

Morale of Hanoi's troops still high, studies show

WASHINGTON — The breakdown in enemy morale, which led to the Korean truce, isn't happening in Vietnam. On the contrary, the North Vietnamese troops are so strongly motivated that there's little chance of a military collapse.

This is the conclusion of four confidential studies made for the Defense Department

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by the RAND Corporation in 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1970. The latest battlefield reports indicate that Communist morale is still high as ever.

In the words of the 1970 study, the "principal conclusion" must be that the Communist side, "as a group, as man for man, seem unlikely to yield, let alone disintegrate, under the type of pressure the United States can apply in the pursuit of current objectives.

"The thought of compromise in the current struggle, even in return for concessions, seems alien to these men," continues the study. "They see the war entirely as one of defense of their country against the invading Americans who, in turn, are seen merely as the successors to the French. . . ."

Back in 1951, RAND did a similar study of Communist morale in the Korean War. The results were so startling that the RAND researcher, Herbert Goldhamer, rushed a secret memo to the commanding general.

"The CCF (Chinese Communist Force) has increasingly lost its capacity to control its troops," Goldhamer reported urgently. "It is a matter of greatest importance to realize that . . . the loss of its military-political grip over its troops . . . reached a point

in June that for the Communist command cannot be estimated to be less than critical."

Collapse of morale

Goldhamer's assessment turned out to be right and the Communists quickly thereafter agreed to a truce. But none of the signs, which led him to detect a collapse of enemy morale in North Korea, are now evident in North Vietnam.

RAND is a brain factory which does strategic studies for the Pentagon. The 1970 study, written by Konrad Kellen, is based on 22 in-depth interviews with North Vietnamese prisoners and corroborated by many other interviews over the years.

"If what these 22 men have said," advised Kellen, ". . . corresponds to what large numbers of soldiers, or perhaps even the majority of Vietnam's 30 million people similarly feel, then the chance of rooting out (the Communist) revolution by military force or political devices is dim indeed, and emerges as an undertaking questionable in more ways than one.

A different way

"The findings would, if accurate, indicate also how narrow the area of compromise in negotiations can be, at best. In an indirect way, however, the findings also indicate a way for an ending different from the one we have been pursuing.

"The intense anger against us, the full responsibility the respondents attribute to us for the war in its present form, are in visible contrast to the virtual absence of violent words by the respondents against their enemy compatriots. Does this indicate a high reconciliation potential?"