

THE WHITE HOUSE

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ARMY review completed

State Dept. review completed

MORI C05105171

April 26, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT:

Situation in South Vietnam

Attached at Tab A is an assessment from Ambassador Bunker on the situation in South Vietnam which will be of interest to you in preparing for this evening's statement. Among the more positive statements in Ambassador Bunker's assessment, the following are significant:

-- The enemy is totally committed to the defeat of South Vietnam's military forces and to the destruction of its government.

-- The resistance put up by GVN in most areas is heartening.

-- The senior Vietnamese leadership has faced the continued enemy pressure with skill and determination, preventing the enemy from achieving its major objectives.

-- After nearly a month of intense warfare, the confidence of the GVN and of the population in eventual success is unimpaired.

-- The enemy's appeal for a national uprising has resulted in no increase in Viet Cong activity in and around population units. When the offensive began, many people feared a repetition of the February 1968 TET in which enemy units appeared suddenly in populated areas. This failed to materialize owing to the apparent weakness of the Viet Cong movement while concurrently the steadiness of the GVN and the effectiveness of its armed forces became obvious to the people.

-- The bombing of the North has been widely applauded here both as a means of inflicting danger on the enemy and as a demonstration of U.S. and GVN determination to pursue the war aggressively.

-- The weakness of the Viet Cong effort until now and the absence of terrorist activity in Saigon and other cities has convinced the population that the local threat is minimal and they are confident that with U.S. air support the North Vietnamese invasion will ultimately be defeated.

-- Economic conditions in areas not directly affected by the war remain stable.

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VIA CAS CHANNELS (BUNKER)

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26 April 1972

FROM: ABMASSADOR BUNKER SAIGON 0077
TO: THE WHITE HOUSE, EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY
FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER
REF: WHS 2053

1. During his visit, Al Haig suggested that General Abrams and I continue to send you our personal assessment of the situation here about once a week. General Abrams, of course, will be sending his personal assessment to the President as requested reftel. I believe the following may be timely.

2. Summary. In the period since my last assessment we have seen no reason to change our estimate of the enemy's objectives in this offensive nor of the lengths to which he is prepared to go in order to achieve them. NVA forces have fought bravely and tenaciously in every area, but the resistance put up by the GVN in most areas has been heartening. The GVN is continuing to react positively and energetically to the problems it confronts, but now that the first shock of the invasion is passed, the traditional carping of opposition leaders at the Thieu Government is beginning to appear.

3. It has become increasingly clear that the enemy is totally committed to the defeat of South Vietnam's military forces and to the destruction of

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2

of its government. He has already employed all but his remaining reserve division - the 325th - and it has moved south to a position from which it could join the battle in MR 1 in less than a week. He has repeatedly committed his units in coordinated attacks of battalion size and larger in MR's 1, 2, and 3, supporting them with tanks and heavy artillery. In spite of sizeable losses in men and equipment, he appears ready to pay any price for a conventional victory on the ground.

4. The senior Vietnamese leadership has faced this continued pressure with skill and determination, preventing the enemy from achieving his major objectives. US and VNAF air power have been decisive elements in the battles to date, ably supporting the ground forces which have stubbornly fought it out with the best the enemy can offer. There have been isolated cases where leadership was weak, but the ARVN forces have generally distinguished themselves.

5. In MR 1 the enemy has been unable to open Route 547 to reach Hue or to take vital areas in Quang Tri Province. General Lam remains confident and offense-minded, pushing the enemy to the west - farther from the positions needed to mount an attack on Hue.

6. In MR 2, the expected all-out offensive appears to have begun. Key positions on Rocket Ridge have been evacuated and the intensity of assaults by fire is increasing each day. General Dzu is realigning his defensive

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3

posture to defend Kontum and Pleiku. Command arrangements have not been effective in the coastal provinces and small unit leadership has been poor.

7. The fighting in MR 3 has centered around An Loc with the enemy's 5th, 7th, and 9th divisions committed in the area. The ARVN forces in An Loc have done an outstanding job, morale is high, and they are determined to hold the city. The battle has been costly for the enemy, but he continues to launch daily attacks - though diminishing in intensity since the 16th of April. The leadership in MR 3 is steady and dependable.

8. The situation in MR 4 is difficult to assess because thus far there have been only widespread, low level attacks against outposts, national police, small ARVN units, and communication routes. The main force units appear to be planning to make major attacks against Chuong Thien from which they can exert pressure on the five bordering provinces; however, no clear pattern of enemy intentions has been discerned. General Truong is the most capable of all the regional commanders and continues to employ his limited forces skillfully throughout his large area of operations.

9. I am concerned by the degree to which the GVN has lost control of areas in Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai as well as the deterioration in An Xuyen and Chuong Thien. On the other hand, the overall picture in the

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4

delta and MR 3 is most satisfactory, and except for localized setbacks, the pacification program has held up well. Intelligence reports indicate an upsurge of political and propaganda activity in many areas, but this will not be meaningful if the enemy fails to achieve military success.

10. After nearly a month of intense warfare the confidence of the GVN and of the population in eventual success is unimpaired. This confidence appears to me to stem partially from the fact that the enemy's appeal for a national uprising has resulted in no repeat no increase in VC activity in and around population centers. I believe that when the offensive began many people in the cities and in the countryside feared a repetition of TET 1968 in which enemy units appeared suddenly in the populated areas. This failed to materialize owing to the apparent weakness of the VC movement while concurrently the steadiness of the GVN and the effectiveness of its armed forces became obvious to the people.

11. The bombing of the North has been widely applauded here both as a means of inflicting damage on NVA installations and as a demonstration of US and GVN determination to pursue the war aggressively. Thoughtful observers are mindful of the relationship between these operations and domestic support for the administration and are watching the increase of peace demonstrations in the US with some concern. The weakness of the VC effort until now and the absence of terrorist activity in Saigon and other

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5

cities has convinced the population that the local threat is minimal and they are confident that with US air support the NVA invasion will ultimately be defeated.

12. Thieu's speech on Hung Vuong Day was fine, but I believe he must do more to rally the population. I have suggested to him that he regularly make fireside chats and give the people of Vietnam his views on the situation as it develops. This is unfortunately not his style, however, and I doubt that he will do it.

13. Since my last assessment I am encouraged by the degree to which the situation in Northern MR 1 has stabilized. Enemy marauding in Quang Ngai is of concern, however, as is the current impact of the offensive in MR 2 both in the highlands and on the coast.

14. The information output of the GVN continues to be satisfactory. As in any country at war, rumors abound and the population is following developments closely, particularly through the national radio. The improving situation in An Loc has contributed to popular confidence although I am sure that reports and photographs showing the destruction there will come as a shock. It is too early to tell what effect bad news from Kontum will have, but I am inclined to believe that reverses there will seem very remote to people in MR 3 and the delta.

15. Economic conditions in areas not directly affected by the war remain stable. Prices in Saigon have fallen a notable four percent in the last two

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6

weeks and the black market currency rates are down significantly. Hoarding is minimal, supply routes are open, and food deliveries have been maintained. Business activity generally has fallen off, however, and there are localized supply problems in towns and areas directly affected by military activity.

16. Warm regards.

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