kenneth W. Clawson, the deputy director of communications for the White House, said The New York Daily News had been invited "and in my judgment New York City did not have to have two or more papers representing it at the briefing."]

The reporters asked several

times that the official place his name on the record, but he declined. The usual reason for such background briefings is to present Administration views without giving them the official stamp of an identified White House figure.

The official painted a dismal picture of disillusion among North Vietnamese citizens, manifested in food shortages, increasing inflation, a flourishing black market and a growth of prostitution in Hanoi.

He quoted the Hanoi radio as saying that black marketeers, saboteurs and people spreading discontent would be severely punished.

Leaders Said to Be Split

The official said there was "no solidarity of view among the northern leadership," over the current invasion of the South. Moderates, he said, wanted "to scale down the ambitions of the regime," and hardliners advocated the domination of South Vietnam and the rest of Indochina.

The official, who had with him a folder of documents stamped "top secret," said the moderates wanted to "draw back from the blood-letting in the South" and to concentrate on the problems at home.

Although the official declared "I am not suggesting a collapse" of North Vietnam's political and social structure, he said he was ruling it out in the future.

Military Reverses Noted

About the battlefield, the official gave a relatively optimistic assessment.

He said it was "still too early to say the offensive is a failure, but it is way behind schedule in achieving its objectives."

Reliable information, he said, indicated that Hanoi had expected Hue and Anloc to have fallen long before now.

The official said the rainy season would magnify the already serious logistic problem facing Hanoi by preventing the movement of tanks and other heavy equipment down an already tightly stretched supply line.

A factor contributing to the deteriorating morale in the North and to the weakening military position in the South, the official maintained, was the high casualty rate the North Vietnamese had suffered since the invasion began March 30. He put their casualties at from 75,000 to 100,000.

White House Rebuts Story From Hanoi

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Associated Press

SF Chronicle
Washington

A White House official, rebutting reports from North Vietnam in the New York Times, asserted yesterday that North Vietnam is showing serious strains in its home-front morale and political structure as well as on the battlefield because of U.S. military actions.

The official, who would not allow his identity to be disclosed, volunteered a briefing to a small group of reporters following a report from Hanoi in the New York Times.

The official said moderates want to draw back from the blood-letting in the South and concentrate on the problems at home.

Although the official said "I am not suggesting a collapse" of North Vietnam's political and social structure, "I am not ruling it out in the future."

Concerning the battlefield, the official, who could speak with more expertise than most White House staff members, gave a relatively optimistic assessment.

He said it is "still too early to say the offensive is a failure, but it is way behind schedule in achieving its objectives."

He claimed that reliable information indicated Hue and An Loc were expected by Hanoi to have fallen long before now.

DIFFICULTY

The failure to maintain the invasion schedule made it difficult to coordinate Hanoi's ability to counter the