

MEMORANDUM

1968-X

## NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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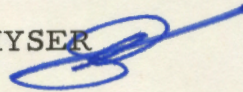
URGENT ACTION

March 31, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR:

SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM:

W. R. SMYSER 

SUBJECT:

The Next Steps on Vietnam



The first purpose of this memorandum is to review what we have done about Vietnam over the last few weeks, to assay its impact, and to consider what we do next.

Its second purpose is to relate our actions to the President's upcoming speech and to tie it all together with the domino theory. We need to think of all these things together if we are to have a good idea of what the President should say and of how we should prepare for his remarks.

As you know, we have done and said relatively little about the current NVA offensive, for three principal reasons:

1. We got started slowly because of: uncertainty about Thieu's policy, the widespread view (buttressed by the CIA estimate) that Danang would hold; and, general bureaucratic resistance (shown in the WSAG meetings).

2. We have let our inability to act frustrate our power to speak. Since Congress has imposed a number of restrictions upon the exercise of American power in Indochina, we have hesitated even to say anything to other countries or -- for that matter -- to the American public. You have made a positive statement in your press conference, as has the President. But there has been no speech and no declaration that would bring home that we regard this as an item of potentially major consequence.

3. We have considered each possible action in a separate context and have not always looked at the total impact of all actions in Vietnam and here. For example, we have sent no messages to Hanoi and to its major allies because we could not follow them up with actions; for the same reason, we have had no Asian or other diplomatic campaign; because of the economic message, there has not yet been a Presidential speech on Vietnam; there is so far no public Presidential letter to Thieu because the ones we did send, largely under Graham Martin's influence, were designed for internal impact. Charity compels me not to comment on the U. S. Navy's effort to help move the refugees,

~~SECRET~~/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY - XGDS

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines, CIA Review  
By KBH, NARA, Date 2/9/00 1/00



but I know nobody who is impressed. Even the Presidential statement issued last weekend about aid to the Vietnamese refugees contained no appeal to the American people or to the world community for refugee relief. Neither have we had any military gestures to warn Hanoi, because of concern about Congress. The total effect of these decisions, each of which was made for what appeared to be sensible reasons, is different from the total effect that I think you would have wanted to achieve.

Because of all this, many Vietnamese and other foreigners believe that the U.S. Administration, like the Congress, does not care what happens to Vietnam. Many Americans are probably beginning to believe the same thing. This presents grave problems in terms of preparing the public for the Presidential speech.

It will not take long for people in Vietnam and here to say, partly from North Vietnamese inspiration and partly for domestic political reasons, that this is the "decent interval" theory at work. As I have written to you earlier, I do not believe there is a "decent interval." There is no way we can wash our hands of Indochina and act as if nothing had happened.

Our next actions must be considered in the light of three purposes we want to accomplish, if possible:

1. To try to have some impact on the North Vietnamese offensive.

I do not believe the intelligence community's assessment that the North Vietnamese will consolidate before they continue their offensive. This is a little like the earlier intelligence assessment (which I also challenged) that the North Vietnamese would only go for limited gains this year. The NVA will keep rolling until it has to stop or until it gets concerned about our reaction, and we should remember that there is a lot of material in place for the NVA to use as it goes on. As I wrote you in recommending messages to Hanoi's allies, the North Vietnamese know the military and political value of shock. This does not mean they will take Saigon, though it does not exclude their having a crack at it. But it does mean that we cannot expect them to stop in order to give us time to get sorted out. I think that Habib and his group should take a look at this issue and urgently consider our next steps in that context, reviewing everything we have so far decided not to do.



We now have evidence that Hanoi regarded Phuoc Long as a test case for the Russian notion that we would not react to an offensive. When the Russians were proven right, the North Vietnamese reserve divisions began to move. We do not know what else is in the wind, though intervention of North Vietnamese naval and air forces remains possible.

2. To try to present the Weyand report in a way that will not undercut its purpose.

I do not know what the Weyand report will say, but I am sure it will ask for considerable aid, of which we have not forwarned the American people. We risk repeating 1968, when Westmoreland's request for 200,000 troops caused the collapse of Johnson's policy (and had to, because we did not need those 200,000 troops when we said that Hanoi had just destroyed its own best forces, as indeed it had). If the American people think that we are using the current South Vietnamese setback as an effort to get unjustifiable amounts of assistance, they will not respond, especially in the present economic context and, more important, with the lack of earlier evidence of our concern. Some forms of aid, like advisors, are simply not good ideas anyway, as I wrote you earlier (Tab A). You can imagine how the Congress will react to the President's speech, since many Congressmen will believe that it will represent an effort to pin the monkey on their backs once again after the poor performance of the ARVN has taken it off.

I do not know of any group that can formally consider this issue, since the President's speech will be prepared at a very high level, but I recommend it for your attention in the discussions in which you will participate over the next week or two. My personal view is that it calls for some action or some further expression of concern before the President actually makes the speech.

I would urge you, however, to act as soon as possible on the two State memos now on your desk regarding a Public Information Program (Tab B) and Congressional Strategy (Tab C).

3. To try to minimize the "domino" impact.

We can see, in Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere that the domino theory still holds despite its detractors. But we cannot just blame everything on that theory and on whoever started the dominos falling. We must think about what we can do, in Vietnam and elsewhere, to





minimize the domino effect. Our aid request can, for example, have an impact. So can a decision to look away. But, though I am doing a separate memo on Asian impact, I cannot give the urgent judgment on global effect that you will need. I suggest that a small group, perhaps under Joe Sisco's chairmanship, should take an urgent look at this. Larry Eagleburger, Win Lord, Phil Habib, Hal Sonnenfeldt and Bill Hyland might be good State candidates for the group, and we could get several NSC people if you agree.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

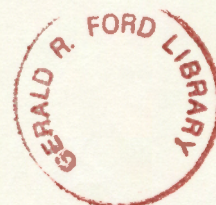
1. That I be authorized, on your behalf, to ask Phil Habib and the Ad Hoc group to review again all recommendations or possible actions we might take to counter the North Vietnamese offensive and to help South Vietnam's refugees.

Approve HK Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

2. That you convene, under Joe Sisco's chairmanship, a small group to report to you on the kind of U.S. position regarding Vietnam that is least likely to collapse the dominos.

Approve HK Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

*same group as above.*





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MEMORANDUM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

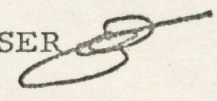
SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

March 28, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR:

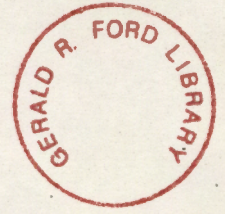
SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM:

W. R. SMYSER 

SUBJECT:

Item in Yesterday's WSAG



I was taken aback at yesterday's meeting by Colby's suggestion to return U. S. advisors to Vietnam.

I am not sure whether Colby meant military or civilian advisors. Either way, I think it is a bad idea.

From the point of view of the efficiency of the Vietnamese, our advisors have never been as useful as they have been touted to be. The military advisors were mainly useful because they could call in U. S. air and artillery, which has now left the country. The civilian advisors were almost all people of limited competence who did not generally understand what was going on. The only ones who made a really positive contribution were the technicians, many of whom still remain and whose number could perhaps be modestly increased to some advantage.

From the standpoint of American opinion, any big fuss about sending advisors back gets us the worst of both worlds: we will be accused of reinvolverment but we will not get the benefits of reinvolverment. The President will be sliced on both ends, for recommitting us and for inefficient results. The American people will be confused and will rightly wonder what kind of tricks are being played.

I think we have two clear options: either (1) to forget completely about reinvolverment and to ask urgently for more money on the basis of non-involvement, or (2) to choose an involvement, if we think we must have one, that at least has a positive effect and that does not jeopardize as many of our people as the advisor notion. That sort of thing would be use of B-52's against troop concentrations or re-mining of North Vietnamese ports. If we choose those means, we will be making the kind of contribution that could spell a material

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E.O. 12958, SEC. 3.5

NSC MEMO, 11/24/99, STATE DEPT. GUIDELINES; LAC review 9/21/05

NAPA. DATE 4/24/07



difference and that would justify the explanations that would have to be given at home.

Of the two essential options, I clearly prefer non-involvement but I can see circumstances under which reinvolverment may make some sense if it becomes clear to all concerned that our Congress will not sustain the aid which is an essential part of the non-involvement concept. Even then, I am not sure it would be worth the price here.

Let me sum it up in these terms: I am concerned that the fall of Vietnam can have a traumatic effect in this country (I might note, in passing, that its prospect is already having a deep impact on Asia.) By the same token, reinvolverment of Americans will have a major and perhaps traumatic effect in this country. If we want to avoid the effect of losing Vietnam, and if -- in order to do so -- we choose to suffer the effect of reinvolverment, we must let that reinvolverment be in areas where it has the greatest chance of having an effect and where it most benefits from our special skills and capacities. I do not want you to end up paying a price twice over. If we choose to ask the United States to pay the price of reinvolverment, it should only be under conditions in which we can be confident that we will spare them the price of loss of Vietnam.





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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

March 27, 1975

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TO: The Secretary

FROM: PA - Carol C. Laise *Sub CCH*

Indochina: A Public Information Program

We understand you wish a public affairs program in support of the points you were making about Indochina in yesterday's press conference. Two courses of action are open to us:

1) To organize a public effort targeted specifically on the Administration's request for a three-year program of assistance to Vietnam and additional funds for Cambodia. Launching such a public program would probably have to await General Weyand's return and the preparation of a detailed legislative request. Thus, we might not be prepared to move publicly for two or three weeks.

2) Alternatively, to undertake beginning next week -- taking advantage of the Congressional recess -- an effort which would seek to set the framework for national consideration of the foreign policy choices which Indochina has brought to the fore, and thereby influence the intellectual and strategic climate within which Congress will consider the Administration's eventual request.

The second course of action seems to us the place to begin. We owe the public as full an explanation as we can give of the current passage of events in Indochina and their implications for our relations elsewhere. The theme would be the issue of "selective reliability." We could follow later with an effort to explain in detail the specific legislation which will be proposed to Congress.

On the assumption you agree to this scenario, PA will undertake an effort which would include public addresses by senior Department officers to important regional and national audiences, supporting television and radio presentations and background sessions with important editorial boards. While

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they will contribute to the public discussion, these initiatives should not by themselves be expected to turn the tide of Congressional or public opinion. Additional statements from you, the President -- and perhaps from influential private citizens -- will be necessary.

To launch such a program, we will need your help. Senior officers are already busy and must be willing to reschedule their priorities. They will also need, directly from you, a sense of what you want them to convey to Americans (e.g., should Art Hartman and his deputies discuss the effect of default in Indochina or European perception of our steadiness within NATO?).

Recommendation:

(1) That you use the attached talking points at your Friday staff meeting to signal the importance you attach to this effort and to give PA necessary "convoking" authority with senior officers.

(2) That, at the same staff meeting, you discuss the basic presentation of our views, from various regional and functional perspectives, so that senior officers gain collective and cohesive sense of what we are trying to convey to the public.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Attachment:

Talking Points

PA/M:FGW<sup>in</sup>sher:sba  
3/27/75 Ext. 20472

Clearance: S/AM-Amb. McCloskey (subs)

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TALKING POINTS

*submitted  
March 26*

--Events in Indochina are moving rapidly.

--Americans need to understand what is taking place and why, and the implications of these events for our foreign policy and world position.

--The President plans an early statement. That, together with my March 26 press conference, will serve as policy guidance.

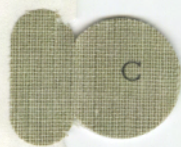
--I want each of you -- and your deputies -- to help take our views to the country over the next two weeks. We need to establish a broad context in which the Congress can consider our Indochina aid requests when it reconvenes on April 7.

--Public Affairs will organize the details of such a program. It will call on all of you for help. I want you to participate, even to the extent of making changes in your present calendars.





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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

March 29, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM: EA - Philip Habib *[initials]*  
H - Robert J. McCloskey *[initials]*



SUBJECT: Congressional Options on Vietnam Aid

A decision on Congressional options and strategy concerning Vietnam aid is needed before Congress returns from its recess. The following memo discusses each but delays giving you a recommendation pending informal contacts next week to clarify the mood of the public and on the Hill.

Our primary objective is to obtain as soon as possible the minimum mix of military and economic assistance required to stabilize the tactical and refugee situations. A second key objective is to demonstrate U.S. concern and thereby boost GVN morale which is in imminent danger of total collapse.

On timing, we believe that a package must be ready for presentation to Congress immediately after its return from the Easter recess on April 6-7. The President himself should announce our program, whatever it is, as soon as possible after Congress returns. Indeed, our groundwork, (i.e., consultation with Chairmen, etc.) must be completed by Sunday.

We believe that new military assistance needs arising out of the NVN offensive probably will exceed the difference between amounts authorized for assistance but not appropriated this fiscal year. The question is whether we should seek an additional military authorization immediately, act later within FY 75, or confine ourselves to supplemental appropriation requests, leaving additional funds until our forthcoming FY 1976 authorization requests.

Concerning our overall Congressional strategy, there are two basic options:





- Option I: Present a total emergency package on military and economic aid to meet immediate FY 75 needs for dramatic effect and candor. This package would include (1) the \$300 million military supplemental; (2) an additional military amount recommended by Weyand as needed immediately; (3) an emergency economic/humanitarian appropriation request which might not need to exceed the difference between AID's authorized and appropriated levies for FY 75; (i.e. \$177 million) and (4) if needed, a new supplemental economic authorization request.
  
- Option II: Split the package into two stages for purposes of speed and possibly more favorable consideration. Under this option we would request immediate passage of the \$300 million in the present military supplemental and initiate an economic authorization supplemental in an amount recommended by the Embassy but probably no larger than \$177 million. (In each case, this represents the difference between amounts authorized and appropriated.) At the same time, we would tell Congress that additional supplementals on the military side, (and in the economic area if indeed this is the case) will be needed. However we would note that we will not report the specific amounts until an assessment is complete.

Depending in part on Weyand's own recommendations and the legislative mood, there is a variation on Option II -- to hold off the additional amounts required by Weyand until FY 76.

Option I (total package) offers the following pros and cons:

PROS:

- Maximum immediate psychological boost to the GVN which needs this gesture desperately.
  
- Represents a leveling with Congress by laying out the entire assistance needs at the same time.
  
- Timely exploitation of whatever improved popular mood exists for Vietnam before it is eroded by further reverses.
  
- Coat-tail effect of large parallel humanitarian package on our military request.





CONS:

- Size of request will complicate chances of passage.
- Any defeat would be disastrous on GVN morale.
- To make the additional military request may itself prejudice the chances for timely passage of the present \$300 million supplemental.

Option II (staged requests) has the following pros and cons:

PROS:

- Smaller figures may be easier to approve immediately.
- Speedier passage enhanced by limiting first request to differences between appropriated and authorized amounts, thus avoiding authorization committees.
- If two above considerations are true, GVN morale may be boosted sooner.

CONS:

- Probable Congressional resistance to passage of immediate supplementals without knowing what our entire request will be (e.g., Weyand's recommendations)
- Amounts obtained may be inadequate to needs of situation.
- Passage may prejudice consideration of later emergency request containing Weyand/Martin recommendations.

Under either option, we believe that in our immediate presentation the amounts requested should not be related to the three year total package which recently we have been pushing. This concept, if indeed still viable, is best left to consideration in FY '76. To coordinate this three year program with the emergency supplemental will, we suspect, only confuse the issue and detract from our primary purpose at this time, which is to secure additional assistance as soon as possible.



This view, however, does not lessen the need at this time to devise some contingency line to handle the question of how the emergency bills square with the three year supplemental. A decision on this is not required for the purposes of this paper, but we probably will respond that it is too early to tell, thus keeping alive the three year concept for the time being.

We further recommend on the economic side that an all out effort be made to obtain MSA status for Vietnam. This will require approaches by you to Humphrey and Hatfield. If they agree, MSA status itself will make available large amounts of PL 480 and other commodities without the need for any legislation. This move, therefore, could possibly obviate the need for new economic assistance beyond a \$177 million supplemental representing the difference between what was authorized and appropriated.



Both options we believe have merit. There is, for example, no question that we will have a better chance for immediate passage of the \$300 million military package if we do not come in with a larger military request now. Balancing this, however, is the certainty that the tactical and psychological situation immediately requires military aid in excess of \$300 million. If we delay making the request, the additional amount probably will not be available until many months into FY 76, if at all. Any decision between these two options rests on a judgment on Congressional and popular mood. We do not have a sufficiently clear picture of this situation and would therefore like to hold off giving you a final recommendation until the middle of next week pending informal soundings on the Hill.

Recommendations:

That you approve informal soundings with available Congressional leaders during the coming week.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_



and, that the President announce the program in a brief TV address on April 6 or 9/10 when he already is scheduled to speak

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer date \_\_\_\_\_

and, that you approach Humphrey and Hatfield as soon as possible to secure approval for MSA status.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

