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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence

27 July 1961

MEMORANDUM

INDIAN ROLE IN VIETNAM

1. Two concepts color Indian thinking on divided Vietnam: colonialism and balance of power. While New Delhi has modified its outlook considerably since it became directly involved in the Indochina problem in 1954, these old preoccupations still strongly influence Indian views.

2. The Saigon and Hanoi regimes have little substance in Indian eyes; they are regarded as instruments of the Cold War powers. New Delhi finds it difficult to accept South Vietnam as a bona fide member of the independent Asian community, viewing US influence--no matter how well-meaning--as a vestige of Western imperialism. Moreover, Diem is not progressive enough for Indian tastes. Ho Chih Minh was long regarded as more representative of the mainstream of Vietnamese nationalism, but in recent years New Delhi has come to regard North Vietnam also as subject to colonial control--in the form of a new Chinese imperialism.

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3. Of more immediate importance in Indian policy-making is New Delhi's assessment of Vietnam as a Cold War battleground where a local war could quickly involve all of Asia. As in the case of Laos and the Congo, the Indian Government relates conditions and developments in Vietnam to the East-West struggle and generally responds in accordance with its overriding objective of reducing world tension. The result is a kind of balancing act, in which Indian representatives attempt arbitrarily to maintain an equilibrium between the opposing sides by preventing either from gaining a decisive advantage over the other.

4. Nowhere is this policy better illustrated than in the performance of Indian chairmen of the ICC for Vietnam, on which Canada and Poland are also represented. India's action, or more often inaction, in connection with inspection and control of violations of the 1954 Geneva accords is often viewed as support of the Communist position. It would be more accurate to describe Indian policy as support for neither side, but aid offered alternately as needed to keep the scales in balance. It is probably a futile exercise to try to find logic in the Indian chairman's fuzzy arguments and phony explanations. The present representative, Gopala Menon, an unimpressive functionary who is long on promises

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and short on performance, is probably more interested in following Indian policy than in making sense. Frequently it is assumed, probably erroneously, that Indian representatives who act this way lack specific instructions from New Delhi and are free-wheeling. Nehru does give a few individuals considerable latitude, as in the case of Krishna Menon, but they appear to be exceptions. According to the Indochina desk officer in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the government keeps in close touch with its ICC representatives to reduce free-wheeling; the chairman in Vietnam once told his Canadian colleagues that every decision he made had the consent of Nehru. New Delhi is neither naive nor uninformed on these matters, although there is some evidence it is sometimes misinformed by representatives trying to justify their actions.

5. The key to understanding Indian behavior in Vietnam lies in New Delhi's interpretation of its role as ICC chairman. By their own admission, ministry officials see the Indian representative's mission as one of reconciliation, not participation as an active third party ruling solely on the facts as he sees them. These officials are equally frank to admit their belief that both the Western and Communist parties try to use the ICC to advance their own aims. Furthermore,

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the Indians consider that in the absence of sanctions the ICC is powerless to accomplish anything without the full cooperation of both sides.

6. The recent adoption by Indian officials of a more cooperative attitude toward problems in Vietnam suggests that New Delhi may be taking a less detached and--from our viewpoint--more realistic approach to a deteriorating situation. While this could be intended merely to redress the balance upset by recent bloc gains, there is little question that Chinese Communist pressure along India's own frontier has greatly sharpened New Delhi's appreciation of Peiping's ambitions. Indians fully share the US objective of securing genuine independence for the nations of Southeast Asia, but, convinced that freedom cannot be "imposed from outside," they expect serious differences to arise over tactics. As long as India sits on the ICC between two firmly "aligned" powers, it seems unlikely to forsake its accustomed mediatory role despite a growing realization of the long-run threat to Indian interests in Southeast Asia.

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