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This package contains the following materials:

-- A statement by W. E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, to the House Select Committee on Intelligence at its hearings related to Vietnam on 3 December 1975.

-- An additional statement amplifying the remarks made by Mr. Colby which also contains at Annex a number of Agency documents, or extracts from Agency documents, which relate to the Director's testimony and have been declassified.

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Statement by

W.E. COLBY

Director of Central Intelligence

to the

House Select Committee on Intelligence

3 December 1975

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I welcome this opportunity to appear before your Committee and respond to the testimony presented to this Committee by Mr. Samuel Adams on September 18th.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, I have filed with the Committee a lengthy statement which presents in some detail the Agency's response to the allegations made by Mr. Adams. I would like at this time, however, to make a brief oral statement to the Committee speaking more specifically to some of those allegations.

The Conspiracy Charge

In his public writings and in testimony before this Committee, Mr. Adams has charged that CIA conspired with the Department of Defense to produce false and misleading estimates. Or, as he puts it, CIA participated in a cover-up undertaken to produce estimates of Vietnamese Communist strength that would be politically acceptable.

I reject this charge as unfounded and unsupportable.

Let's take a look at the record. The record shows clearly that from 1965 onward CIA consistently advised the senior policymaking officials of this Government that there was a strong likelihood that the official military estimates of the size of organized enemy groups in South Vietnam were understated. The CIA also presented its own independent estimates of the proper magnitude of these groups.

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

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To start at the beginning, Mr. Adams' initial questioning of the correctness of the official estimates was done in his draft report dated 22 August 1966 on "The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars." On 26 August – just four days later – the CIA in a special assessment prepared for the Secretary of Defense and also sent to the President, the Secretary of State and other senior officials advised:

"Recently acquired documentary evidence now being studied in detail suggests that our holdings on the numerical strength of these Irregulars (now being carried at around 110,000) may require drastic upward revision."

Let me quote from other CIA documents:

– On 27 June 1966:

"If the reports are accurate, and past experience suggests that many of them are, the total number of North Vietnamese troops now in South Vietnam would be well over 50,000 men instead of approximately 38,000 as is now carried by MACV."

– On 22 November 1966 in a memorandum to Robert W. Komer, Special Assistant to the President:

"A reappraisal of the strength of Communist irregular forces which is currently underway indicates that accepted (i.e., MACV) estimates of

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the strength of Viet Cong irregular forces may have drastically understated their growth, possibly by as much as 200,000 persons."

The same message was conveyed in special reports prepared for the Secretary of Defense in December 1966 and in a January 1967 memorandum prepared by CIA's Board of National Estimates.

In May and June 1967, CIA reports to officials in the State and Defense Departments contained our estimates that the size of organized Viet Cong manpower was on the order of 500,000.

The May 1967 report – a special assessment prepared for Secretary McNamara – explicitly outlined our differences with each of the components in MACV's Order of Battle and concluded:

" ... we believe the Viet Cong paramilitary and political organization is still probably far larger than official US order of battle statistics indicate ... . Thus, the overall strength of the Communists organized force structure in South Vietnam is probably in the 500,000 range and may even be higher."

The 500,000 figure presented by the CIA in this report could be compared with an official military number at that time of 292,000.

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Mr. Chairman, I believe that these quotations from official CIA publications show clearly that the CIA did not shrink from pushing the case for higher figures and made no attempt to produce "politically acceptable" estimates.

The Order of Battle Conference in Saigon

Much of Mr. Adams' case seems to hinge on his charges that the CIA "sold out" or "caved in" at the order of battle conference held in Saigon in September 1967. A few observations about this conference are in order.

The final agreed figures resulting from the conference, particularly those for the VC/NVA combat forces, represented a significant move on the part of MACV, most notably regarding the category of Administrative Services or Support groups.

In regard to the Irregular Forces, it is true that the conference agreed that they could be removed from the conventional order of battle. The significant point to note here is that even though they were not quantified, we had produced a National Intelligence Estimate, in which the military concurred, which acknowledged these Irregular Forces to be a very sizable factor in total enemy capabilities and one with which senior policy levels of this Government should be greatly concerned. To illustrate this point, I should like to quote from that estimate.

After noting that the VC/NVA Military Force is estimated as "at least 223,000-248,000" the estimate makes this key judgment:

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

"It must be recognized, however, that this Military Force constitutes but one component of the total Communist organization. Any comprehensive judgment of Communist capabilities in South Vietnam must embrace the effectiveness of all the elements which comprise that organization, the total size of which is of course considerably greater than the figure given for the Military Force."

I don't suppose the results of the Saigon order of battle conference were completely acceptable to any of the parties. The military had a point in its argument that their concern was with the combat threat represented by the order of battle in the classic sense. CIA had a point, namely, that a responsible national intelligence assessment of enemy capabilities would have to include consideration of the much broader insurgency threat represented by all organized political, military and quasi-military groups.

Mr. Adams was never able to make or to appreciate this distinction. He always seemed, and apparently still seems, to persist in lumping all of these disparate groups together into a total number of 500,000 or whatever its size and to describe this aggregate as the enemy army. His persistence in this position is what led one observer to say of the September 1967 conference that it produced more heat than light.

Thus, I find it difficult to perceive the conference as the cover-up or sell-out claimed by Mr. Adams. CIA continued to maintain its independence on the question of enemy strengths. In an effort to make its judgments more effective and more persuasive, CIA created in August 1967 a new unit to concentrate more resources on the problem, particularly the more important question of the general

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

adequacy of Vietnamese manpower resources and their ability to continue with the war.

It is true, as Mr. Adams states, that in December 1967 CIA prepared a special report for Secretary McNamara which used the numbers for Military Forces agreed at the Saigon conference and used in the estimate. We do try to live up to our agreements. Mr. Adams fails to point out, however, that in that same report CIA noted that the estimates for Military Forces did not include other sizable components (the self-defense or Irregular Forces) in the Communist structure. Mr. Adams also fails to note that by February 1968 CIA and DIA had produced a joint memorandum in which a CIA estimate of the size of a total insurgency base in South Vietnam of 500,000 persons was used. The Joint Staff concurred in this memorandum and General Wheeler sent it to the Secretary of Defense.

The Tet Offensive

In his testimony regarding the performance of the Intelligence Community prior to the Tet Offensive, Mr. Adams maintains that the Intelligence Community was caught by surprise by the Tet Offensive and that this surprise was due to the fact that the Community had so denigrated the size of the Viet Cong that we simply could not have predicted the scope of the Tet attack. He then goes on to make rather sweeping claims that the losses of thousands of American lives and hundreds of military aircraft were due to the poor performance of the Intelligence Community.

I have already provided the Committee with a copy of a post-mortem done in 1968 by the Intelligence Community on its performance at the time of the Tet Offensive. This report acknowledges quite frankly that warning of the Tet

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Offensive had not fully anticipated the intensity, coordination and timing of the enemy attack. But the report found quite unequivocally that clear warnings regarding the imminence of an offensive – whether it would occur just before, or just after, or during Tet – were sufficient that the military command in Saigon, on the basis of these intelligence reports, was able to take alerting measures throughout the country.

I would submit that rather than being the cause of the loss of thousands of lives and hundreds of planes, the Intelligence Community provided the warnings that enabled the military commands in Vietnam to meet and to defeat the enemy forces during the Tet Offensive and to minimize losses of lives and resources.

I would submit, moreover, that it was in large part due to these intelligence warnings that the Vietnamese Communists failed to attain their goal of a decisive victory for the Communist cause. The fact of the matter as we look back in history is that the Tet Offensive was a calamitous setback for the Communist forces in 1968.

The 30,000 Agents

Mr. Adams makes much of his role in the production of a CIA estimate that the Viet Cong had 30,000 agents in the South Vietnamese government and army. His testimony gives the impression that Agency work on this subject was almost exclusively an Adams' effort. He also makes the assertion that his estimate of 30,000 agents should be compared with an official estimate on the part of CIA's Directorate of Operations of only 300 agents. Finally, he asserts that the Agency attempted to suppress the report.

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

I should like to make a few comments on these statements:

First, I would observe that Mr. Adams' testimony about his famous estimate of 30,000 agents reflects his well-known tendency to make sweeping and unqualified generalizations. Mr. Adams fails to note or to inform his audience that the text of a CIA report he drafted made it quite clear that the total numbers presented were to be viewed only as "a broad order of magnitude." The basic question that had to be answered was, "What is an agent?" Even by Mr. Adams' own description of the network of agents, when he separated "fencesitters" or people with varying degrees of sympathy for the Communist cause, his estimate of hardcore effective agents amounted to only some 10% of the total, that is, 3,000 rather than 30,000.

Mr. Adams was the principal analyst in the Intelligence Directorate working on this problem. The effort to publish finished intelligence on this subject was modest, but it was consistent with the availability of the data to be exploited. More to the point, other parts of the Agency were more directly concerned with the question of Communist subversion. During the same period in which Mr. Adams was doing his work, our Station in Saigon had 14 people assigned to this activity. They were backstopped by a five-person team in CIA Headquarters.

The 30,000 vs. 300 score that Mr. Adams recounts is wrong. The fact is that the Agency estimate of 30,000 was a fully coordinated report which had been concurred in by all parts of the Agency, even that part which Mr. Adams claims to have identified only 300 agents.

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

In regard to suppression of the report, I can only state most forcibly that there was no suppression of the report. The fact of the matter is that it took Mr. Adams well over 18 months from the initiation of his report to the completion of a draft that would meet minimum Agency standards regarding the organization of reports, the quality of their writing, and the consistency and the soundness of the analysis and evidence used in making the judgments presented in the report.

Other Aspects

Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak very briefly to two other points made by Mr. Adams in his testimony. Mr. Adams' testimony gives the impression that he was the only analyst in CIA working on the Viet Cong and that for a period of almost two years he was the only analyst working full-time on the problem.

During the years when Mr. Adams was most directly engaged in making his case for higher figures, the Intelligence Community relied on the Department of Defense, which had the primary responsibility for order of battle numbers. Therefore, I do not find it surprising that only one analyst in CIA Headquarters was working full-time in exploiting captured documents for information on some very specific aspects of this question.

I would like the record to show also that during the 1965-1968 period, when Mr. Adams gives the impression he was going it alone, the number of production analysts working on the Vietnam problem grew from 15 analysts in 1965 to 69 analysts in 1968. I believe that Mr. Adams' testimony on this point and on the significance of his contribution to the intelligence production effort shows a surprisingly dim awareness on his part of his own relative position in CIA and

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

of the broad range of Vietnam war-related activities on which CIA was conducting research and analysis.

Finally, in his testimony Adams dramatizes his drafting of a memorandum of resignation from the Office of the Director on January 30, 1968, the day of the Tet Offensive. In reviewing the record, I found that Mr. Adams did write such a memorandum, but I also found that his transfer from the Office of the Director had been negotiated almost two months before the Tet Offensive and that he had been in his new CIA assignment a full week before the offensive. This chain of events and the timing of his memorandum raises questions in my mind as to his motives for writing the memorandum.

General Observations

Mr. Chairman, I believe that my remarks regarding the testimony of Mr. Adams make it clear that his charges against CIA are plainly and simply wrong. I see little profit in engaging in further argument and recrimination about the Vietnam war. On the whole, I am satisfied that the record of CIA in the Vietnam war is one in which we can all take great pride. There are, however, several observations that come to mind as a result of my study of Mr. Adams' statement and my personal review of the performance of CIA.

First, I would observe that our experience in estimating enemy strengths in South Vietnam is a classic example of many of the intangibles with which intelligence officers must wrestle in their day-to-day job.

Working from incomplete and often conflicting data, the job of intelligence on this subject was also beset with additional and complex methodological and

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

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judgmental factors. These ranged from fundamental conceptual differences on the threat to be measured, to the choice of the proper methods for extrapolating uncertain and fragmentary data. Even if agreements could be reached on the groups to be included, there were problems in deciding on how to measure their strengths, their attrition, or their success in replacing manpower losses. Even if all of the definitional and quantitative factors could be resolved, there were any number of judgmental calls to be made on the qualitative aspects of these forces.

In short, the problem of estimating the numerical strength of many disparate groups of organized manpower, particularly in the context of the Vietmam war, was of necessity a highly imprecise art. Even to this day I doubt that there are experienced observers – in Washington or in Hanoi -- who would lay claim to having precise knowledge of the numerical strengths of most of the organized groups in South Vietnam on either side.

The problem for intelligence analysts was further complicated during the Vietnam war by the national obsession for trying to measure the course of the war in numerical terms. As I look back over the past 10 years, I view this infatuation with numbers as one of the more trying experiences the Intelligence Community has had to endure. In the minds of many, the penchant for numbers created pressures which made a task that was at best difficult almost impossible to achieve.

Numbers *were* useful during the war to those of us fighting it, but we had no illusions as to their absolute precision. I personally am less concerned with who had the better numbers than I am with the more fundamental question – did the CIA do its job?

Approved For Release 2002/08/21 : CIA-RDP90-00610R000100100001-5

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My answer to this question is a resounding affirmative. CIA did not attempt to sweep numbers under the rug. When it was necessary, the CIA raised questions, debated the issues, and provided its own independent assessments without regard to how they would be received. On some issues we did exceedingly well; on others we probably could have done better.

Whatever the merits of the argument, my concern is that the members of the Executive Branch, the Congress, and, indeed, the American public can feel assured of one fact:

CIA is doing its job. Its analysts are calling the shots as they see them. They do this as professionals in the intelligence business, not to agree or disagree with the desires of policymakers.

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