

220

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

TO : S/AH - Governor Harriman DATE: May 31, 1967
THROUGH: ARA/IAS - Sandy M. Pringle
FROM : ARA/IAS - George Lister
SUBJECT: Two Suggestions Concerning Vietnam

Greetings from the Lower Depths of ARA!

The following are two suggestions related to the problem of Vietnam.

1. Moscow, Hanoi and others may well have assumed that a Middle East crisis would weaken us in Vietnam because Uncle Sam cannot be at full strength everywhere at once. If so, the Communists may have outsmarted themselves. Actually, the new crisis may have the opposite effect, for one reason because it takes the spotlight, in this country and elsewhere, away from Vietnam. At all events, the present Soviet-Nasser alignment might be exploited to hurt Hanoi and the anti-war movement in this country and abroad, in the same way that the Hitler-Stalin Pact devastated the American Communist Party. A significant and active minority of the anti-war leaders and activists are Jews. If it can be shown that Hanoi supports Nasser, at a time when the U.S. (and LBJ) are the main protectors of Israel, many of these Jews (including some in the American Communist Party) will modify their present views on the Vietnam war. Thus, I believe it would be to our interest, in this country and elsewhere (including Vietnam), to arrange for skillful, unattributed propaganda exploitation of available material showing Hanoi is with Nasser. In addition to influencing some Jews against Hanoi, this would also serve the general purpose of showing the North Vietnamese as being on the side of the clear aggressor in the Middle East.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals;
not automatically declassified.

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 13292, Sec. 3.5

NLJ/LIS 06-87

By cbm, NARA, Date 12-19-06

It may prove somewhat difficult to find exploitable statements from Hanoi, because the North Vietnamese probably have said relatively little thus far on the Middle East crisis. I checked with the FBIS Washington office and they doubt that they have available any official Hanoi public comment on the subject. But they believe there might well have been such comment without it having been picked up and sent in by the FBIS service, since the latter would not normally include Hanoi's passing references to the Middle East in their reporting. I doubt that the North Vietnamese Communists would publicly ignore the crisis entirely, and it would be awkward for them to deviate very far from the Moscow line. Therefore, if it turns out that nothing is readily available on the subject here in Washington, it might be useful to ask the field to cable whatever they have or can pick up from Hanoi broadcasting and news coverage. Just a few anti-Israeli or pro-Nasser statements would suffice for our purposes.

Meanwhile, the attached clipping shows how the Italian Communist Party, one of the more sophisticated and experienced, is trying to straddle this issue, which is an explosive one for the Communists--especially if it can be exploited quickly.

2. Entirely apart from the foregoing, do you think it would be feasible and desirable to issue an official statement suggesting that it would be useful for all concerned for Hanoi to send a spokesman to this country to debate Vietnam with one of our spokesmen over nation wide television for an hour or two? It would be important to limit the debate to the two men, so that the differences would become crystal clear and would not be fuzzed by other American and foreign participants of various political views. I believe that the hard-nosed, dogmatic, doctrinaire attitude, mentality and line of the Hanoi leaders would come through in such a debate, to our advantage (particularly since the Vietnamese visitor should have less rapport with the American public than would our representative). The mere issuance of such an invitation or challenge might cause Hanoi to reconsider

its current estimate of the Johnson administration's relationship with the American people and with the domestic anti-war movement. Moreover, it would not be easy for Hanoi to turn down such a challenge. However, if the challenge were rejected (as I would guess it would be), we could exploit the refusal extensively here and around the world, particularly since the story would have considerable publicity value. If the challenge were accepted, and the debate did take place, we could then propose to Hanoi that our spokesman be allowed to participate in a similar debate over North Vietnamese radio. Once more, refusal could be exploited effectively. One way or the other, the outcome should be to our advantage.

Both of the foregoing tactics might have some effect on future domestic political developments.

ARA/IAS:GLister:sn

CONFIDENTIAL