

APR 24 1975

# '67 Viet Data Said Concealed

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U.S. military policy planners deliberately concealed the true nature of Vietcong strength months before the crucial Tet offensive of 1968, Rep. Paul N. McCloskey (R-Calif.) charged yesterday.

McCloskey released three previously secret cables to support his accusation that former military and State Department officials in Vietnam attempted to scale down Central Intelligence Agency estimates of Vietcong strength from 420,000 to 300,000.

In a letter to President Ford, the congressman said that the cables, sent in mid-August, 1967, "clearly reflect command influence, if not distortion, on the intelligence-reporting function of the CIA."

The 420,000 estimate of Vietcong strength was arrived at by the CIA from its study of captured documents. McCloskey said the figure was viewed by military commanders in Vietnam as undermining their claims that Vietcong strength was being eroded.

A cable sent by the late Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, then deputy commander in Vietnam, to the Joint Chiefs of Staffs warned that the press would use the higher figure to discredit American policy in Vietnam.

"We have been projecting an image of success over the recent months and properly so," the cable said.

"Now, when we release the (higher) figure, the newsmen will immediately seize on the point that the



CREIGHTON W. ABRAMS

... cable cited

enemy force has increased about 120,000 . . . All available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion as to the meaning of the increase."

A subsequent cable from Gen. William C. Westmoreland, then military commander in Vietnam, endorsed Abrams' cable and warned that "erroneous conclusions would result."

Westmoreland was quoted by the Los Angeles Times as saying that McCloskey's charge was "categorically false and I resent the implication. Mr. McCloskey should know better."

The Abrams cable indicates that the military establishment in Vietnam may have genuinely disputed the CIA figures as well as feared the public relations consequences of their publication.

It objects to the inclusion of Vietcong "self defense forces" in the CIA intelligence estimates on grounds they contain "a sizeable number of women and old people" who are in practical terms noncombatants.

"They operate entirely in their own hamlets, they are rarely armed, have no real discipline and almost no military capability," the Abrams cable said. "They are no more effective in the military sense than the dozens of other nonmilitary organizations which serve the VC cause in various roles."

The third cable released by McCloskey was sent by Robert W. Komer, who headed the U.S. pacification program in Vietnam, to George Carver, the CIA's Vietnam intelligence director.

Komer repeated Abrams' arguments both as to the military capability of the self-defense forces and the harmful public relations consequences of having the higher figure published.

"Thus (the) credibility gap would be widened at (the) very time when in fact we are moving toward much more valid estimates," Komer said.

Komer, now with the Rand Corp. here, said yesterday that McCloskey's allegation was "utterly silly." He said that his cable to Carver was an effort to make certain that the CIA did not overestimate Vietcong strength by counting people who were noncombatants as soldiers.

"This was a long-standing

and completely legitimate disagreement on intelligence estimates between people in the field and the CIA analysts," Komer said. "This was not a policy issue at all but a long-standing dispute upon how enemy strength should be computed."

McCloskey maintained in his letter that the credibility of the U.S. military establishment was undermined because the public accepted the contention of the generals that Vietcong strength was declining.

"Five months later . . . during the Tet offensive of 1968, it appeared that VC forces were much stronger than estimated," McCloskey wrote.

The purpose of McCloskey's letter to the President was less retrospective than it was an attempt to persuade Mr. Ford not to have intelligence estimates "screened by Defense or State Department personnel at this crucial and difficult time."

McCloskey is one of several members of Congress who made such a request in an April 17 letter to the President.

While Henry A. Kissinger was not mentioned by name in McCloskey's letter, the thrust of the congressman's argument is that it is potentially dangerous for one man to occupy the two jobs of Secretary of State and national security adviser to the President, as Kissinger now does.

McCloskey said that this gives one person control both of policy planning and of the intelligence estimates, which determine if the policy is working.