

MEMORANDUM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines  
By KBH, NARA, Date 2/10/00

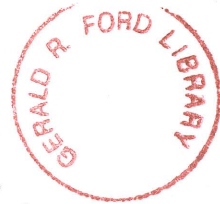
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INFORMATION

April 5, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: GENERAL SCOWCROFT  
FROM: CLINTON E. GRANGER *cel*  
SUBJECT: Report on Vietnam

*Thanks - B*



General Weyand has completed his tour of Vietnam, and his assessment for the President, in draft, is attached. The final report was completed, but General Weyand declined to release it except to the President, although a copy has been delivered to Secretary Schlesinger - and could be available from General Wickham. Little change is anticipated from the draft to the final. The report to the President is objective, and reflects his considered judgment. I agree with his analysis, and assisted in some detail in the preparation of the report.

However, supplementing the formal report, General Weyand will make verbal comments to the President which will amplify some of the more generalized points in his report. He has expressed concern over the political viability of President Thieu, and over capabilities of several of the senior generals in the Vietnamese Army; he will bring these points out to the President.

In addition, he will probably pass on some impressions similar to mine, which follow. The written report, as well as other reports being rendered by Ambassador Martin, reflect the necessity which both feel to seek a positive solution to an almost impossible problem. In my judgment, both General Weyand and Ambassador Martin may feel constrained to maintain the "can-do" American attitude in the face of adversity; my comments provide a more pessimistic balance.

The principal question is whether the GVN can survive in the short term. Without substantial assistance from the United States, I do not think the GVN will survive until the end of April. With a rapid replacement of key weapons by the United States, the situation could be sustained until mid to late May. This is, of course, under the assumption that the North Vietnamese will use their opportunities, and pursue their current military operations while they enjoy a very decided advantage. The intelligence at the time this was drafted - and it is a very fast moving situation - indicates that the NVA is rapidly shifting military assets south to maintain the initiative.

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In gross terms, the GVN had 13 divisions before the NVA offensive. They now have only 6 divisions, plus fragments that have been withdrawn South from the northern provinces. The six are disposed with three in Military Region (MR) III, on the main approaches to Saigon, and three in MR IV, defending the Delta. Against this the North Vietnamese have 11+ divisions in the northern provinces and as strategic reserve, and an additional eight in the south, for a total of 19. Again in gross terms, the ratio of combat forces is about 3:1 against the South Vietnamese.

The NVA have in excess of 600 Soviet or Chinese-provided tanks; the ARVN have only a little over a hundred left in their entire inventory. The NVA maneuver battalions (armor and infantry) are supported by adequate artillery, and have demonstrated ability to use their forces in conventional warfare in a highly professional manner. They have more than adequate ammunition stocks to support continued offensive action to a final conclusion.

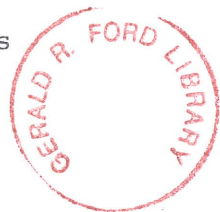
The NVA remain highly disciplined in their operations, in spite of the relatively short training period for some of their replacements. Their command and control is excellent, permitting them to use their forces effectively in offensive operations.

The ARVN divisions in MR III and IV are intact, discipline is reasonably sound, but morale has suffered seriously from the unprecedented disasters in the north. They have been, and remain defensive minded, and with each NVA success their stamina for sustained operations will continue to shrink. Morale has been deteriorating at a rapid rate in the last week.

The NVA are operating as military units, with their families in North Vietnam. In contrast, the ARVN are concerned about the future of their families, and when fighting in areas where the families are located may be expected to place greater emphasis on family responsibility over responsibilities to a Government which may not be able to protect those families. I believe this one factor, more than any other, explains the rout in MR I and II. The NVA have a winner outlook, while the ARVN have a defeatist philosophy.

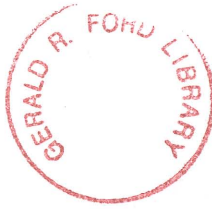
With this as a general background, I do not think that the ARVN will be able to sustain a defense of the remaining half of South Vietnam - unless the North Vietnamese do not press their advantage, and permit the GVN time to rebuild their army. The probability of this is very low, since intelligence indicates that the NVA are moving to exploit success.

Given time to rebuild their forces, as outlined in General Weyand's report, and with equipment and supplies provided by a supplemental bill for \$722 million in FY 1975, the GVN would probably be able to defend the reduced land areas, especially considering the reduced lines of communication and the advantages of interior lines in a conventional war. This would



require doubling their assets in a relatively short period. It is highly improbable that the NVA will pause in their current operations long enough for this re-organization and rebuilding of ARVN to be accomplished. It is more reasonable to assume that the North Vietnamese will use their total assets apparently having suffered little damage in their conquest of MR I and MR II-to maintain their initiative, and to seek a rapid military solution.

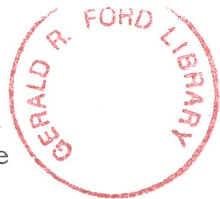
I have talked at some length with Lieutenant General Toan, the ARVN commander in MR III (based on having operated as a team when he was commanding the 2d ARVN Division in 1967. We exchanged views as old soldiers, having shared experiences in fighting a common enemy in the past). This is the man who will be charged with fighting the decisive battles in MR III, and his views would appear to be key in any judgment, and are indeed key to my opinions expressed in this paper.



- In response to questions on what he envisioned as the immediate future, General Toan briefed me on his intelligence, his dispositions, and indicated that his plans were to defend in place with his forces disposed as they now are. I asked if he had considered withdrawal of the 25th ARVN Division from the Tay Ninh area, or the 18th from the northeast approaches to Binh Hoa-Long Binh-Saigon, and what his plans might be. He said there were no plans for withdrawal, and reiterated his intent to fight in place "to the last drop of blood and the last bullet."
- I asked his views on his capability to cope with the threat developing from the north. He indicated that his forces can handle the existing enemy in MR III, and could probably cope with an additional NVA division as well. However, he pointed out that more than one more NVA division would pose "serious problems."
- In response to my question on what he considered the most serious aspect of the enemy threat, he cited the combined arms teams of armor, artillery and infantry. The enemy capability to use his artillery effectively has caused major problems, but General Toan saw the prime threat as the NVA armor. He desires additional tanks to counter this threat, but we did not discuss the effectiveness of TOW anti-tank missiles mounted on M113 armored personnel carriers as an alternative. (I later determined independently that the ARVN have sufficient TOW launchers and M113 carriers to use the two together as an effective military tool, and that they had developed local adaptations to mount TOW on the carrier. However, the carriers and TOW are scattered through ARVN units, and the probability of a withdrawal and refitting is low.)

- He indicated that he needed additional tactical mobility, and wished for additional helicopters. However, while helicopters would be useful, the comment may well have been spurred by our associations in 1967, when I supplied helicopter airlift and gunship cover to his 2d ARVN Division.
- I talked about the problems created in the northern provinces by the presence of families of military personnel near the tactical positions of the GVN forces, and asked if he had any plans to withdraw the families in the more exposed positions to Saigon. He said he had no such plans, and that there was not really any place that they could withdraw to - and that the families would stand on position with his soldiers. While not very realistic, this probably indicates the mental attitude which will be evident when the pressure increases.
- In response to questions on the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Air Force, General Toan had no kind words, indicating that the Air Force was ineffective, would not press in on targets in support of the ground forces in the face of enemy air defenses; dropped their bombs from extremely high altitude, and had even bombed General Toan's own troops recently.
- Discussions on the political scene and higher headquarters were very limited - General Toan did not want to discuss his views, but expressed himself in a few short profane terms.

We then discussed the probable scenario for future events in MR III. Our views concided: expecting a major effort to isolate Tay Ninh and the 25th ARVN Division as a prime effort, with a large secondary attack toward the Bien Hoa-Long Binh-Saigon complex from the northeast.



This would probably lead to a rapidly disintegrating tactical situation throughout MR III, and could trigger a GVN effort to shift a division north from the Delta. However, one division would not have the added capability to lend real stability, and the vacuum in the Delta would cause a more rapid collapse there.

Saigon will probably become a city under siege at a very early point in time - possibly the last week in April.

One event which could alter the situation in all of the remaining South Vietnamese forces would be the replacement of President Thieu. There is a vast bitterness against Thieu for the reverses in the northern provinces. Correctly or not, Thieu is being blamed for the military disasters in MR I and II.

My pessimistic view is that there is little the United States can do to alter the course of future events in South Vietnam, short of reintroduction of U. S. airpower in considerable quantity - and even that probably would not turn the tide on the ground.

At the same time, the U. S. has both a moral and pragmatic interest in making a maximum effort to salvage the situation in Vietnam. Our credibility as an ally will be measured by our efforts in the next weeks and, hopefully, months. While the probability of success may be low, it is essential that the U. S. project a clear picture of determination to assist the South Vietnamese. This will insure that the GVN has some marginal chance of survival, and will, more importantly, protect U. S. credibility worldwide.

In a practical sense, while we may speak of plans extending over a period of several years, we can accept almost any kind of a Congressional funding accomodation which will give us a high surge now. Without rapid funding in the short term there is zero probability of a long term future, and even with a large appropriation, the probability of having a problem to be concerned about by the beginning of FY 1976 may be only academic.

Finally, the evacuation of refugees could easily grow to a matter of millions of people. This is being addressed separately.

At Tab A is a draft of General Weyand's report.

