

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
Date: 3 Jan 2012 Authority: EO 13526
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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

18 MAY 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Improvement and Modernization of South Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF)

As a result of our conversation 26 March 1971, I am providing the results of our most recent reassessment of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, which has been conducted in terms of the RVNAF capability to perform the essential functions of countering the main force threat, interdicting North Vietnamese men and materiel, providing local security in the countryside, and conducting protracted war. The major conclusions of the attached assessment are:

- The Improvement and Modernization Program has created the military potential for the South Vietnamese to cope with the VC/NVA threat as currently projected. Whether the Vietnamese can realize this potential will depend on their national will, leadership, and morale.] -
- Some minor adjustments in the equipment to be provided under the current programs are needed. However, emphasis from here on should be on qualitative improvement rather than further expansion.
- It is apparent that the highly sophisticated US aerial bombardment capability cannot be duplicated in the Vietnamese Air Force just as it is apparent that the US effort cannot be continued indefinitely. For the long haul the full spectrum of interdiction techniques must be relied on, with emphasis on those relatively inexpensive ground and air systems and tactics which can be sustained by the South Vietnamese. Such systems and techniques exist but need continued improvement and added impetus.
- The manpower and economic impact resulting from the size of the RVNAF makes the ultimate reduction of the force structure essential. The bulk of such reductions should come in the regular forces with some of the freed resources shifted to the RF/PF, police, and PSDF to counter the Protracted War threat. The ARVN must improve its ability to deal with the main force threat with improved mobility and flexibility.] -
- The increased effectiveness of the RVNAF makes the negotiation of an end to hostilities, or reduced US involvement, less risky and potentially more productive. For example, the risk of negotiating a date for total US withdrawals in exchange for actual return of PWs now appears acceptable.) This is omitted in 20 May ver

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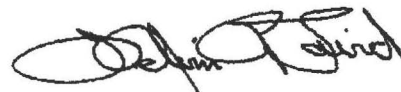
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In the context of our two-pronged strategy of parallel negotiations and Vietnamization, the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program has thus far provided the principal impetus to US redeployments. I am confident that the program we have set forth, with only minor adjustments to changing circumstances, will provide the ultimate objective of providing the South Vietnamese the opportunity to defend themselves.

I will continue to keep you advised of progress in this program.



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ASSESSMENT OF THE RVNAF IMPROVEMENT AND MODERNIZATION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

As a result of a conversation between the President and the Secretary of Defense on 26 March 1971, a reassessment of the Improvement and Modernization Program for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF I&M Program) has been conducted by the Department of Defense. This reassessment has been conducted in terms of four essential functions performed in whole or in part by the RVNAF: countering the main force threat, interdicting North Vietnamese infiltration of men and materiel, provision of local security, and conducting protracted war. The conclusions which result are:

- The Improvement and Modernization Program has created the military potential for the South Vietnamese to cope with the VC/NVA threat as currently projected. Whether the Vietnamese can realize this potential will depend on their national will, leadership, and morale.
- Some minor adjustments in the equipment to be provided under the current programs are needed. However, emphasis from here on should be on qualitative improvement rather than further expansion.
- It is apparent that the highly sophisticated US aerial bombardment capability cannot be duplicated in the Vietnamese Air Force just as it is apparent that the US effort cannot be continued indefinitely. For the long haul the full spectrum of interdiction techniques must be relied on, with emphasis on those relatively inexpensive ground and air systems and tactics which can be sustained by the South Vietnamese. Such systems and techniques exist but need continued improvement and added impetus.
- The manpower and economic impact resulting from the size of the RVNAF makes the ultimate reduction of the force structure essential. The bulk of such reductions should come in the regular forces with some of the freed resources shifted to the RF/PF, police, and PSDF to counter the Protracted War threat. The ARVN must improve its ability to deal with the main force threat with improved mobility and flexibility.
- The increased effectiveness of the RVNAF makes the negotiation of an end to hostilities, or reduced US involvement, less risky and potentially more productive. For example, the risk of negotiating a date for total US withdrawals in exchange for actual return of PWs now appears acceptable.

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PROGRAM PURPOSES

From the outset, the RVNAF I&M Program was considered the critical element in the Vietnamization program. Although our strategy has been a two-pronged one of negotiations and Vietnamization, the possibility that the intransigence of the other side would prevent a negotiated end to the war has been recognized. Therefore, the reduction of US involvement has been almost exclusively predicated upon improvements in the capabilities of the RVNAF.

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Several other fortuitous circumstances created by the fall of Sihanouk have contributed immeasurably to the improved situation in Southeast Asia. Not only did the loss of Cambodian sanctuaries and LOCs seriously hinder VC/NVA efforts against RVN MRS III and IV, but also expanded hostilities on the flank and rear of enemy forces. The VC/NVA now must continuously defend their LOC through Northeast Cambodia. Some 25-30,000 VC/NVA which in the spring of 1970 were considered targeted solely against RVN are now considered dual-targeted against both Cambodia and South Vietnam. In actuality, these 25-30,000 troops have largely been tied down in Cambodia since April of 1970 mainly in defense of LOCs and base areas in Northeast Cambodia from RVNAF cross-border operations such as TQAN THANG. The effect of this force diversion has been apparent in improved security and increased stability in RVN MRS III and IV and in the net decline of almost 40,000 VC/NVA personnel estimated to be currently targeted against the southern two MRS -- a reduction of 36 percent in the threat to this area.

The continued threat of allied cross-border operations in South Laos has a force diversion effect as seen by an increase of almost 30,000 in NVA forces in South Laos prior to, during, and since LAMSON 719. Although approximately 24,000 were deployed from North Vietnam, the threat to RVN MR I was reduced in the DMZ area and a major enemy offensive from base areas in Laos was preempted.

The changes in the strategic initiative coupled with a continued improvement in the security situation have improved the RVNAF's ability to meet the basic objective of the I&M Program -- namely, to achieve the capability to cope successfully with the combined Viet Cong-North Vietnamese threat.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENT

The March 26 memorandum of the Secretary of Defense summarized statistically the program progress as of the beginning of 1971. Briefly, the extent of the build-up of Vietnamese forces is summarized in the tables attached. All programs are proceeding on schedule and are projected to be completed on or ahead of time. Furthermore, the JCS and Service Secretaries have recently completed a review of the Vietnamese ability to maintain and effectively utilize the materiel which has been provided to them. They have concluded that although technically competent personnel are still in short supply and significant back-up US logistical support is still required, levels of maintenance and utilization rates are within acceptable US limits. All in all, it is possible to report that we are succeeding in achieving or exceeding detailed program objectives, such as unit activations and materiel deliveries.

Our current reassessment of the Improvement and Modernization Program, however, went beyond the review just described to try to determine if the program continues to serve the central objective of Vietnamization: to permit the Vietnamese to satisfactorily defend themselves, thereby facilitating an end to active US involvement in the hostilities in Southeast Asia. To accomplish this assessment, four basic Vietnamese defense capabilities were identified for analysis.

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- Countering the main force threat.
- Interdicting North Vietnamese infiltration of men and materiel.
- Providing local security in the countryside.
- Providing the capability to conduct a protracted war.

COUNTERING THE MAIN FORCE THREAT

The potential for successful defense against the VC/NVA main force threat is available. In the aggregate, the South Vietnamese forces outnumber the VC/NVA significantly. Furthermore, there are significant advantages enjoyed by the RVNAF such as helicopter and fixed-wing air mobility, tactical air and helicopter gunship support, and a more secure and redundant supply system. It is commonplace to view these as US-provided capabilities, and in the past they generally have been. However, as a result of the RVNAF I&M Program, the Vietnamese now have a substantial proportion of the ultimate 532 helicopters and over 700 other tactical aircraft which will give them a continuing superiority in these areas even though it will be far less than that which US forces provided at the time of our peak deployments.

In order to test the adequacy of the force structure programmed for the RVNAF, we have analyzed on a highly aggregated basis the opposing forces by military region under circumstances decidedly disadvantageous to SVN. We have used a recent CIA estimate which we consider maximizes both the size and supportability of possible VC/NVA offensive operations during FY 72. In addition, we have liberally allocated dual-threat forces to a hypothetical offensive against MR I in the course of the 1971-72 dry season. No re-dispositions of ARVN have been assumed. US forces have been reduced to 50,000, while the ROKs have been assumed to accede to a GVN request to remain in MR II until FY 73. Under these generally unfavorable circumstances, the ratio of main force maneuver battalions under low to medium risk conditions would turn out as follows:

	Ratio of RVNAF Main Force Bns to VC/NVA		RVNAF Surplus/Deficit	
	Projected	Desired	Troops	Bns
MR I	0.6	1.1	-26,500	-44
MR II	2.8	2.5	+ 4,700	+ 8
MR III	3.0	2.5	+ 6,500	+11
MR IV	3.7	2.5	+10,100	+17
Reserve			+ 9,100	+12
RVN Total			+ 3,900	+ 4

This aggregate analysis under unfavorable circumstances indicates an overall adequacy of forces although the situation in MR I will almost surely require remedy. A redistribution of forces to adjust to US redeployments is now being studied in Vietnam. Undoubtedly, the GVN must make some difficult decisions in generating additional defensive capability in MR I and to

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a lesser extent in MR II. However, as politically and administratively difficult as the solutions may be for the GVN, there is no reason to believe that a combination of redistribution and temporary reinforcement from the strategic reserve cannot provide the combat capability to cope with the threat. Just as the enemy cannot simultaneously maximize his effort everywhere, neither can the GVN. However, as will be discussed under the capability to wage protracted war, a failure by the GVN to establish reasonable restraints on forces as well as a balance between military requirements and economic sustainability may have a more debilitating effect than enemy operations.

INTERDICTION

The Vietnamese forces need some reasonable capability to impede the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam to forces in the south. We should not expect the RVNAF to be able to stop the flow; indeed the large and costly US effort was unable to do this or even to reduce the amounts of supplies reaching the south below the basic needs of the VC/NVA. But they should be able to exact some price and complicate the enemy's logistic efforts.

It is apparent that the highly sophisticated US aerial bombardment capability cannot be duplicated in the Vietnamese Air Force just as it is apparent that the US effort cannot be continued indefinitely. Although aerial bombardment in the Lao panhandle has been a principal feature of the US Interdiction effort, similar capabilities in magnitude and sophistication cannot be duplicated even from the combined resources of all forces in Southeast Asia including those of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Our approach, therefore, has been to analyze the entire interdiction system and to maximize those capabilities which are compatible with indigenous potential.

The VNAF will have a limited air interdiction capability represented by A-1, A-37, and F-5 fighter aircraft (an eventual total of 258 such aircraft by FY 73) plus two squadrons of fixed-wing gunships (1 AC-47, 1 AC-119G). Minor adjustments are being considered such as replacing either the AC-47 gunship squadron or a troop lift squadron with an AC-119K squadron. Either can be accomplished without a serious dilution of the distribution of critically short, technically qualified pilots and maintenance personnel. Further, we are continuing studies of alternative weapon systems of even lesser sophistication and cost which would hopefully provide added capabilities. One such system is a fuel-air explosive weapon (CBU-55) which would allow the A-1 aircraft to approximate one-third of the effectiveness of a B-52 against "soft" personnel type targets. Another concept we are looking at is the "mini-gunship" force, which would combine rapid fire weapons systems with a simple relatively inexpensive light aircraft compatible with Vietnamese flying skills, maintenance and perhaps eventually manufacture.

Since US air interdiction must eventually phase out, the Vietnamese must have the capability to interdict the flow of men and materiel further down the pipeline where the targets become more numerous and dispersed. A variety of techniques for doing this are in being or under development.

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The first element in the interdiction system is the ability to gain intelligence on where and how the interdiction is taking place, with sufficiently "real-time" readout that friendly forces can react and destroy or disrupt the infiltrating element. The Vietnamese special operations THOT NOT and PHU DUNG (formerly Salem House and Prairie Fire, respectively) are principally reconnaissance activities which have limited exploitation capabilities in the form of small scale raids and ambushes. In addition, they can call in air or artillery as appropriate to further inhibit enemy movement.

The South Vietnamese border is currently guarded by 37 Border Base battalions which, by their location and operations astride or proximate to major infiltration corridors, actively interdict NVA infiltration routes as they cross into SVN. These 37 battalions, recently converted to Ranger control from US Special Forces-led Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG), are showing continued improvement in long-range operations including cross-border reconnaissance missions. Border surveillance units such as these can inhibit but not stop a determined enemy. However, if aggressive and determined ground reconnaissance is coupled with other means such as long-range and limited cross-border exploitation, it can be a valuable part of the total system.

Already underway as supplements to traditional human reconnaissance methods such as those described above are a number of sensor programs. At present, there is no Vietnamese counterpart to the current US IGL00 WHITE sensor system employed in the interdiction role in Laos. However, the RVNAF is currently responsible for approximately 56 percent of the unattended ground sensor population now employed in the border area. Eventually, they will assume managerial responsibilities for the approximately 2,500 active sensors which are expected to be in place by the end of FY 71. Full Vietnamese control of the border sensor system will supplement other surveillance techniques and generate targets for exploitation by air, artillery, or direct troop attack. In furtherance of improved surveillance, the Department is studying the feasibility of designing and employing under Vietnamese auspices a new "strategic read-out system" so that RVNAF can determine the highest threat, most-used ingress routes from Laos into SVN, thereby eliminating dependence on the US IGL00 WHITE operation based in Thailand.

RVNAF capability to conduct moderate size raids into NVA base areas and supply lines exists and can be improved by training, experience and improved leadership. Regional and Popular Forces can have the effect of inhibiting local movement of the VC/NVA forces and preventing them from building up supplies necessary for attacks. Thus, these forces are an active part of the interdiction effort. The expansion of the RF/PF by approximately 50 percent over the past three years has greatly increased coverage of the countryside and, if aggressive patrolling is undertaken, VC/NVA movement will be severely curtailed. Paramilitary programs such as the People's Self-Defense Force, the National Police,

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Phung Hoang, and the offer of bounties and rewards are all underway to expand what could be called "grass roots interdiction." As the population commits itself more to the GVN and feels more secure from VC/NVA harassment, this can be an increasingly important aspect of interdiction.

A specialized case of interdiction is the defense against sea infiltration. The current MARKET TIME operation is a combined sea and air barrier employed off the coast of Vietnam. Principal forces engaged in this operation are US Navy ships and patrol aircraft and Vietnamese craft and ships. Because the Vietnamese Navy could not be developed to the same level as US MARKET TIME forces, a land-based coastal radar system has been designed as a substitute for the long range air patrol capability and to supplement the lack of depth in the surface screen caused by the relative lack of ships in the sea patrol. This radar system, which is scheduled to be operational by January 1972, will give coverage out to approximately 40 miles off-shore, with reaction capability provided by Vietnamese Navy surface vessels and Air Force aircraft. If this system performs to expectations, it will in large measure solve the coastal interdiction problem.

Finally, it is necessary to remember that the most effective means of interdiction is to shut off the flow at the source. The loss of Sihanoukville and the Cambodian sanctuaries through political developments did more to degrade VC/NVA capabilities in southern RVN than our bombing campaign ever could have. Continued efforts to diminish or alter the support provided to North Vietnam by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China could produce far greater returns than any of the military actions outlined above. In that regard, the possibility that the USSR and CPR would lose some of their enthusiasm for continued heavy investment in the war as the US presence diminishes or ends must not be overlooked. Likewise, recent movement in relations with the CPR may portend possibilities which could produce major dividends.

In summary, the interdiction of men and materiel is not exclusively a function of the numbers or tonnages of bombs dropped. As US involvement winds down, alternative interdiction methods must be employed and where possible improved to ensure that the threat within South Vietnam is contained at manageable proportions.

LOCAL SECURITY

Since the Vietnamization program began in late 1969, pacification ratings (HES/71) have improved significantly - from about 40-50% A-B population in 1969 to 74.8% in March 1971. However, the enemy's switch to low-level protracted war tactics in the last year now places the burden for local security on the RF/PF and National Police. Field reports and pacification statistics indicate that these forces still need improvement in the areas of competent leadership and proper motivation and still require considerable qualitative improvement.

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Most of the attention in the I&M program to date has been directed to the regular forces. The regular force programs are now largely complete and we plan to give greater attention to the local forces, the police, and key supporting programs such as the anti-VCI effort. Given the enemy's current strategy and the heavy political cost of much of his effort, these local security forces will be the key to the eventual success or failure of the GVN.

This function is only partially the responsibility of the forces included in the Improvement and Modernization Program. Ultimately, the GVN's effectiveness in this functional area depends on the administrative effectiveness of the police apparatus. If improvement in these areas can be achieved, the role of the regular and local forces in dealing with the VC/NVA threat will be made easier. Pacification has been greatly facilitated and accelerated by favorable shifts in the military balance during the past year. Follow-up actions such as Sir Robert Thompson's program for improvement of the police function are essential and will receive the Defense Department's most serious consideration and support.

PROTRACTED WAR

Discussion of this issue has been saved until last because the analysis of military requirements and the adequacy of forces must ultimately be judged in the context of the sustainability of the effort over the long haul if the enemy should persist in the military pursuit of his objective of unifying all of Vietnam.

The Department has been concerned, as have others in Washington and Saigon, with the long-term economic consequence of the large RVNAF force structure. This places a very heavy burden upon the GVN budget which has been growing as US forces have redeployed. Consequently, US economic aid has become an increasingly important source of funding for the GVN budget. At the same time, US troop redeployments are resulting in a lower level of DOD in-country spending, which has been a major source of US economic support to RVN.

The RVNAF has also been a major drain on manpower available for the production of goods and services. This manpower drain is particularly acute because the RVNAF has utilized much of the skilled manpower which is in such short supply and which is badly needed for the development of the economy. We must recognize that, if the GVN is to survive over the long haul, the requirements for sound economic growth must be balanced against the military requirements for the maintenance and improvement of security. It is essential that skilled manpower be released as soon as possible from the Regular forces into economically productive pursuits and into those areas which are essential complements to the Regular forces in meeting the protracted war threat, such as the territorial forces, police, and local administration. A reduction in Vietnamese military forces would not be acceptable so long as significant US involvement continues, but we are already looking, as is President Thieu, to the possibility of reducing the overall strength of the RVNAF.

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We must also anticipate that as the war, and especially US involvement, winds down, there will be increasingly close Congressional scrutiny of the level of our spending in support of the GVN. Although this is not foreseen as a major problem in the near future, at least while increases in RVNAF capabilities are the principal reason for US redeployments, the funding level may eventually come under sharp attack. The search for less expensive solutions in terms of manpower, dollars and piasters remains a priority item for the Department of Defense.

Directly related to the sustainability of effort under conditions of protracted war are the intangibles of leadership, morale, corruption, loyalty, and national purpose. While progress is noticeable in some areas such as leadership, the cultural differences undoubtedly make Western standards out of place. For example, low pay, rampant inflation, a power structure which relies on personal influence, and an abundance of opportunity all tend to cultivate what we regard as corruption in the Vietnamese military. We will have to learn to live with a higher level of such corruption than we would consider acceptable in Western institutions, while continuing efforts to prevent such practices from undermining the ultimate effectiveness of the forces. Leadership has improved, but must receive continuous high level attention in the RVNAF as it must in any military establishment at war.

In large measure, the Vietnamese willingness to accept the ultimate challenge of Vietnamization is now in their own hands. As the earlier analysis has indicated, the potential capability for self-defense is well along in development. Fostering the embryonic confidence and abilities displayed during LAMSON 719 will depend not on US actions, but on the drive of the GVN leadership and the effective use which they make of their military capabilities. Political progress and economic stabilization are more important at this stage than additional forces or military hardware.

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RVNAF STRENGTH (000)

	Actual		Plan
	1970 1 Jan	1971 1 Jan	1973 30 Jun
Army & Marines	432	428	461
Navy	32	40	40
Air Force	36	45	47
Regional Forces	258	283	294
Popular Forces	216	251	258
Total RVNAF	974	1,047	1,100

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RVNAF GROUND UNITS

	Actual		Pla
	1969 June	1971 1 Jan	1973 June
<u>Army/Marine Battalions</u>			
Maneuver	184	188	188
Artillery	47	70 ^{a/}	85 ^{a/}
Combat Support	40	47	47
Combat Service Support ^{b/}	37	46	50
<u>Territorial Units</u>			
RF Rifle Cos.	1,407	1,672	1,679
PF Platoons	4,839	7,222	7,479

- a/ Includes battalion equivalents of the two-howitzer local defense platoons.
 b/ Battalion equivalents of ordnance, engineer, and transportation companies.

EQUIPMENT ON HAND FOR RVNAF GROUND FORCES (000)

	Actual		Plan
	1969 1 Jan	1971 1 Jan	1975 30 Jun
M-16 Rifles	764,000	807,000	865,000
Light Support Weapons	50,000	61,000	69,000
Artillery	1,000	1,200	1,600
Armored Vehicles	2,000	2,100	2,600
Trucks, tractors, cranes	46,000	53,000	84,000
Radios	36,000	39,000	52,000

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VNAF SQUADRONS

	<u>Actual</u>		<u>Plan</u>
	<u>1970</u> <u>June</u>	<u>1971</u> <u>1 Jan</u>	<u>1973</u> <u>June</u>
<u>Squadrons</u>			
Helicopter	5	10	18
Fighter/Attack	6	9	12
Transport	2	2	6
Other	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>14</u>
Total	22	30	50

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VNAF AIRCRAFT INVENTORY

	<u>1970</u> <u>1 Jan</u>	<u>1971</u> <u>1 Jan</u>	<u>1973</u> <u>June</u>
Fixed Wing	310	406	771
Helicopters	<u>101</u>	<u>289</u>	<u>528</u>
Total	411	695	1,299

SORTIE RATES PER MONTH
(Monthly Average - 000)

	<u>Actual</u>		<u>Projection</u>
	<u>FY 70</u>	<u>FY 71a/</u>	<u>FY 73b/</u>
<u>Tactical Air</u>			
VNAF	3.3	3.2	8.2
US	21.2	12.8	5.6
Laotian (RLAF)	<u>1.5</u>	<u>2.6</u>	<u>3.2</u>
Total	26	18.6	17.0
<u>B-52</u>	1.5	1.1	.7c/
<u>Helicopter</u>			
VNAF	13.9	19.8	26.3d/
US	<u>695.4</u>	<u>550.7</u>	<u>432.4</u>
Total	709.3	570.5	458.7

a/ Projected for entire fiscal year at rates flown in July-March.

b/ Based on fiscal guidance memo.

c/ A JCS proposal to fly 1,000 B-52 sorties per month is under consideration.

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