

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5

NSC/Soubers to Smith 09/06/2002

By LR Date 02/17/07

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

March 15, 1972

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

National Security Study Memorandum 151

TO: THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Vietnamese Air Force Capabilities

The President has directed a review of Vietnamese air force capabilities and related U.S. assistance programs. The review should focus on program actions that could be taken to ensure that on-going VNAF improvement is adequate to meet the priority needs not only as our force levels in South Vietnam decline to low levels, but if we should eventually stand down, substantially reduce or withdraw our air units based in Thailand or the Tonkin Gulf/South China sea.

In particular, this review should include presentation of alternative VNAF improvement programs for the period FY 1973-75 and should reflect analyses of the following issues:

-- The adequacy of our programs with respect to missions in which the VNAF has already demonstrated a credible capability, e. g. , close air support, interdiction within South Vietnam, troop lift and resupply.

-- The requirement for and feasibility of building additional VNAF capabilities for missions which are now performed primarily by the U.S. air forces, e. g. , air defense, MARKET TIME air surveillance, trail interdiction, intelligence collection, reconnaissance and medical evacuation.

-- Expansion of out-of-country close air support and interdiction missions by VNAF as an alternative to further build up of Laotian and Cambodian air forces.

-- Expansion of the Laotian and Cambodian air forces to relieve the VNAF of responsibility for out-of-country missions.

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-- Innovative use of aircraft and weapons systems, such as light STOL aircraft and CBU-55 bombs to provide added capabilities given South Vietnamese resource and manpower limitations.

In developing the alternative VNAF improvement programs the contributions of remaining U.S. air assets and capabilities in SEA should be considered. As a base case, the adequacy of the VNAF assuming we maintain essentially current force levels in Thailand and offshore should be assessed. Options where forces in Thailand stand down or are withdrawn and where both Thai and sea based U.S. forces stand down or are withdrawn should also be addressed.

This assessment should also consider the essentiality of the various capabilities of current U.S. forces in light of the capabilities of the forces of our allies, to ensure that as U.S. forces are withdrawn the highest priority missions are the last terminated.

The Department of State should be consulted as to the political implications of alternative programs and options developed in this assessment.

This review and related back-up studies should be submitted by April 14 for consideration by the Senior Review Group.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Kissinger", with a stylized flourish at the end. To the left of the signature is a small mark resembling a hash symbol (#) followed by a horizontal line that ends in a hook.

Henry A. Kissinger

cc: The Secretary of State  
The Director of Central Intelligence