

MEMORANDUM

B-8

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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JCS REVIEWED 14-Jul-2010: NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION.

May 3, 1972

JCS REVIEWED 14-Jul-2010: REFER TO OSD

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT: Report From General Abrams

DOS REVIEWED 11 AUG 2011 NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION

Attached at Tab A is an assessment by General Abrams of South Vietnamese leadership changes, strategic plans, and the condition of South Vietnamese and enemy forces at the present time.

Leadership Changes:

In an earlier memorandum I reported on leadership changes planned by President Thieu. In commenting on these anticipated changes, General Abrams makes the following additional points of interest:

-- The new Commander in MR-1 is the best South Vietnamese field Commander and knows MR-1 intimately.

-- The Commander of the 3rd Division, which participated in the defense of Quang Tri, may be relieved but this has not been decided. (A recent announcement indicates that the Commander has in fact been relieved and placed under investigation.)

-- The head of the Armor Command will attempt to put the three ranger groups in MR-1 back into fighting condition.

-- The Marines, which have habitually been employed as separate brigades, will now be used as a Division force under the Commander of the Marine Corps.

Strategic Concept:

President Thieu has issued orders to clear up the An Loc situation, hold Kontum, hold Hue and counterattack to retake Quang Tri. He has directed the following specific moves:

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-- General Minh has been given three days to clear the enemy from An Loc and release the Airborne Division.

-- An Airborne Brigade will be withdrawn from the Kontum area to prepare to reinforce Hue.

-- The two main forces for the counterattack in MR-1 will be the Marine and Airborne Divisions.

General Abrams believes that President Thieu's concept is sound but points out that there are two major risks involved:

-- Withdrawal of the Airborne Brigade will increase the risk for Kontum.

-- The enemy may regenerate momentum and attack Hue before forces can be positioned for the counter attack.

South Vietnamese Forces

Based on fragmentary reports the following picture has emerged concerning the current status of South Vietnamese forces in MR-1:

-- The South Vietnamese 1st and 2nd Divisions, the 51st Regiment and the Marine Division less one Brigade are considered combat effective. The other Marine Brigade came out of Quang Tri in good order but lost most of its heavy equipment.

-- The 3rd Division, 20th Tank Squadron and three ranger groups involved in the fighting at Quang Tri are considered combat ineffective.

-- Considering maneuver battalions there are approximately 44 that are combat effective and 23 that are ineffective.

The situation in MR-2 is as follows:

--The 23rd Division and a number of smaller units are combat effective.

-- The two Korean Divisions are effective but presently of little use outside their normal area of operations.

-- Three regiments of the 22nd Division and an armor cavalry squadron are considered to be ineffective.

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-- Approximately 38 maneuver battalions are rated combat effective and 12 ineffective.

The situation in MR's 3 and 4 is relatively stable although the 5th ARVN Division in MR-3 sustained considerable damage at An Loc.

Enemy Forces:

General Abrams makes the following assessment of the current effectiveness of enemy units:

MR-1

-- The 304th NVA Division has been heavily hit by B-52 strikes and may have the equivalent of only one combat effective regiment. The 308th NVA Division is minimally combat effective.

-- The 324B Division which is targeted against Hue is still considered effective but has limited offensive capability.

-- The enemy's determination to continue the offensive in MR-1 is evidenced by deployment of elements of the 325th NVA Division to the DMZ area and movement of the 312 NVA Division headquarters from northern Laos to southern North Vietnam. The 325th Division had been the only regular combat division remaining in North Vietnam.

MR-2

-- The 320th and 2nd NVA Divisions are combat effective and presently deploying elements to the vicinity of Kontum City.

-- While an attack on Kontum appears imminent, enemy capability to conduct a continuing offensive is limited by an extended logistical system and replacements in the infiltration pipeline.

-- The enemy now controls the northern portion of Binh Dinh Province on the coast and is expected to continue attempts to push southward.

MR-3

-- Failure to sieze An Loc and a significant decrease in ground attacks and shellings indicates that the enemy does not have the capability to sustain a main force offensive at this time.

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-- Elements of two regiments are believed to be regrouping in the vicinity of An Loc but are only considered to be marginally effective.

-- The 7th NVA Division which is blocking Highway 13 below An Loc is also rated as only marginally effective, but the 5th VC Division which has participated in only limited combat operations is still considered combat effective.

MR-4

All evidence indicates that the present period of increased enemy initiatives will continue.

Overall:

In summing up the situation, General Abrams makes the following points:

-- The situation in MR-1 and -2 is serious and losses have been significant.

-- Enemy reinforcements are moving into the DMZ area and it is doubtful whether the Airborne Division will be able to reinforce Hue before it comes under attack.

-- President Thieu has taken the proper steps to correct leadership problems and restore the will to fight.

-- U.S. air has been critical in supporting the South Vietnamese.

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May 3, 1972

FROM: GENERAL ABRAMS

SUBJECT: COMUSMACV Special Assessment

1. In my daily assessments, I am endeavoring to keep you informed on the situation as it develops here. In this special assessment, I want to inform you of several broader aspects of the overall situation as it has developed in the past few days.

2. As of 1 May, after 31 days of combat, the pressure had mounted and the battle had become brutal, the senior military leadership was beginning to bend and, in some instances, break. It was apparent that in adversity the senior leadership was losing its will and could not be depended on to take the necessary measures that would cause the RVNAF to stand and fight. Known exceptions to this were Generals Truong and Phu. As I studied the situation on 1 May, there was no apparent basis for confidence that Hue or Kontum could be held and it was clear that Quang Tri was not only to be lost, but that a virtual rout was about to occur. At that point, I arranged through Ambassador Bunker, for an audience with President Thieu at 0800 Saigon time, 2 May. I met with President Thieu on 2 May and outlined to him as candidly as possible the critical situation which he faced and emphasized the seriousness of the then developing breakdown in command and control in the Quang Tri area, the disobedience of orders in MR-2 and disputes among commanders in MR-3. I pointed out as persuasively as possible that all our efforts of the past several years were at stake and that the effectiveness of RVNAF and GVN leadership at this time was the crucial ingredient.

3. Subsequent to the 0800 meeting on 2 May, President Thieu, at 1200 hours assembled his four Corps Commanders, Chief of the JGS, Commanders of the Marine and Airborne Divisions, and the Navy Commander. At that meeting, the situation was reviewed, the President emphasized the need for proper leadership and discussed defects in leadership which had come to his attention. The outcome of the meeting is that President Thieu has made major command changes

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which will provide new leadership and hopefully improve the will to fight and has outlined his strategic concept for the next stage of the battle. He has relieved General Lam from command of I Corps and assigned General Truong. General Truong is the best field commander in RVN and knows MR-1 intimately. General Nghi, currently commanding 21st Division, will take temporary command of IV Corps. General Hau, currently Assistant Division Commander, Airborne Division, will take command of the 21st Division. The relief of General Dzu is under consideration. General Giai, currently commanding 3rd Division, may be relieved but this has not been decided on. General Toan, Commander of the Armor Command, will attempt to gather up the 1, 4 and 5 Ranger Groups in MR-1 and put them back into fighting condition. Attempts are under way to reassemble and reconstitute the 3rd Division. One Marine Division habitually employed as separate brigades, will be employed as a division under Lt General Khang. The 9th and 21st Divisions will be used as needed throughout MR-s 3, 4 and Cambodia. General Minh has been told to get going and take the necessary decisive and hard actions to kill the enemy. President Thieu has decided to visit Danang and Hue to make his personal presence felt. These are prudent command changes and attempts to get things back in order. President Thieu's strategic concept, for which he has issued the necessary preliminary orders, is to clear up the An Loc situation, hold Kontum, hold Hue and counterattack to retake Quang Tri. He has given General Minh three days to clear up An Loc and release the Airborne Division and has ordered the withdrawal of the Airborne Brigade from Kontum. The Airborne Division will require several days for resupply and re-equipping and then will be committed to the counterattack to retake Quang Tri. The two main forces for the counterattack will be the Marine Division and the Airborne Division. Under the circumstances, I believe President Thieu's concept is sound although there are two major risks involved. The first is that the withdrawal of the Airborne Brigade will increase the risk for Kontum. The second risk is that the enemy may regenerate his momentum and attack Hue before forces can be positioned for the counterattack.

4. Information as to damage sustained by friendly forces is still very fragmentary. The 1st and 2nd Divisions, 51st Regiment, and the Marine Division less the 147th Brigade are considered combat effective. The 147th Marine Brigade came out of Quang Tri in good order but lost most of its heavy equipment. The 3rd Division, 20th Tank Squadron, and the 1, 4 and 5 Ranger Groups are considered ineffective.

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In terms of maneuver battalions of all types (including border Ranger defense) there are approximately 23 battalions that are probably combat ineffective and approximately 44 that are combat effective. In MR-2, the 23rd Division, 2nd Ranger Group, 2nd Armored Brigade, the 41st Regiment of the 22nd Division and two battalions of the Airborne Brigade are considered combat effective. The two ROK divisions are combat effective but of little use except in their normal area of operations. The 40, 42, and 47 Regiments of the 22nd Division and the 19th Armored Cavalry Squadron are combat ineffective. Information on the Armored Cavalry unit's effectiveness is not available. In terms of maneuver battalions of all types (including border Ranger Defense Battalions), there are approximately 12 battalions that are combat ineffective and approximately 38 battalions that are combat effective. Twelve of the 38 combat effective battalions are Border Ranger Defense Battalions which have little or no mobility. In view of the relatively stable situation in MR-s 3 and 4, I will not attempt a detailed assessment of damage to friendly forces in these regions except to note that the 5th Division in MR-3 has sustained considerable damage at An Loc.

5. The following is an assessment of the effectiveness of enemy units in the Republic.

A. In Northern MR-1, the 304th NVA Division has been hit heavily by B-52 strikes and may have the equivalent of only one combat effective regiment. The 308th NVA Division, recently active against Quang Tri, is minimally combat effective. The 324B NVA Division, active against Fire Support Bases Bastogne and Birmingham and targeted against Hue, is still considered combat effective but with limited offensive capability. The enemy's determination to continue the offensive in MR-1 is evidenced by the employment of the Headquarters and regimental elements of the 325th NVA Division to the DMZ area, and the Headquarters 312 NVA Division from Northern Laos to Quang Binh Province of NVN.

B. In MR-2, enemy forces are continuing to probe friendly positions. The 320th NVA and the 2nd NVA Divisions are considered combat effective, and are presently deploying elements to the vicinity of Kontum City. An attack on Kontum appears imminent; however, the enemy's capability to conduct a continuing offensive is limited by an extended logistical system and by those replacements in the infiltration pipeline. In Binh

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Dinh, the fall of Landing Zone English has given enemy forces the control of the Northern portion of the province, and they are expected to continue attempts to push southward.

C. In MR-3, the enemy's failure to seize An Loc and a significant decrease in ground attacks and attacks by fire are indication that he does not have the capability to sustain a main force offensive at this time. Elements of at least 2 regiments of the 9th VC Division, the 271st and 272nd, are now believed engaged in regrouping in the vicinity of An Loc but are only believed to be marginally effective. The 7th Division, still engaged in blocking Highway 13 below An Loc is also considered to be marginally effective. The 5th VC Division, which has participated in only limited combat operations, is still considered combat effective and is....

D. All evidence indicates that the present period of increased enemy initiatives will continue in MR-4.

6. The situation in MR-1 and MR-2 is serious. Losses of combat effectiveness in maneuver battalions and support units and losses of equipment are significant. Enemy reinforcements have begun moving into the DMZ area. *I doubt that there will be time to extract and reposition the Airborne Division before Hue comes under attack. President Thieu has taken the proper steps to correct the leadership problems and restore the will to fight. We will use air power to try to buy time for his efforts to take effect. The heart of the matter continues to be the RVNAF will to fight. US air, in addition to the heavy attrition it has imposed on the enemy, has been critical in supporting the Vietnamese will to fight.

*(from Kontum)

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