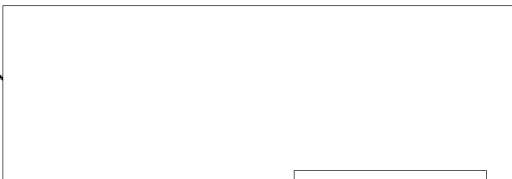


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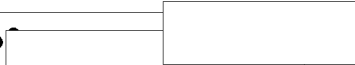
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



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MEMORANDUM FOR

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Sir Robert Thompson's Report

I am forwarding to you herewith a copy of the report to the President prepared by Sir Robert Thompson following his visit to Vietnam in October and November. Your comments on this report would be appreciated, along with any suggestions which you would care to make on dealing with the problem areas raised by Sir Robert.

In view of the sensitive nature of this report, it should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis.


Henry A. Kissinger

Attachment

NSC review completed - unredacted segments may be declassified

SECRET

DATE: 31Dec69

TO:

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT: Sir Robert Thompson's Report

REMARKS:

1. Attached is a copy of Sir Robert Thompson's report which we have just received. I have been tasked by the Acting Director with preparing a set of comments for transmission to the White House. Would you please scan Sir Robert's prose and send me by 1400 Tuesday, 6 January, any pertinent observations you think ought to be made. Brevity in this instance should be regarded as the soul of wit.

2. For reasons I do not fully understand, the White House is very touchy about this document and regards it as extremely sensitive. Would you therefore please handle it on an EYES ONLY basis and not circulate it generally among your colleagues.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

NSC review completed - unredacted segments may be declassified

11/11/69
Spec. Asst.
White

DATE: 2Jan70

TO: Mr. Abbot Smith, D/ONE

FROM:

SUBJECT: Sir Robert Thompson's Report

REMARKS:

Per our conversation this morning,
attached is a copy of Sir Robert Thompson's
report.

Acting Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

NSC review completed - unredacted segments
may be declassified

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NSC review completed - may be declassified
in full

VISIT TO VIETNAM - OCTOBER 28th-NOVEMBER 25th, 1969

Report by Sir Robert Thompson

General

1. I was very impressed by the improvement in the military and political situation in Vietnam, as compared with all previous visits, and especially in the security situation both in Saigon and the rural areas. The position of the GVN is undoubtedly more stable and its performance increasingly effective. This has best been demonstrated in the 1969 pacification program which has resulted in greatly increased government control in the rural areas. The success can be attributed both to a determined drive by the GVN, supported by the United States, and to the much weaker position of the Viet Cong, supported by the NVA, which has now become apparent to the people who have therefore been prepared to identify themselves more with the government and to support the program, notably in recruitment to the territorial forces.

Hanoi

2. It is likely that Ho Chi Minh's death has resulted in some loss of inspiration in the North and of appeal in the South. While the present collective leadership can be expected to remain resolute in its intentions and in the righteousness of its cause, it is possible that there may be conflict over strategy as between a continuing offensive, protracted war and negotiations. This conflict may be further exacerbated by the Russo-Chinese dispute. Hanoi's direction of the war may therefore be less certain, but this is not something on which we should rely.

The North Vietnamese Army

3. While manpower and the means of infiltration are still available, there has unquestionably been a loss of experienced and dedicated leaders and of well-trained regular forces. Much of the cream has gone. The morale and offensive potential of the NVA is therefore lower. Because the force structure has been maintained, and even

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expanded, all units are well below strength and reinforcements during the year have hardly replaced casualties. This could now be remedied by increased infiltration which would allow for a higher rate of activity from about March to May, 1970.

4. An important limiting factor on NVA activity is the reduced forward in-country logistic capacity owing to a loss of caches and of local support. The NVA is now much more dependent on outside supply especially of ammunition but, in some areas, even of food.

The Viet Cong

5. The Viet Cong are also militarily much weaker owing to casualties, defections and a greatly reduced recruiting base. Where they are still relatively strong, for example in MR 5 (between Danang and Tuy Hoa) and in the Delta provinces of Long An, Dinh Tuong and Kien Hoa, their units are dependent on NVA fillers for 20-30% of their strength whereas elsewhere this figure rises to 70-80%. There is some evidence of disputes between NVA and Viet Cong and there is a certain lack of local knowledge on the part of NVA elements and possibly local popular antagonism to them. In addition to recruiting difficulties the Viet Cong also have logistic difficulties especially in respect of ammunition for their units at a distance from the Laos and Cambodian borders. Thanks to the Navy coastal supply has virtually ceased and many of the Delta water ways have been closed to them.

6. Losses in the Viet Cong infrastructure after the Tet offensive of 1968 have not been easy to replace. Such losses have continued at the lower levels. The party political structure however is not yet seriously damaged although in many areas it is displaced and much less in contact with the population. It could still recover particularly as some cadres have certainly infiltrated through the Chieu Hoi program, thereby obtaining a fresh identity, which may enable them to conduct more open and legal activities.

Enemy Intentions

7. COSVN 9 directs that there should be greater coordination between the military and political offensives; that military attacks should be sharp selective actions aimed to achieve maximum impact; that political activity must be considerably increased amongst the population; and that there must be much better control and direction by the party

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through more effective leadership in the party's controlling committees at all levels. Emphasis is placed on the improvement of the party structure and of the logistic organization in both of which present weaknesses are recognized. The priority areas are given as Saigon, eastern Nambo (west of Saigon) and the Delta.

8. There are three immediate targets:

[a] US forces: In order to cause casualties and increase dissent in the United States. It is likely that attacks will be mainly by fire or on targets of opportunity. Direct attacks, other than sabotage or commando raids, would seem unlikely as being too costly.

[b] ARVN: With the dual purpose of lowering morale and discrediting Vietnamization. ARVN is likely to be the main and more dangerous target of the NVA, particularly if attacks result in US forces having to rescue an ARVN unit thereby incurring heavy casualties themselves. Local successes, especially against the RF, will continue as Vietnamese units have an unfortunate tendency to slackness under poor leadership.

[c] Pacification: To prevent continued expansion and consolidation. Because many of the present gains are still fragile, temporary local reverses are possible in outlying areas but I do not think that the enemy is in a position to achieve a general rollback. VC political activity will include selective assassinations and areas where these occur will need increased attention.

9. The general pattern of enemy activity over the next 2-3 months is likely to be constant and widespread small attacks with a few high points. He may be compelled by his loss of initiative and reduced capacity to disperse his effort against all three of the above targets instead of concentrating on one.

10. If the rate of infiltration now increases substantially, the enemy may plan a more spectacular offensive for the period March to May on the model of the May 1968 offensive, though probably not so widespread or sustained. Because there is now better intelligence with regard to his moves and intentions and an awareness of the threat, he would be clobbered. For a few days however it might look bad, though later it could be shown as a Bastogne and a costly defeat. Our forces are at present well deployed and able to cope with this.

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Longer-Term Dangers

11. It needs to be remembered that Hanoi can exploit the advantage of the long-term presence against the US short-term presence. The threat will always be there. Moreover, while maintaining a military threat sufficient to keep ARVN occupied, Hanoi could switch the VC effort to a political struggle in the suburbs and rural areas where the GVN might be administratively and politically weak if ARVN is staffed with all the talent because of over-modernization. The manpower balance needs to be carefully watched.

12. With this in mind I foresee two possible dangers:

[a] A peace campaign in the 1971 presidential election with the NLF supporting the peace candidate and with the people unable to differentiate between peace and a just peace. There are a number of peace candidates such as Minh, Don and Dzu who might be promoted with possible Buddhist support and run President Thieu very close, particularly if there are several other candidates. If Thieu is not re-elected there would almost certainly be an army coup against a successful peace candidate.

[b] In the period after 1971, assuming the re-election of Thieu and only a limited US presence, there could be a repeat of the 1956-59 situation with a Viet Cong recovery in the rural areas providing the excuse for NVA intervention.

13. There is of course the danger of the unpredictable for which Vietnam is renowned. The greatest opportunity for internal dissension occurs when there is an improving security situation, thereby allowing political maneuverability, and a stagnating economy, thereby causing frustration.

US and GVN

14. I am in full agreement with the present strategy, as followed in 1969, and with the intentions of the 1970 plan with its emphasis on consolidation and further development. There are four points which I would like to stress:

[a] There needs to be a concentration of effort on certain vital areas, such as Long An and Dinh Tuong provinces.

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[b] The gains of the last year in many areas are still fragile and security has been achieved as much by the momentum and thrust of the program as by the organization of the security framework, i. e. the protection of a village is dependent partly on its own defense arrangements and as much on the fact that GVN forces are moving forward into the next one thereby preventing Viet Cong counter-attacks in the fragile areas. This means that in consolidating the program in 1970 more attention will need to be paid to tightening up the organization of the whole security framework, rather than putting a disproportionate effort into the remaining 5-10% VC areas.

[c] There is now much better planning, coordination and control both in respect of the US and GVN through CORDS and the CPDC. In my experience of the last nine years Vietnam now has its best government in Thieu and Khiem and the US its best team. Also without question the standard of province chiefs generally throughout the country is the best I have met. The great need now, with few exceptions, is for continuity at all levels to insure further progress over the next two years.

[d] All briefing maps show that attention is still focussed on enemy units though mention is made of the VC infrastructure. There would be sharper targetting if maps also showed the party committee control structure, the important logistic support trails and liaison routes, where the enemy is most vulnerable.

Problems

15. There are of course problems ahead most of which I found in discussions were well recognized by both the US and GVN. I have listed some of these in an Appendix.

Role of US Forces

16. I do not have the knowledge nor could I accept the responsibility for suggesting the rate at which United States forces might continue to be withdrawn. Obviously if all goes well further reductions will be possible in 1970 even though two of the criteria may not be met (progress in Paris and reduced NVA activity). Clearly as strengths decline a decision must be made as to whether a balanced force or a force weighted towards support, including logistics and maintenance should be retained. In either case it would be the basic mission of the

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combat elements to provide protection for the force as a whole. Their secondary role should be to fill in for ARVN units redeployed to a battle area (as was done for example by battalions of 4 Division when ARVN units were sent to Bu Prang). An important consideration will be to keep combat elements in fighting trim which can only be done if they are engaged in operations. In the last resort, the commander will also need authority to commit US troops in a rescue operation to prevent any situation getting out of hand.

17. In support of pacification the many small teams which vary from the original Marine CAPs to the MATS should continue. Their role should be a mixture of tactical assistance and training and logistical support. These teams can help greatly to organize village defenses and to provide both training and confidence. This particularly applies to outlying villages where the Viet Cong threat remains and to villages through which important infiltration routes run.

Conclusion

18. A winning position, in the sense of obtaining a just peace (whether negotiated or not) and of maintaining an independent non-Communist South Vietnam, has been achieved but we are not yet through. We are in a psychological period where the greatest need is confidence. A steady application of the "do-it-yourself" concept, with continuing US support in the background, will increase the confidence already shown by many GVN leaders. The year 1970 could then end decisively in our favour so that, if President Thieu is re-elected in 1971, the VC revolutionary movement within the South should be reduced to a negligible threat. This would leave Hanoi, and her two rival supporters, with the sole option of a conventional invasion. Inviting as it does a different response, this is not a course that they could lightly undertake.

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APPENDIX

Problems

1. Direction of manpower -
Balance between military and civil.
Low pay levels -
Inevitable corruption.
Antiquated office procedures -
Waste of trained manpower and
Frustration of public.
2. Technical services reaching down to the village.
Credit facilities for Village Councils and for individuals through
a revolving fund operated by a Village Council.
Continuing grants for poor villages.
3. Economic growth
Cash crops other than rice
Taxation
Inflation
Effect of inflated currency on exports.
4. Re-establishment of courts
Recodification of law
Legal training.
5. Elections at Province level
Dissident minority areas
Risk of central Government and its departments being obstructed
by elected Province Chief.
Local interference with Police.
6. Status of Police
Charter
Army rank equivalents
Director-General to be of General rank
Uniforms and equipment
Training and expansion
Maintaining strength of Public Safety Division of AID
Limited role for Army officers
Need for professionalism.

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7. Phoenix Program

Allow gradual dominance of Special Police through evolution rather than reorganization.

Preparation of Dossiers.

Checks on Chieu Hoi program.

Control and targetting across administrative boundaries.

Tougher sentences for leading VC.

Check on identities - posthumous promotions.

8. Support for Montagnard refugees unable to return to traditional areas.
Review of CIDG role against logistic trails in central highlands.

9. Review of HES data.

Revision of quota system as quality becomes more important than quantity in respect of Chieu Hoi, VC Infrastructure, etc.

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