Declassified and approved for release by DIA and NSA on 10-27-2005 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT 14 Dec 67

General Carter -

Attached Memo to SECDEF from DIRDIA subject: Release of COMINT Pertaining to Gulf of Tonkin Incidents of 2 and 4 August 1964, dated 13 Dec 1967, was forwarded by NSALO [redacted] who indicated the distribution as follows:

Cy 1+2 - SECDEF
Cy 3 - DEPSECDEF
Cy 4 - CJCS
Cy 5 - NSALO
Cy 6 - DIAPL-4
Cy 7 - DIASO-SA

P.L. 86-36

Also, [redacted] forwarded the attached DSSCS Memo for Mr. Coyne from Col. Morrison, USAF, Military Assistant in OASD/A. Note: Attempted to burn cy of this for Col. Bolstridge but would not "take".

↑ Get approval [redacted]

TOP

DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

13 DEC 1967

SI-TS-61/PL-4

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Release of COMINT Pertaining to Gulf of Tonkin Incidents of 2 and 4 August 1964

1. I have reviewed the intelligence pertaining to the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin on 2 and 4 August 1964 and reaffirm that our intercept of encrypted North Vietnamese Naval Communications did in fact provide the basis for prior warning given to the USS MADDOX on 2 August and again on 4 August. As the result of a cryptanalytic breakthrough into the cryptosystem employed by North Vietnamese MTB's, this intercepted information was deciphered, translated and reported to the USS MADDOX twelve hours in advance of the actual attack on 2 August and one hour in advance on 4 August. All of the information concerning the attacks came from manual morse intercept and was copied on a typewriter by the intercept operator as heard. All of th information was encrypted and there was no clear text voice traffic which could be associated with the attacks. The original intercepted traffic which is in storage at the National Security Agency Respository at Fort Holabird, Maryland can be provided; however, permanent transcriptions of th original cypher messages, together with the decryption and translations thereof, are immediately available.

2. The system used by the NVN Navy to pass the enciphered messages has changed several times since the August and September 1964 events in the Gulf. Each new encipherment has been from the same system "family" and because of our technical continuity, it has been possible to maintain our ability to decipher messages passed in each new system. We retain that capability today and are still able from this SIGINT source to provide NVN Naval intentions in the use of their torpedo patrol boats.

cc: DepSecDef

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3. Current SIGINT of high value regarding the movement of POL, supplies, ammunition and foodstuffs from NVN into LAOS and SVN is available from enciphered morse messages presently being passed in NVN voice communications facilities. These messages are enciphered in systems similar to those used by NVN Naval elements and other entities of the NVN military and para-military forces. Disclosure of our success in exploiting enciphered NVN Naval messages would undoubtedly betray our success with similar systems and deny us access to this vital information.

4. The consequences of any public disclosure of U.S. SIGINT capability against North Vietnam/Viet Cong communications would seriously degrade not only the Naval aspect of the problem, but the successful prosecution of both th air war over North Vietnam and operations within South Vietnam. The application of major U.S. technical intelligence resources enables us to provide adequate information to allow U.S. forces to direct most, if not all, of their operations against hostile forces. In the North, SIGINT provides us a collection base upon which to design equipments to deceive enemy defenses and to provide self protection to individual aircraft. Further, SIGINT provides a means to evaluate the effectiveness of these electronic warfare devices. Additionally, extensive SIGINT coverage of North Vietnam allows us the capability of following enemy units deploying from th North to the South and thereby provides a continuing input to the order of battle data base. SIGINT also provides us an insight into the command and control structure, emanating from Hanoi, which directs the Communist war effort in the South. In day-to-day tactical operations within South Vietnam, SIGINT provides the "eyes" for the tactical unit and gives forewarning of enemy attack, of ambush, and enemy groupings within the various areas of U.S. elements.

5. The majority of U.S. operational successes on the ground have been due in large measure to th SIGINT provided to the appropriate commanders. Without this intelligence, the success of our ground effort would be seriously degraded and the resultant losses in personnel and equipment resources would undoubtedly be quantitatively increased.

6. The collection of useful SIGINT information by airborne direction finding (ARDF), readable communications, and traffic analysis has resulted in the development of a series of SIGINT indicators of Communist intent to initiate tactical activity and has successfully given forewarning of enemy preparation to launch large scale attacks. During the past year and a half, every attempt by a Vietnamese Communist Division and front echelon headquarters to mount a major offensive has been detected via SIGINT and reported to the appropriate military commanders.

7. As you are aware, the United States Intelligence Board and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have previously strongly urged against the public release of any indication of our SIGINT capabilities. Public disclosure of the U.S. capability to exploit Communist communications in Southeast Asia would place in jeopardy the aforementioned day-to-day tactical operations of our forces in both the North and South. In addition, it could negate a large expenditure in time, money and resources, that has occurred over the past years, not only against the Asian Communist Nations but in other areas of the world. Public disclosure, therefore, would seriously impact at the policy making level but the brunt of the effects would be borne particularly by the commanders and the men of our operating forces engaged in the Southeast Asian hostilities.

SIGNED

JOSEPH F. CARROLL
Lieutenant General, USAF
Director