

Saigon CIA Chief's Assessment of Vietnam, March 17, 1975

Memorandum

National Security Council
1651

Urgent Information

~~Secret~~ March 17, 1975

Memorandum for: General Scowcroft
Dismissed orally (handwritten)
From: William L. Stearman (initials)

SUBJECT:

Saigon CIA Station Chief's Assessment of the Current Military Situation in South Vietnam

The CIA Station Chief in Saigon has just completed an appraisal of the current military situation there following the outbreak of North Vietnamese attacks on March 10.

At Tab I is a memorandum from you to the President outlining the key points of this assessment.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memorandum at Tab I.

Memorandum For: The President

From: Brent Scowcroft

SUBJECT: Saigon CIA Station Chief's Assessment of the Current Military Situation in South Vietnam

The CIA Station Chief in Saigon has just completed an appraisal of the current military situation there following the outbreak of North Vietnamese attacks on March 10.

The key points in this analysis are as follows:

-- Developments of the past two weeks in South Vietnam leave no doubt that the Government (GVN) is facing a "general offensive" as traditionally defined to include coordinated, countrywide attacks by divisional-sized units aimed at bringing about a decisive change in the military and political situation.

-- Elements of two strategic reserve divisions recently have moved from North Vietnam into the South and possibly other elements are on the way.

-- The GVN as a result of U.S. aid cutbacks is in the position of having to defend itself with far fewer resources than ever before, a problem which has been seriously exacerbated by the latest round of fighting.

-- The drawdown of GVN ammunition and POL stocks will soon be staggering.

-- In their own guidance documents and briefings the Communists are describing 1975 as the year of decision in which large scale military activity will bring about decisive changes in the military-political balance.

-- Moreover, Communist propaganda and secret documents clearly attribute the improvements in Communist fortunes to developments in the U.S. North Vietnam's authoritative Party journal "Hoc Tap" recently interpreted the cutback in U.S. aid to South Vietnam as a sign of U.S. impotence and unwillingness to reenter the Indochina conflict and indicated that this had figured centrally in Hanoi's decision to escalate the fighting in 1975.

-- In summary, South Vietnam is in deep trouble because North Vietnamese determination to bring about a military solution. Unless the present trends are reversed, within the next few months the very existence of an independent non-Communist South Vietnam will be at stake. The emergency will not be like that now faced in Phnom Penh, because South Vietnamese leadership is stronger and geographic factors are more favorable. However, the ultimate outcome is hardly in doubt because South Vietnam cannot survive without American military aid as long as North Vietnam's war-making capacity is unimpaired and supported by the Soviet Union and China.