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(U) Vietnam: A SIGINT Paradox (Part II)

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI-REL)~~ As we saw in Part I, NSA spent the 1950s studying North Vietnamese cryptology. The Agency had experienced personnel who had worked on the problem for many years

~~(S//SI-REL)~~ David W. Gaddy, who worked the North Vietnamese problem without interruption from 1953 through 1967, shares the following explanations for the during the Vietnam War.

Vietnam Was Not a Priority

~~(S//SI-REL)~~ Gaddy recognized that the North Vietnamese were excellent cryptographers.

(U) The amount of resources devoted to a problem is determined by priorities. Breaking the North Vietnamese cipher was never the top priority for the Agency in the 1960s and

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1970s. Even though we were fighting a war with Vietnam, the top priority remained the USSR, followed by China. Due to confusion and politics, sufficient resources were never devoted to breaking the North Vietnamese cipher.

(U) Several NSA analysts from the Vietnam era report that there was confusion over how many enemies were involved in the Vietnam War. Dean Rusk, secretary of state during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, viewed the war as one between two distinct enemies. On one hand, according to the Rusk camp, there was an internal fight between Viet Cong guerrillas or insurgents who lived in South Vietnam and the government of South Vietnam. On the other hand, there was another fight between North and South Vietnam. Gaddy explained: "COMINT clearly demonstrated that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were not separate entities. The North Vietnamese called the shots and provided assistance to the Viet Cong. The U. S. made a distinction between the communists in the North and the Viet Cong in the south that nobody else adhered to."

(U) Because of this confusion on the part of policymakers, NSA wasted time looking for evidence of coordination. As head of B261, the North Vietnamese shop, Gaddy found that "when the fighting heated up, valuable resources were diverted from the North Vietnam shop to studying the Viet Cong. Although the two shops cooperated, there was rivalry and duplication of effort. I had a standard joke during this period: Did you hear about the two North Vietnamese who marched down to the 17th parallel? One stepped over and got renotated."

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~~(S)~~ Decision-makers at the Agency had their own agendas. They took advantage of the interests of the president and other policymakers to acquire more assets. While these assets were useful for fighting the war, the underlying question was how this would help us with the Soviet or Chinese problem. Gaddy pointed out that "the communications facilities established [redacted] were useful in fighting the Vietnam war, but they would also be useful for studying the Chinese problem when the war ended. I believe that Agency seniors and U. S. policymakers never dreamed that the Vietnam war would last as long as it did. This misunderstanding helped to explain why fighting the Vietnam war was never the Agency's stop priority."

~~[(U//FOUO)~~ Sharon A. Maneki, Center for Cryptologic History, 972-2893s, samanek]

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