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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 21, 1969

National Security Study Memorandum 1

TO: The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Situation in Vietnam

In an effort to develop an agreed evaluation of the situation in Vietnam as a basis for making policy decisions, the President has directed that each addressee of this memorandum, the U. S. Ambassador in Saigon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and MACV prepare a separate response to the attached questions. The answers should include a discussion of uncertainties and possible alternative interpretations of existing data.

The President wishes to receive, as well, the Secretary of State's comments on the Ambassador's response, and the comments of the Secretary of Defense on the responses of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and MACV.

All replies should be forwarded to the President by February 10, 1969.

A. McNamara

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VIETNAM QUESTIONS

Environment of Negotiations

1. Why is the DRV in Paris? What is the evidence?

(Among the hypotheses:

- a. Out of weakness, to accept a face-saving formula for defeat.
- b. To negotiate the withdrawal of U.S. (and NVA) forces, and/or a compromise political settlement, giving a chance for NLF victory in the South.
- c. To give the U.S. a face-saving way to withdraw.
- d. To undermine the GVN and U.S. /GVN relations, and to relieve U.S. military pressure in both North and South Vietnam.
- e. Out of desire to end the losses and costs of war on the best terms attainable.)

2. What is the nature of evidence, and how adequate is it, underlying competing views (as in the most recent NIE on this subject, with its dissenting footnotes) of the impact of various outcomes in Vietnam within Southeast Asia?
3. How soundly-based is the common belief that Hanoi is under active pressure with respect to the Paris negotiations from Moscow (for) and Peking (against)? Is it clear that either Moscow or Peking believe they have, or are willing to use, significant leverage on Hanoi's policies? What is the nature of evidence, other than public or private official statements?
4. How sound is our knowledge of the existence and significance of stable "Moscow" and "Peking" factions within the Hanoi leadership, as distinct, for example, from shifting factions, all of whom recognize the need to balance off both allies? How much do we know, in general, of intraparty disputes and personalities within Hanoi?

NVA/VC

5. What is the evidence supporting various hypotheses, and the overall adequacy of evidence, relating to the following questions:
 - a. Why did NVA units leave South Vietnam last summer and fall?
 - b. Did the predicted "third-wave offensive" by the NVA/VC actually

take place? If so, why did it not achieve greater success?

c. Why are VC guerrillas and local forces now relatively dormant ?

(Among the hypotheses: 1) response to VC/NVA battle losses, forcing withdrawal or passivity; 2) to put diplomatic pressure on U.S. to move to substantive talks in Paris; 3) to prepare for future operations; and/or 4) pressure of U.S. and allied operations.)

6. What rate of NVA/VC attrition would outrun their ability to replenish by infiltration and recruitment, as currently calculated? Do present operations achieve this? If not, what force levels and other conditions would be necessary? Is there any evidence they are concerned about continuing heavy losses?
7. To what relative extent do the U.S. /RVNAF and the NVA/VC share in the control and the rate _____ of VC/NVA attrition; i.e., to what extent, in terms of our tactical experience, can heavy losses persistently be imposed on VC/NVA forces, despite their possible intention to limit casualties by avoiding contact?

(Among the hypotheses:

- a. Contact is predominantly at VC tactical initiative, and we cannot reverse this; VC need suffer high casualties only so long as they are willing to accept them, in seeking contact; or
- b. Current VC/NVA loss rates can be maintained by present forces -- as increased X% by Y additional forces -- whatever the DRV/VC choose to do, short of further major withdrawal.)
8. What controversies persist on the estimate of VC Order of Battle; in particular, on the various categories of guerrilla forces and infrastructure? On VC recruiting, and manpower pool? What is the evidence for different estimates, and what is the overall adequacy of evidence?
9. What are NVA/VC capabilities for launching a large-scale offensive, with "dramatic" results (even if taking high casualties and without holding objectives long), in the next six months? (e.g., an offensive against one or more cities, or against most newly "pacified" hamlets.) How adequate is the evidence?
10. What are the main channels for military supplies for the NVA/VC forces in SVN, (e.g., Cambodia and/or the Laotian panhandle)? What portion of these supplies come in through Sihanoukville?

RVNAF

- 10a. What differences of opinion exist concerning extent of RVNAF improvement, and what is evidence underlying different views? (e.g., compare recent CIA memo with MACV views.) For example:
- a. Which is the level of effective, mobile, offensive operations? What results are they achieving?
 - b. What is the actual level of "genuine" small-unit actions and night actions in ARVN, RF and PF: i.e., actions that would typically be classed as such within the U.S. Army, and in particular, offensive ambushes and patrols? How much has this changed?
 - c. How much has the officer selection and promotion system, and the quality of leadership, actually changed over the years (as distinct from changes in paper "programs")? How many junior officers hold commissions (in particular, battlefield commissions from NCO rank) despite lack of a high school diploma?
 - d. What known disciplinary action has resulted from ARVN looting of civilians in the past year (for example, the widespread looting that took place last spring)?
 - e. To what extent have past "anti-desertion" decrees and efforts lessened the rate of desertion; why has the rate recently been increasing to new highs?
 - f. What success are the RF and PF having in providing local security and reducing VC control and influence in rural populations?
11. To what extent could RVNAF -- as it is now -- handle the VC (Main Force, local forces, guerrillas), with or without U.S. combat support to fill RVNAF deficiencies, if all VNA units were withdrawn:
- a. If VC still had Northern fillers.
 - b. If all Northerners (but not regroupees) were withdrawn.
12. To what extent could RVNAF -- as it is now -- also handle a sizeable level of NVA forces:
- a. With U.S. air and artillery support.
 - b. With above and also U.S. ground forces in reserve.
 - c. Without U.S. direct support, but with increased RVNAF artillery and air capacity?

13. What, in various views, are the required changes -- in RVNAF command, organization, equipment, training and incentives, in political environment, in logistical support, in U.S. modes of influence -- for making RVNAF adequate to the tasks cited in questions 9 and 10 above? How long would this take? What are the practical obstacles to these changes, and what new U.S. moves would be needed to overcome these?

Pacification

14. How much, and where, has the security situation and the balance of influence between the VC and NLF actually changed in the countryside over time, contrasting the present to such benchmarks as end-61, end-63, end-65, end-67? What are the best indicators of such change, or lack of it? What factors have been mainly responsible for such change as has occurred? Why has there not been more?
15. What are the reasons for expecting more change in the countryside in the next two years than in past intervals? What are the reasons for not expecting more? What changes in RVNAF, GVN, U.S., and VC practices and adaptive-ness would be needed to increase favorable change in security and control? How likely are such changes, individually and together; what are the obstacles?
16. What proportion of the rural population must be regarded as "subject to significant VC presence and influence"? (How should hamlets rated as "C" in the Hamlet Evaluation System -- the largest category -- be regarded in this respect?) In particular, what proportion in the provinces surrounding Saigon? How much has this changed?
17. What number or verified numbers of the Communist political apparatus (i. e., People's Revolutionary Party members, the hard-core "infrastructure") have been arrested or killed in the past year? How many of these were cadre of higher than village level? What proportion do these represent of total PRP membership, and how much -- and how long -- had the apparatus been disrupted?
18. What are the reasons for believing that current and future efforts at "rooting out" hard-core infrastructure will be -- or will not be -- more successful than past efforts? For example, for believing that collaboration among the numerous Vietnamese intelligence agencies will be markedly more thorough than in the past? What are the side-effects, e. g., on Vietnamese opinion, of anti-infrastructure campaigns such as the current "accelerated effort," along with their lasting effect on hard-core apparatus?
19. How adequate is our information on the overall scale and incidence of damage to civilians by air and artillery, and looting and misbehavior by RVNAF?
20. To what extent do recent changes in command and administration affecting

the country-side represent moves to improve competence, as distinct from replacement of one clique by another? What is the basis of judgment? What is the impact of the recent removal of minority-group province and district officials (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Montagnard) in their respective areas?

Politics

21. How adequate is our information, and what is it based upon, concerning:

- a. Attitudes of Vietnamese elites not now closely aligned with the GVN (e.g., religious leaders, professors, youth leaders, professionals, union leaders, village notables) towards: Participation -- if offered -- in the GVN; the current legitimacy and acceptability of the GVN; likewise (given "peace") for the NLF or various "neutralist" coalitions; towards U.S. intent, as they interpret it (e.g., U.S. plans for ending the war, perceived U.S. alignments with particular individuals and forces within Vietnam, U.S. concern for various Vietnamese interests).
- b. Patterns of existent political alignments within GVN/RVNAF and outside it -- reflecting family ties, corruption, officers' class, secret organizations and parties, religious and regional background -- as these bear upon behavior with respect to the war, the NLF, reform and broadening of the GVN, and responses to U.S. influence and intervention.

22. What is the evidence on the prospects -- and on what changes in conditions and U.S. policies would increase or decrease them -- for changes in the GVN toward: (a) broadening of the government to include participation of all significant non-Communist regional and religious groupings (at province and district levels, as well as cabinet); (b) stronger emphasis, in selection and promotion of officers and officials, on competence and performance (as in the Communist Vietnamese system) as distinct from considerations of family, corruption, and social (e.g., educational) background; and (c) political mobilization of non-Communist sympathies and energies in support of the GVN, as evidenced, e.g., by reduced desertion, by willing alignment of religious, provincial and other leaders with the GVN, by wide cooperation with anti-corruption and pro-efficiency drives.

23. How critical, in various views, is each of the changes in question 22 above to prospects of attaining -- at current, reduced or increased levels of U.S. military effort -- either "victory," or a strong non-Communist political role after a compromise settlement of hostilities? What are views of the risks attendant to making these changes, or attempting them; and, to the extent that U.S. influence is required, on U.S. practical ability to move prudently and effectively in this direction? What is the evidence?

U.S. Operations

24. How do military deployment and tactics today differ from those of 6 - 12 months ago? What are reasons for changes, and what has this impact been?
25. In what different ways (including innovations in organization) might U. S. force-levels be reduced to various levels, while minimizing impact on combat capability?
26. What is the evidence on the scale of effect of B-52 attacks in producing VC/NVA casualties? In disrupting VC/NVA operations? How valid are estimates of overall effect?
27. What effect is the Laotian interdiction bombing having:
 - a. In reducing the capacity of the enemy logistic system?
 - b. In destroying materiel in transit?
28. With regard to the bombing of North Vietnam:
 - a. What evidence was there on the significance of the principal strains imposed on the DRV (e. g. , in economic disruption, extra manpower demands, transportation blockages, population morale)?
 - b. What was the level of logistical through-put through the Southern provinces of NVN just prior to the November bombing halt? To what extent did this level reflect the results of the U. S. bombing campaign?
 - c. To what extent did Chinese and Soviet aid relieve pressure on Hanoi?
 - d. What are current views on the proportion of war-essential imports that could come into NVN over the rail or road lines from China, even if all imports by sea were denied and a strong effort even made to interdict ground transport? What is the evidence?
 - e. What action has the DRV taken to reduce the vulnerability and importance of Hanoi as a population and economic center (e. g. , through population evacuation and economic dispersal)?