

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

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North Vietnam's Morale Unshaken

By Jack Anderson

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 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, seems 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 singularly feel, then the chances 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.

"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?"

Kellen was struck by the unshakable morale of the Communist troops. "To anyone experienced in interviewing soldiers in war," he wrote, "the results are . . . extraordinary. Enemy morale appears high indeed, particularly in view of the enormous disproportion in power and resources of the two contenders . . ."

He found "particularly remarkable the degree to which the men do not simply 'mouth' what they have been told, but seem to have fully absorbed and assimilated it, rendering it in their own terms, illustrating it with their own examples and experiences.

"Thus, what may have begun as indoctrination has become sincere conviction, opinion and emotion, and may, therefore, be regarded as virtually impossible to dislodge.

"The men polled here—all except one—are unlikely to change their views or to lose their readiness to make the necessary sacrifices commensurate with those views. They

can perhaps be killed, but they probably cannot be dissuaded either by words or by hardships."

The study adds this ominous note: "The enemy soldier who, lacking all the important modern engines of war, cannot be broken in his morale and motivation, seems anomalous, because probably few enemy armies could have carried on the war under comparable circumstances."

Nazis Gave Up

"One of the most effective leaflets in World War II was one entitled 'Human Hands Vs. Steel.' It told the Nazi soldiers that men could not be expected to fight with their bare hands against steel; that their air force, equipment and supplies were inferior to ours; and that it was, therefore, not dishonorable but only logical for them to give up the fight and surrender.

"To Hitler's supermen, this was an eminently sensible way of thinking, and they responded in large numbers. But the enemy in Vietnam thinks differently."

Footnote: We reached Kellen who acknowledged his authorship of the Rand report. Nothing he has learned since 1970 has changed his views, he said, but he cautioned that he is no longer privy to prisoner information. From our own sources, however, we learned that enemy morale is still rated as high.