a263

11 MAY 72

r lbylvyyxzyyc
SAIGON Take 2 Intelligence a262: far. 460.

Some predictions have been borne out by events or by updated intelligence information.

U.S. officials from the top down predicted at one point that the Hanoi offensive would coincide with President Nixon's trip to Peking. This was based in part on seized documents that called for a three-phase effort-a preparatory phase in January, action in February and a final phase one to two months later.

Sources say later information indicated the major push was to begin Feb. 19, two days before Nixon reached Peking, but that it was unaccountably postponed. It is not clear whether subsequent intelligence pinned down the launching for more than a month later, March 30.

Regardless of the timing, the offensive thus far has followed the pattern indicated. The enemy documents specified that primary targets were to be Saigon's pacification efforts and the Vietnamization program, with another objective the undermining of Nixon's political prestige and his trip to China.

Intelligence analysts are said to evaluate the enemy's capabilities rather than his intentions, so while assessments of Hanoi's plans appear to have been fairly sound, his strengths seemingly were misjudged.

Criticism for this has been directed at the U.S. Air Force. Its network of electronic sensors, backed up by bombing raids and truck-killing gunships over the Ho Chi Minh supply trail, seems to have been overrated.

How else, critics have asked, can so much material-ammunition alone, not to mention tanks and artillery-have gotten down the trail and into position in the highlands and outside An Loc?

A widely accepted view among persons who deal with the Air Force here is that it became the victim of its own propaganda in claiming that as much as 85 per cent of enemy material coming down the trail never reached its destination.

Newsmen in Saigon recall that shortly before the offensive began an Air Force officer asserted air strikes assuredly could halt any such push by the Communist command.

One indictment of Air Force activity is a U.S. security memorandum, recently made public. In that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were said to have estimated that a B52 strike, some 30 tons of bombs normally, killed 2½ enemy troops on average, while the CIA said bombing ''did not seriously affect'' the movement of men and supplies to Laos and South Vietnam.

But the Air Force gets high marks from some field officers whose jobs or lives have depended on the intelligence that its sensors collected.

MORE

r 625ped may 11

a264
r lbylvyyxuiv
SAIGON Take 3 Intelligence a262-263: collected. 460.

Some of these officers judge that the real breakdown in intelligence monitoring began with the start of the U.S. pullout and the advent of Vietnamization in 1969.
The CIA, relieved of responsibility for a South Vietnam village pacification program called Revolutionary Development, was assigned to gather strategical intelligence in North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. That had been an Army task.
''Vietnamization applied to that program, too,'' says one officer. ''With fewer Americans going into the sensitive areas, and fewer helicopters and other assets to help the Vietnamese do it, there simply was less intelligence coming out of those areas.''
Available information suggests that no U.S. ground reconnaissance teams have been inside North Vietnam since late 1968, and none inside Laos, since early 1971. Most information as a result is based on monitoring, sensors and what data filters out by other channels.
''They've pulled in the recon screen, and it just isn't the same as before,'' said one source. ''Visual reconnaissance complements the sensors—one can't do the entire job of the other.
''With the troops pulled back from the borders, we lost our capability to patrol the borders. We had nobody out there in the boonies. It was the enclave concept at work, and it was a failure.
''The enemy had ample time to move stuff down. They built underground storage tanks, pipelines, they floated barrels of petroleum down the rivers.
''The tanks may have moved down too far to the west for the sensors, but some of them were detected. There just wasn't anybody out there to see them.
''In Vietnamization, we just gave up a lot of units that were feeding back the information that the command needed to in order to know what the enemy was up to.''
Subsequent assessments may find that a major failing of the Americans was to misjudge their own South Vietnamese allies.
Many U.S. officers have spoken, sometimes bitterly, in recent weeks of a lack of preparedness among the Saigon government's forces despite advance warnings. That is attributed mainly to the weakness that has always been recognized—poor leadership, sometimes inept, sometimes corrupt as well.
As long ago as January, President Nixon was describing the path to Vietnamization as successful. As some Americans here see it, from both military and civilian viewpoints, Washington officials pressed the success aspect so hard that even skeptical advisers in the field began to exaggerate their faith in its progress.
Says one man here: ''When the enemy wasn't pushing, everything seemed to be going okay. But when the stuff hits the fan it looks like Vietnamization is a word and that's about all.''
r 632ped may 11