

March 27, 1979

**'Decisions of the NVR from 9 March 1979: Oral
Report on China's Aggression against the Socialist
Republic of Vietnam'**

Citation:

"Decisions of the NVR from 9 March 1979: Oral Report on China's Aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam", March 27, 1979, Wilson Center Digital Archive, BStU, ZA, AGM 369. Translated by Bernd Schaefer.

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Summary:

A report on the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict, outlining the military forces on both sides and a description of combat operations from 17 February to 8 March.

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Ministry for State Security
Secretariat of the Minister
Berlin, 27 March 1979
VME/GKS/6/79

Comrade Major General Geisler

Decisions of the NVR^[1] from 9 March 1979

With the request

[...]

4. For your Information and further Consideration

Keep for Records

[signed illegible]
Colonel

RE: Oral Report on China's Aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

1. The oral "Report on China's Aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" is taken notice of.

2. The Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED and Minister for National Defense, Comrade Army General Hoffmann^[2], is mandated to prepare this report for an information to the Politburo at its next meeting.

3. In cooperation with the organs in charge, the Minister for National Defense has to review delivery options of military technology and equipment, according to the request by the Vietnamese comrades, to support the armed forces of the SR Vietnam and to implement those options as far as possible.

All solidarity and support measures are supposed to be organized on the basis of the decisions by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED from 6 March 1979.

4. The Minister for National Defense, in close cooperation with the Minister for State Security and other organs in charge, has to continue with a deep analysis of the preparation and course of China's aggression, and to outline the conclusions for the national security and defense of the GDR.

5. Activities in the areas of agitation and propaganda have to continue to focus on relentlessly unmasking China's anti-communist policy, to condemn decisively the criminal attack on the Vietnamese people, to broadly propagate the heroic struggles of the Vietnamese comrades, and to increase solidarity with the Vietnamese fraternal people on all levels.

[signed Streletz]
Streletz^[3]
Lieutenant General

Presenter: Deputy of the Minister [of Defense] and Chief of the Main Staff [of the National People's Army of the GDR][\[4\]](#)

Agenda Item:

"Oral Report on China's Aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam"

Comrade Chairman!

Comrades Members of the National Defense Council!

I have the mandate to inform you about some questions in the context of China's aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Please allow me therefore to

- provide a short military-strategic characteristic of the Indochinese region
- to outline the balance of forces on both sides
- to characterize the process and results of combat actions so far, and
- to explain first conclusions to be drawn from a military perspective after the first combat actions.

On the military-strategic characteristics of the Indochinese region

The Indochinese peninsula is occupying a key position in Southeast Asia. It is the bridge between the Asian continent and Australia. Therefore still major attention is devoted in the world domination plans of American imperialism primarily to those countries like the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia.

Without maintaining and regaining influence in this part of Southeast Asia, the American "island strategy", based on Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, is lacking the secure Asian 'mainland component'.

The reliable political and military position in the Eastern part of the Indonesian peninsula allows for the control of the water straits - heavily used by the United States, Japan, and the USSR - from Africa's Eastern coast and the oil and trading ports of the Near and Middle East into the Pacific Ocean and its adjacent seas.

In light of this military-strategic context, one has to see the treasonous attitude and the criminal actions by the current Chinese leadership against the consolidation of socialism and the expansion of anti-imperialist revolutionary processes in the region; it also is a direct support to the geopolitical strategy of U.S. imperialism.

The visit[\[5\]](#) by the Deputy Prime Minister of China and Chairman of the General Staff of the Chinese armed forces, Deng Xiaoping, to the United States underlines that the U.S. position and its tacit approval of the intentions of the current Chinese leadership delivered the needed abetting of this aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The actual area of China's aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam are affecting the [Chinese] Provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan and the 5 Northern provinces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In the border areas of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam next to China large parts of the national minorities of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam are living.

This area harbors significant, in part not yet exploited raw material deposits, among them

- uranium near Muong Te (20 to 25 kilometers from the state border)
- one of the largest apatite deposits in the world near Lao Cai (important for steel and pig iron production as well as sulfuric acid products) (10 to 15 kilometers from the state border)
- the largest anthracite hard coals deposits in Southeast Asia in the north of Hai Phong (about 15 billion tons) (about 50 kilometers distance from the state border)

Like the border areas in China, the border provinces are consisting of mountain massifs that are difficult to pass. With peaks over 3,000 meters in height, they are of low medium range and in part of high mountain region character. In the lower parts (up to 800 meters in height) they are covered by thick jungle.

The most important transportation routes run radially from Hanoi along the mountain and river valleys to the border area with China.

Overall one can assess that

- the Northern provinces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have rich deposits of strategic resources, in part in close proximity to China
- the character of the terrain is allowing for major combat operations only along the roads and valleys in two main directions, namely the Lang Son to Hanoi direction and the Lao Cai to Hanoi direction along the Red River
- the use of tank and mechanized units, as well as of aerial forces, is severely limited due to the complicated territorial reliefs.

On the military balance of forces on both sides.

The overall military situation is characterized by a quantitative superiority of the Chinese Armed Forces vis-a-vis the Vietnamese People's Army.

With more than 4.3 million soldiers, China has currently the numerically strongest army in the world.

The ground forces have 166 divisions, among them 12 tank divisions.

The most important units of the ground and air forces are deployed along the border with the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic with 84 divisions, 14 artillery divisions, and 6 air corps (about 59 percent of the armed forces)

53 divisions are held as reserves in the interior military districts. In implementation of the anti-Soviet great-power chauvinist course of the Chinese leadership, since 1960 the economic and scientific-technological resources of China became focused on the development of nuclear weapons and according missiles.

Thus currently China has over 350 inter-continental, long- and medium range missiles, as well as bomber aircraft, with ranges between 1,500 and 10,000 kilometers. They are able to reach targets on the territory of the USSR beyond the area of Moscow.

In order to conduct the aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, currently 29 divisions are operating in the three main offensive directions, among them 6

divisions of the territorial forces.

The armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have a strength of overall 700,000 men.

The ground forces are comprising of 38 infantry divisions and 4 independent tank brigades. Of those, 6 infantry divisions are said to be based in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos and 5 infantry divisions and 1 tank brigade in Kampuchea.

According to our information, the units of the armed forces composed to defend against China's aggression are 22 infantry divisions (among them 5 infantry divisions to guard Hanoi), 1 to 2 tank brigades and one airborne brigade, as well as border and territorial units. Thus we have in the combat zone a more than double superiority in forces on the side of the Chinese aggressor.

One can assess the Vietnamese People's Army is superior vis-a-vis the Chinese aggressor units in combat experience and in equipment with modern fighting technology.

However, the military-political situation in the South of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, in Kampuchea, and in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, especially along the border with China, requires to keep parts of the regular armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in constant combat readiness in these areas.

This is limiting the option of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam towards a full unfolding of its military potential to defend and break China's aggression.

On the process and results of the combat operations.

On 17 February 1979, 3:30 AM local time (CET: 16 February, 9:30 PM) China started with forces and equipment from the main military districts of Kunming and Guangzhou the aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. With strong fire support by artillery forces, the attack was launched simultaneously in 14 directions along the entire length of the border to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

For the first three days of the aggression, the deployment of enhanced regiments was characteristic. Those focused their efforts towards the quick seizure of border posts and the swift development of the attack to occupy strategic mountain passes and traffic junctions.

Because of the fierce resistance by the units in border and territorial troops of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam deployed in the immediate border areas, which operated with skilled utilization of the territorial conditions, the regiments deployed by the aggressor in its first wave were brought to a halt in a depth of about 5 to 10 kilometers in the immediate border vicinity.

Thus favorable conditions were created for the built-up of a steadfast defense, for covering the most important objects in the Northern provinces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and for the organized approach and operation of the units from border and territorial troops stationed in the border area.

Because of overrating its own capabilities, the military leadership of China was forced to focus the operations of its forces in the following days in four main directions to occupy the towns of Mong Cai, Lang Son, Cao Bang, and Lao Cai. In order to achieve these objectives, gradually the main forces of 16 divisions were introduced in combat and 13 divisions were deployed in the depth of the rear.

To guide those now altogether 29 divisions, the tactical units operating in independent directions were bundled into army corps, their overall command was assigned to a front staff.

Despite the significant increase in combat and fire power, the Chinese troops advanced only by an average attacking speed of 0.5 to 2 kilometers per day.

This low efficiency of operations by the ideologically trained and physically steeled Chinese troops is, among else, a result of:

- the high fighting morale on the side of the members of the armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and their sacrificial support by the civilian population
- the superior tactical brilliance by the commander pool of the armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
- the ever improving mastery of the modern Soviet arms and fighting technology by the members of the Vietnamese armed forces.

Since 6 March 1979, the intensity of Chinese forces to push the attack forward in depth has significantly decreased. As of 8 March 1979, 8:00 PM CET, the front stands along the general line of Mong Cai, Lang Son, Cao Bang, and Lao Cai.

Thus the aggressor was able to achieve in the main directions a depth of between 15 and 35 kilometers, however without having any foreseeable perspective for an offensive continuation of its operations towards the interior of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Currently some operations of local character are notable, which are aimed at defending the positions and fortifying the occupied segments.

Individual troop parts and units of the Chinese aggressor forces, which were part of the 2nd wave, have been removed to China's territory.

On some initial conclusions from military perspective, derived from China's aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

So far the course of China's aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam allows for drawing the following initial conclusions from a military perspective:

1. The attempt by the current Chinese leadership to achieve decisive military successes by adopting the imperialist "Blitzkrieg strategy" is condemned to failure; because, like in the case of this strategy's inventors, the capabilities do not match the military-political and military-strategic objectives.
2. The "two-front strategy", threatened against the USSR by the current Chinese leadership in alliance with NATO's strategists, has turned out to be a double-edged sword; because a further reinforcement of the troops already operating against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam would have forced the Chinese leadership - on the basis of its actually available forces and at the expense of the Northern front with the USSR and the Mongolian People's Republic - to relocate parts of its forces to the border with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; currently this could have led to strategic disadvantages China would have been unable to compensate for.
3. The high political-moral steadfastness of the members of the armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and their close alliance with the [Vietnamese] population has again proved to be a substantial factor for a successful mastering of the [military] tasks.

4. The military prowess of the highest political and military leadership of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to deploy the absolutely necessary forces and means to localize the incursions by the Chinese troops into the territory of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, as well as to prepare the strongest units of permanent combat readiness to conduct a determined counter-offensive in the South of the mountain massif, has proven to be correct against the reckless mass deployment of Chinese infantry units.

5. Important principles of Marxist-Leninist military science and Soviet art of war have been fully affirmed by the armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam through the actual practice of repulsion of the aggression.

Among else, this is referring to the following:

- the smart concentration of forces and means at the pertinent location and at the right time;
- the appropriate selection of forms and methods of combat operations contingent upon the availability of your own forces and resources
- the growing role of the concentrated use of modern equipment and fighting technology and their influence on the success in battles and operations
- the significant influence of the operative development of your own territory and the concrete terrain conditions on the efficiency of exploring the performance parameters of armaments and fighting technology on the ground forces
- the growing dependency of success on the battlefield on a well-coordinated and uninterruptedly working system of supply and dispatch.

Comrade Chairman!

Comrades Members of the National Defense Council!

From the beginning of China's aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a reliable exchange of information between the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR and the Ministry for National Defense of the GDR was guaranteed.

This exchange of information enabled us to be continuously informed about the respective current status of combat operations.

Like all working people of the GDR, the members of the National People's Army, the border units, and the civil defense of the GDR, have condemned on all levels of their activities in strongest form China's criminal aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam through manifold actions, the strive for exemplary training results, and through monetary donations; in accordance with the general orientation of the party and state leadership of the GDR, and based on the XI Conference of Delegates of the party units within the National People's Army, the border units and civil defense of the DDR, as well as on the Free German Youth delegate conferences held so far.

The Ministry for National Defense, in close cooperation with the Minister for State Security and other organs in charge, will continue with a deep analysis of the preparation and course of China's aggression, and it will outline the conclusions for the national security and defense of the GDR.

Comrade Chairman!

Presentation concluded.

[1] Nationaler Verteidigungsrat = National Defense Council [of the GDR].

[2] Heinz Hoffmann (1910-1985), GDR Minister for National Defense 1960-1985.

[3] Fritz Streletz (born 1926). Deputy of the Minister of Defense and Chief of the Main Staff [of the National People's Army of the GDR].

[4] Fritz Streletz.

[5] 29 January to 5 February 1979.