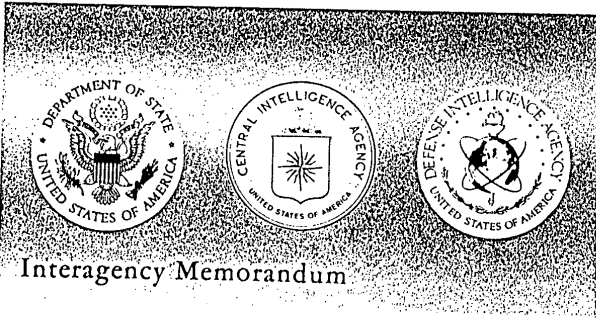


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KEY POINTS



OVERVIEW

South Vietnam: A Net Military Assessment

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April 2, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: SOUTH VIETNAM: A NET MILITARY ASSESSMENT*

KEY POINTS

- During the past year, both the Vietnamese Communists and the South Vietnamese have improved their military capabilities. Even so, a generally low level of activity is expected to continue at least through May 1974, although the fighting may become intense in some areas. With the forces they presently have in South Vietnam, the Communists lack the capability to make significant and lasting gains against the GVN. The GVN is similarly incapable of making major gains against the Communists.
- The situation would change rapidly, however, if North Vietnam commits its strategic reserve to South Vietnam and infiltrates sufficient manpower to bring existing units up to strength and create a replacement manpower pool. In the event of a country-wide offensive:
 - Reinforced North Vietnamese forces would have the capability to regain control of Quang Tri City, perhaps capture Hue, and make sizable gains in southern MR 1. In MR 2, Kontum and Pleiku cities might fall, and in MR 3, the Communists would make some temporary gains north and northwest of Saigon.
 - We doubt that the GVN would be able to stop the Communist offensive without the US providing large-scale logistical assistance. Moreover, should the Communists accomplish all of the above, the adverse psychological impact might be more significant than the actual impact on the military balance. As a result, a situation could develop in which the GVN would be unable to regain the initiative without the reintroduction of US combat air and naval support.

* This memorandum has been prepared jointly by the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State.

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MILITARY REGION 4
OVERVIEW

MILITARY REGION 1

INTELLIGENCE

OVERVIEW

A. Since the cease-fire in January 1973, both the Vietnamese Communists and the South Vietnamese have upgraded their respective military capabilities. The North Vietnamese have increased their combat forces, improved their firepower position, and made extensive improvements to their logistic system. The South Vietnamese, for their part, have also strengthened their combat forces and have assumed responsibility for most of their logistic operations. As a result of the large inflow of US equipment into South Vietnam in the last weeks before January 27, 1973, the South Vietnamese now have more tanks, artillery, and aircraft than ever before.

Manpower

B. Communist regular combat forces physically located inside South Vietnam have grown from 154,000 in February 1973 to an estimated 182,000 in March 1974. Since the cease-fire, this force has markedly changed its orientation. Hanoi has withdrawn two infantry divisions as well as six combat regiments from northern MR 1. In addition, a third infantry division was withdrawn in January just prior to the cease-fire.* Partially offsetting these withdrawals, Hanoi has deployed 12 antiaircraft (AAA) regiments into South Vietnam. Moreover, owing to continuing infiltration and unit deployments, there also are more NVA combat infantry troops in South Vietnam now than in February 1973. The North Vietnamese have also reinforced their controlled areas with a large number of tanks and field and antiaircraft artillery, creating a peak firepower capability. They are clearly intent both on establishing a capability to protect those areas of South Vietnam which they now control and on maintaining an option to resume large-scale offensive action.

* In terms of combat infantry alone, the North Vietnamese currently have 12 infantry divisions deployed in South Vietnam -- two of which have only one subordinate regiment instead of the normal three -- compared to 15 divisions of three regiments each before the cease-fire. They could, however, move additional divisions across the DMZ and back into northern MR 1 on short notice.

C. On the South Vietnamese side, the GVN regular ground combat forces are now some 52,000 men stronger than they were in February 1973, having increased from 320,000 to about 372,000 men. These ground combat forces are supported by a more proficient air force (VNAF) and effective artillery units. Higher manning levels within South Vietnam's 13 infantry divisions account for 45,000 of the 52,000-man increase. The remaining growth results from the upgrading of Regional Forces (RF) into the regular combat structure. This was backed up by the upgrading of some Popular Forces and local self-defense forces into the RF structure. The following table compares GVN and Communist regular combat forces by Military Region and shows that the nationwide force ratio between the opposing armies is basically unchanged from a year ago -- although it has deteriorated (from the GVN point of view) in MR 2 and MR 3, while improving in MR 4.

COMPARISON OF GVN AND COMMUNIST
REGULAR COMBAT FORCES BY MILITARY REGION*

	<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
<u>March 1974</u>					
GVN	103,000	78,000	94,000	97,000	372,000
VC/NVA	84,000	37,000	39,000	22,000	182,000
Ratio	1.2	2.1	2.4	4.4	2.0
<u>February 1973</u>					
GVN	89,000	68,000	75,000	88,000	320,000
VC/NVA	74,000	27,000	26,000	27,000	154,000
Ratio	1.2	2.5	2.9	3.3	2.1

* Communist regular combat forces include personnel in combat, combat support, and air defense units and local force companies and platoons. In early March 1974, there were 140,000 Communist infantry troops and 22,000 air defense personnel compared with about 125,000 and 15,000 in February 1973. GVN regular combat forces include assigned personnel in ARVN/VNMC ground combat and combat support units and regional force battalions.

D. Barring major redeployments from North Vietnam, the current balance of forces will remain fairly stable throughout the remainder of the dry season. The relationship could be

altered quickly, however, if Hanoi decides to deploy some of its strategic reserve divisions from North Vietnam¹, in conjunction with those elements of the NVA 968th Infantry Division remaining in Laos, into GVN MR 1 or MR 2. In the southern half of South Vietnam, however -- unlike March 1972 -- there is no NVA/Viet Cong reserve force in Cambodia available for deployment into MR 3 or MR 4, and the Communists could only shift forces among MRs to alter the balance. The GVN is in a similar situation countrywide. The ARVN now has no uncommitted strategic reserve; any shifting of forces to one region can only be accomplished by reducing the force structure in another.

Firepower

E. The South Vietnamese have improved their armor, artillery, and air capabilities; on balance, they hold an edge in firepower assets countrywide. The withdrawal of US airpower, coupled with the North Vietnamese buildup of armor, artillery, and air defense forces, however, significantly mitigates the GVN's advantage in firepower assets. Moreover, the Communists now enjoy an advantage in long-range artillery, have a strong supply apparatus, and have parity in tanks.

Logistics

F. While strengthening their combat position in South Vietnam, the Communists also have achieved significant improvements in their logistic posture. Following the cease-fire, MR 559 -- North Vietnam's logistic and support structure in southern North Vietnam, southern Laos, northeastern Cambodia, and the western reaches of South Vietnam itself -- was further reorganized to permit a more efficient, speedier transport of supplies in a bomb-free environment. At the same time, the Communists undertook a major road and POL pipeline construction and improvement program in Laos and South Vietnam which permits year-round deliveries to South Vietnam and greatly enhances access to portions of the coastal region² (see map on Communist infiltration routes).

¹ North Vietnam's strategic reserve consists of six divisions, totalling some 40,000-50,000 men.

² Over the past year, the Communists have constructed or upgraded more than 1,000 miles of roads in South Vietnam and extended their POL pipeline about 125-150 miles southward through the Laotian Panhandle and western South Vietnam.

G. This ambitious construction program did not interfere with the continuing heavy pace of cargo shipments to the South. The improvements to the MR 559 logistic system in the past year, including the dispatch of 26,500 infiltrators to the area, have given the Communists their strongest supply organization and transportation network from North Vietnam to the south ever. Moreover, they now have sufficient ordnance stockpiled in South Vietnam to sustain heavy combat activity for at least 18 months.

H. The South Vietnamese logistic command also has improved steadily in the post cease-fire period. Moving from almost complete dependence on the US for support of its forces, ARVN now has total responsibility for the in-country distribution and storage of supplies. In general, the performance of the ARVN logistic system at the present fairly low level of hostilities has been good. Current supply stockpiles, particularly of military equipment and replacement parts, are more than adequate for current consumption rates. Should major countrywide fighting resume, however, the South Vietnamese logistic system would be stretched to the limit and would probably be unable to handle the infusion and distribution of the large amounts of materiel required to support the GVN's combat forces. Even at the present modest level of combat, there is a problem of getting the proper mix of supplies to GVN forces on a timely basis. Moreover, interregional distribution of supplies is hampered by virtual autonomy of each MR commander, and ARVN remains dependent on US civilian contractors for aircraft maintenance and port management.

Intelligence

I. RVNAF intelligence does not provide adequate out-of-country surveillance. Such primary threat indicators as infiltration of North Vietnamese troops into South Vietnam, deployment of Communist combat units from Laos or North Vietnam, or logistic movements into South Vietnam, are monitored by US intelligence assets. If early warning of a Communist build-up for a major offensive is to be detected, it will have to be through continued US intelligence collection.

Qualitative Factors

J. Since the cease-fire, the RVNAF has improved its leadership through personnel shifts and additional training and has become more proficient in using firepower. Serious

ANNEX A
MILITARY REGION I
MILITARY REGION I

problems still exist, however, especially those stemming from inexperience in managing, supplying and maintaining a large force in combat. Moreover, lack of coordination between different commands still impedes the RVNAF's fighting ability. While efforts are being made to rectify these problems -- some of which already have been successful -- RVNAF still needs more time to improve all aspects of its fighting forces before it could be expected to handle a major Communist offensive on its own.

K. The Communists historically have been more disciplined, tenacious, and dedicated fighters than the RVNAF. They too, however, have their shortcomings. After the initial successes in the 1972 Easter Offensive, the pressures of maintaining a sustained offensive began to be reflected in less effective leadership and a lack of coordination. Moreover, as the toll of casualties mounted, they began to experience a reduction in troop morale and the problems attendant with having to replace experienced cadre with those who possessed inadequate formal military training. Since the cease-fire, the North Vietnamese have taken measures to overcome these shortcomings, including comprehensive training programs in both the North and the South. In last year's fighting in Quang Duc and Pleiku provinces, the Communists used infantry, armor, artillery and AAA forces effectively, suggesting that they are making progress in coordinating the actions of their forces.

Scenarios for the Remainder of the Dry Season

L. *Limited Activity: The Most Likely Scenario.* According to reliable agent reporting, the North Vietnamese do not plan to launch a major offensive in South Vietnam, at least through the remainder of the 1973-1974 dry season. These sources indicate that Communist combat activity will be confined to the defense of their territory and limited offensive operations against selected targets. Similarly, GVN tactical plans through the dry season will consist of a mix of defense and offense. Under these circumstances, neither side is likely to achieve substantial, permanent territorial gains in the next few months.

M. Under this scenario, the outlook for MR 1, where defensive lines have stabilized, is for a continued absence of heavy combat activity. In MR 2, combat activity may intensify

in the central highlands as both sides contest territory along strategic lines of communication (LOCs). Neither side, however, has a decisive edge, since ARVN's numerical superiority in the highlands is partly offset by NVA firepower assets. In MR 3, there probably will be some high points of activity, largely confined to sapper attacks, attacks-by-fire and LOC interdiction efforts. To the south in MR 4, Communist combat activity will be handicapped by understrength units and a weak logistic system.

N. *A General Offensive Scenario.* What would be the result if large-scale hostilities broke out again in South Vietnam in the next several months? Both the GVN and the North Vietnamese would find it difficult to launch and sustain a major offensive in the immediate future. Should the Communists decide to do so, however, they would have the capability by the end of April 1974 if they committed new divisions from outside South Vietnam and substantially increased the current rate of infiltration. Since they would be the aggressors and could achieve local manpower or firepower superiority in chosen areas, the unfavorable (to the Communists) nationwide ratio of forces would not necessarily be a critical factor in their decision. (In none of their earlier offensives have the Communists had a favorable nationwide ratio of forces.)

O. Under this scenario, the North Vietnamese would launch a countrywide offensive some time after increasing infiltration and redeploying several infantry divisions from the strategic reserve to GVN MR 1, where the weather will remain good from now through August. If this worst likely scenario developed -- and US support were not provided -- the North Vietnamese forces in northern MR 1 would regain control of Quang Tri City, and gain additional territory in the southern part of the region, probably including a provincial capital. The key to the defense of MR 1 rests with the GVN's ability to resupply critical areas if major land LOCs are interdicted. If the GVN were not able to overcome resupply problems -- considering its limited assets -- then Hue also could fall to the Communists. From the Communist point of view, the destruction of the elite units defending Hue would be as important as the capture of the city itself. The Marines and Airborne are the GVN's strategic reserve, and if they were rendered combat ineffective, it would undermine the GVN's overall defensive ability.

MILITARY REGION 4

ANNEX A

MILITARY REGION 1

MILITARY REGION 2

P. In MR 2, one or both provincial capitals of Pleiku and Kontum could conceivably fall into Communist hands, although the fighting would be fairly even. North and northwest of Saigon in MR 3, the Communists would temporarily gain additional territory, including several district capitals. GVN forces, on the other hand, probably would not yield any substantial ground in coastal MR 2 or in MR 4.

Q. In sum, if the Communists launched a general offensive, we believe that they would make some permanent territorial gains. The GVN would probably be unable to stop the Communist offensive without the US providing large-scale logistical assistance. Given the near parity in the two sides' physical capabilities, the outcome of any major Communist offensive would be highly influenced by intangibles virtually impossible to predict. For example, the resourcefulness and effectiveness -- or lack thereof -- of individual ARVN unit leaders under stress in the initial days of combat could have a major impact on the outcome of the battle. Moreover, the adverse psychological impact of Communist successes in the initial stages of an offensive might be more significant than the actual impact on the military balance. Thus, a situation could develop in which the GVN would be unable to regain the initiative without the reintroduction of US combat air and naval support.

ANNEX A
MILITARY REGION

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