

Pres file

Tuesday, October 24, 1967

Mr. President:

Kay Graham has sent me the attached cable from Messrs Perry and Martin of her Saigon bureau regarding Newsweek's hatchet-job on the ARVN. You will recall that we were told that the Newsweek editors here had significantly altered the story filed from Saigon. Perry and Martin flatly deny that their story was distorted back here.

It is quite possible, of course, that Martin and Perry told a rather different tale to Zorthian and General Sidle in Saigon than they tell in the attached cable to their bosses. The fact remains that Kay Graham and Newsweek have them on the record here, and I thought you should know about it.

W. W. Rostow

P. S. I should like your permission to make available to Mrs. Graham the attached sober evaluation of the improvement in the Vietnamese military over the past several years. It is quite a contrast to the shallow journalism of NEWSWEEK.

W. W. R.

yes —

no —

See me —

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THE WASHINGTON POST COMPANY

1515 L Street Northwest, Washington, D. C. 20005

KATHARINE GRAHAM
President

October 19, 1967

Dear Walt:

I got a message given to Chal Roberts by the President saying Newsweek editors had distorted the story in our October eighth issue about the quality of the ARVN--according to our Saigon bureau.

I enclose the following cable from Perry and Martin out there in response to a query of ours. You will know whether he wants to know the gist of the contents or not.

Sincerely,

Kay

Mr. Walt Whitman Rostow
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Enclosure

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(FOLLOWING RECVD VIA NEWSWEEK TIE-LINE 11:52A)

WASH POST

MRS KAY GRAHAM: FOLLOWING RECD FROM SAIGON TODAY--

SAIGON, OCT. 19 -- PROLANSNER REGARDING THE ARVN STORY, THE WHITE HOUSE AND DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ALLEGATIONS ARE ABSOLUTELY NOT RPT NOT TRUE. IN FACT, WHAT EYE POINTED OUT TO THE TWO OFFICIALS EYE TALKED TO ABOUT IT, ZOPHIAN AND GEN. SIDLE, WAS THAT HAD IT NOT BEEN NECESSARY BECAUSE OF SPACE TO SHORTEN THE ARTICLE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH TOUGHER THAN IT WAS, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF WESTMORELAND PERSONALLY AND IT WOULD HAVE INCLUDED MANY, MANY MORE EXAMPLES OF CORRUPTION AND INCOMPETENCE

EYE DID SAY THAT MY FILE HAD INCLUDED AYE PARAGRAPH WHICH, IN AYE WAY, WOULD HAVE SOFTENED THE LIONS AND RABBITS QUOTE BY SAYING THAT THE INDIVIDUAL VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS ARE AS GOOD AS ANY IF PROPERLY LED AND MOTIVATED. BUT THE ABSENCE OF THIS PARAGRAPH IN NO RPT NO WAY DISTORTS THE MEANING OF THE LIONS AND RABBITS QUOTE NOR DOES ITS ABSENCE PUT THE LIONS AND RABBITS QUOTE OUT OF CONTEXT.

NO NO NO: THE ARTICLE WAS RIGHT ON THE MONEY. AS EYE POINTED OUT IN AYE MESSAGE TO OZ, IN WHICH EYE FURTHER DOCUMENTED THE POINTS MADE IN THE LEAD, GEN. SIDLE, IN FACT, ADMITTED THAT WHAT WAS PRINTED WAS TRUE BUT THAT EYE SHOULD HAVE "WRITTEN

IT AYE LITTLE HAZIER." WELL, MY FEELING IS THAT THERE IS
ALREADY ENOUGH "HAZE IN CONNECTION WITH THIS WAR," MOST OF IT
CREATED BY THE WESTMORELANDS WHO WILL NOT FACE FACTS. THE FACT THAT
NEWSWEEK IS WILLING TO STRIP AWAY SOME OF THE HAZE IS GRATIFYING,
NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT TO MANY MANY OTHER PEOPLE OUT HERE. THE
RESPONSE TO THAT ARTICLE AMONG MILITARY MEN AS WELL AS CIVILIANS --
AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE -- IS OVERWHELMINGLY IN NEWSWEEK'S
CORNER. EYE AM PROUD MY NAME IS ASSOCIATED WITH STORY.
REGARDS PERRY

RPLANSHER REUR 34 THE INFORMATION PEOPLE OUT HERE ARE
UNDER GUN TO PUT BEST LIGHT ON ARVN. SO THEY GAVE PERRY COMPLETE
TREATMENT AND THEN HAD TO EXPLAIN TO THEIR BOSSES WHY THEY
FAILED. CHIEF MACV IN FOR OFFICER GOT ME UP WITH CALL ASKING WHETHER
IT WAS RIGHT TO SAY THAT PERRY FILED MUCH MORE ON ARVN THAN APPEARED.
EYE SAID THAT WAS ALWAYS TRUE. ZORTHIAN WHO HAD READ PERRY'S
FILE (SOMEONE READS ALL CABLES) REMARKED THAT NEW YORK TOUGHENED
UP THE STORY AND EYE AGREED BECAUSE IT DID APPEAR WITH NONO SQUI-
VOVATION TO WHICH WE DID NOTNOT OBJECT. EACH TIME EYE SAID THAT
THE STORY REPRESENTED ACCURATELY PERRY'S FILE. EVERYONE THOUGHT
THE HEADLINE WAS VERY TOUGH, WHICH IT WAS, BUT IT WAS EXCELLENT
AND LOGICAL CHOICE FOR UUSS CONSUMPTION EVEN THOUGH IT RUFFLED
FEATHERS OUT HERE. FROM THESE CONVERSATIONS THE REPORTS GOING
BACK TO WASHINGTON HAVE NONO DOUBT BEEN CREATED, BUT WE HAVE NOTNOT
BACKED DOWN ONE INCH HERE OR BEEN CRITICAL OF THE MAGAZINE'S
HANDLING WHICH WE THOUGHT WAS EXCELLENT. REGARDS

MARTIN

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FACT SHEET

SUBJECT: Assessment of the RVNAF

BACKGROUND:

1. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) have been fighting almost continuously since they were formed in 1954 and 1955 from the Vietnamese component of the French Forces in Indo-China. Some of these Vietnamese units and individuals have been fighting since World War II. By early 1965 the RVNAF was close to defeat. The North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong Main Forces clearly were moving in for the kill. Since that time, bolstered by the presence of the US and other Free World Military Forces, the South Vietnamese forces have been rebuilding their morale and effectiveness while continuing to expand. Faced with a critical shortage of good leaders, and confronted daily by a determined enemy, their task has been difficult. The tendency is to compare them with US Forces. However, the only fair and rational approach to an evaluation of the South Vietnamese forces is to compare their condition today against their effectiveness two years ago when they were close to disorganization and defeat.

2. During the first six months of 1965, the RVNAF were defeated in battalion or larger actions at the rate of 1 or 2 per week. During the first six months of 1967 they did not suffer a single such defeat. In 37 heavy engagements during this recent period, their ratio of battlefield losses versus the VC and NVA were 7 to 1 in their favor. In the first half of 1965 the RVNAF was able to inflict casualties on the enemy at a rate of 1,980 Viet Cong per month - in 1967 that rate has risen to 3,586 per month. This means that battlefield performance measured in enemy losses is up 81% since 1965. When we consider that during the same period the strength of the RVNAF was increased by only 18%, we must conclude that their combat effectiveness is improving. They are fighting better.

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.3

DA Memo, Jan. 5, 1988

By 129 NARA Date 11-14-91

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3. The above is not meant to imply that all is well or that all the important problems have been overcome. The central problem has been - is today - and will be for a long time to come - a shortage of well-trained, well-motivated, aggressive and dedicated leaders. This problem is not susceptible to a rapid solution.

ASSESSMENT:

4. Among the standard indicators of the morale and effectiveness of a military force is the number of weapons captured from the enemy as compared to the number of weapons lost to the enemy. (TAB A). During the 2 1/2 year period ending in mid-65, the RVNAF had been losing more weapons to the enemy than it captured. The Allied ratio is now 4.7 weapons captured for each weapon lost, and COMUSMACV reports that the RVNAF alone is capturing twice as many weapons as it loses.

5. The ratio of enemy to friendly battlefield losses is a general indication of force effectiveness. TAB B shows the overall ratio in South Vietnam -- that is all friendly against all enemy. On this chart, the peak in 1962 shows that the enemy suffered 6 battlefield losses for each friendly battlefield loss. Recently, the South Vietnamese and US ratios have been reasonably close, with the US advantage not more than 15%. This graph is especially interesting as, in a sense, it charts the progress of the war. The favorable loss ratios of 1962 gave way to the slump of 1964 and early 1965. Since then the trend has been up, and the RVNAF contribution to the upward trend closely parallels that of the allied forces.

6. Another indicator of effectiveness is the number of soldiers who are missing in action. TAB C shows the actual number of South Vietnamese soldiers who were missing in action in each quarter and who were probably captured or left on the battlefield. The South Vietnamese soldiers obviously are less prone to surrender than they were in 1965. Or, of equal significance, they are successfully maintaining unit integrity during battle - in short, they are winning instead of losing the bulk of their battles.

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7. A traditional indicator of the morale and effectiveness of any military force is the number of desertions from its ranks. TAB D shows the desertion rate per 1000 men in uniform computed monthly. Within the past year the number of desertions in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces has dropped significantly. In fact they are running at roughly half of the desertion rate in 1965.

8. The claim is sometimes made that the US forces are doing the fighting and Vietnamese forces are not. This claim is not borne out by statistics, displayed at TAB E. The peak at the end of 1965 on this chart shows that the Vietnamese forces were suffering losses at a rate 2 1/2 times that of US forces. Now they are taking losses per 1,000 men in uniform at approximately 70% of the rate of US forces. This applies not only to the territorial forces - the RF and PF - but equally to the regular forces - the ARVN. In absolute numbers the total RVNAF losses are about the same as those of US forces.

9. TAB F compares combat deaths in actual numbers. The top half of the chart is 1965 and the bottom half 1967. Only the first 6 months of each year are portrayed. In early 1965 the US had very few combat troops in South Vietnam, and the small number of US losses were mostly advisors. The total of allied losses have not quite doubled since 1965, while VC/NVA losses have approximately quadrupled.

10. The RVNAF annual combat death rate is 1.4% of its current military strength, or 3% of the current South Vietnamese manpower pool. The enormity of this loss to South Vietnam is better understood if these loss rates are hypothetically applied to the US military and manpower resources. TAB G graphically portrays what the hypothetical impact would be.

11. Beginning in late 1966 the South Vietnamese Army has increasingly been oriented toward the Revolutionary Development or Pacification Program. TAB H shows that of 154 infantry battalions, 61 were on combat operations in mid-September. The number of battalions committed to the different missions varies from week to week; however, more battalions were available for combat operations a year ago. The big change has been in the assignment of 54 battalions to full time support of Revolutionary Development. A year ago, only 10 to 20 battalions were deployed part time on this mission and these battalions were also used for other tasks. The figures shown in parenthesis are

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for September of 1966. Additionally, the Vietnamese Army must spend a considerable amount of its time and forces on the defense of fixed installations, including their own bases, political centers such as province and district towns, industries, public utilities, roads, railroads and even their own dependents. There are 34 battalions deployed on security missions. This does not seem to be a very large figure when one recalls that there are 44 province and 233 district capitals which, for political and psychological reasons, must be protected against VC attack. The amount of force required varies with the threat, but these 277 administrative centers are a major security burden by themselves and they are just part of RVNAF's security problem.

12. Notwithstanding these responsibilities and the diversion of one-third of the force to pacification, the Vietnamese Army has maintained a high level of large unit actions with remaining forces. TAB I shows that there has been an offsetting increase in small unit operations. Furthermore an increasing proportion have been conducted at night. (TAB J). However, the relatively small number of contacts associated with small unit operations indicates there is still a long way to go in aggressiveness and small unit leadership.

SUMMARY (TAB K)

13. The RVNAF lost 10,441 weapons in the first six months of 1965. They have reduced this loss rate to about 40% of what it was. Their battlefield losses, not counting desertions, were slightly less in the first half of 1965 than in the 1967 period. Significantly the overwhelming preponderance of the losses in 1965 were from desertions, which reflects the low state of morale that existed at the time. Today morale is substantially improved over what it was and it is expected to continue to improve. It is evident that the RVNAF has come a long way since 1965. Those who claim that it is increasingly ineffective are clearly wrong. Yet all will agree they have a long way still to go. MACV, together with the Vietnamese High Command, have been working very hard on this problem. Jointly they are conducting a comprehensive program for increasing the effectiveness of RVNAF. This program consists of some 44 separate sub-programs.

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MACV reports indicate that these programs are in general moving ahead satisfactorily. All programs are adequately funded and supported consistent with MACV and CINCPAC's requests.

14. There are, of course, problem areas, but these are known and action is being taken to correct them. For example, there are still problems in the selection and promotion of outstanding officers, particularly in the Regional Forces. Pay, as General Thieu indicated during his campaign, is felt to be too low and a pay raise will probably be one of his first concerns after his inauguration. Overall, training is still not attaining the standards desired, and MACV is still working on distribution problems to overcome the equipment shortages in the RF/PF which on-site inspections revealed.

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