

INFORMATION

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Presfile

Saturday, November 11, 1967
9:00 a.m.

Mr. President:

This summary answer to seven
key difficult questions about Vietnam
may be helpful to you.

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Attachment: Progress or Stalemate

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PROGRESS OR STALEMATE

Q: How can the administration argue that we are making progress in Vietnam when after many years we are unable to show territorial gains or definite signs of winning?

Ans: The U. S. has not been in Vietnam for years. Our first combat troops arrived only a little over two years ago; the first year was spent primarily in a logistical build-up, and we have only been able to exert the full pressure of our forces on the enemy for a year. Similarly, the current pacification program only really began with the Honolulu Conference and has taken a year to build up momentum.

This is a war for people--not for territory. 80% of the South Vietnamese live on less than 40% of the land. Since the beginning of the U. S. military build-up in early 1965, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people living in areas of relative security under the protection of the government of South Vietnam. In mid-1965, there were at most some 7.7 million people--no more than 47% of the population living in areas under the government's protection. Some 3.7 million people--about 22%--were living in Viet-Cong dominated areas. At the end of September, however, Government of Vietnam statistics show 11.9 million--or 72% living under Government of Vietnam protection, as opposed to only 2.2 million--or 14 percent--under Viet-Cong domination. Our own U. S. statistics, based on detailed evaluations on a hamlet-by-hamlet basis and using different criteria, are somewhat more conservative. Our data places about 69% of the population under protection of the Government of Vietnam, and about 14% under the Viet-Cong. Thus, by the most conservative estimate, the percentage of people afforded protection from Viet-Cong terrorism has risen by about one-half, and the percentage under Communist domination was reduced by more than one-fourth.

But by one of the most objective criteria of control or security--the population of areas sufficiently secure to hold elections--the percentage of the population under the protection of the Government of Vietnam is greater than shown by either Government of Vietnam or U. S. statistics. For, in the recent Presidential elections, voting took place in areas containing 75 percent of the people of Vietnam.

The trend in numbers of registered voters and of people voting shows the trend in increased security and Government protection. In May 1965, 3.8 million people voted of 4.2 million registered voters in the municipal and provincial elections.

In September 1966, 4.3 million voted of 5.2 registered voters in the Constituent Assembly elections. In September 1967, 4.8 million voted

of 5.8 million registered voters in the Presidential and Upper House elections. Thus, registered voters are up nearly 40% from the first election to the last.

By any reckoning, we have made appreciable and significant progress in the most crucial area of the war--protection of the people.

Q: But are there not just as many of the enemy in South Vietnam now as there were one or two years ago--in spite of these population statistics and in spite of kill ratios?

Ans: No. We believe that enemy strength in South Vietnam has declined over the past year or so. On the basis of captured documents and prisoners we now estimate that Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army organized unit strength has declined from a peak of 126,000 in August 1966, to about 118,000 now. Although our estimates on guerrilla strength are much less precise, we believe that Viet Cong guerrilla strength has also declined significantly. (In the process, we have learned that earlier estimates were too low because of incomplete intelligence.)

The reason for this is simply that the number of troops infiltrated and recruited by the enemy has not been as great as his deaths, desertions and other losses.

Q: Isn't the real test of stalemate the fact that the enemy is able to match our escalation of the war in spite of everything we do--as evidenced by his recent DMZ shellings and by his ability to mount rocket attacks at will on U. S. bases such as Danang?

Ans: We don't think so. Because of the nature of this war, the enemy cannot be prevented from mounting attacks in the border areas such as the DMZ and Cambodian border. Nor can he be prevented from continuing mortar and rocket attacks on U. S. bases. But these costly incidents do not have much significant military impact.

These engagements mark a major change in his tactics since the beginning of 1965 when he roamed the country at will and only his own lack of decision prevented him from mounting an assault on Saigon itself.

In the summer of 1965, he tried to cut South Vietnam in two. In 1966 he tried to capture the northern provinces. This year, his objectives have been the more modest ones of seeking limited victories in the DMZ

and Cambodian border areas. He has been foiled in every attempt and at great loss to himself.

Q: Isn't it possible, however, that the change in enemy tactics is of his own choice rather than something forced on him by our military pressure?

Ans: This is conceivable but not very likely. It is difficult to imagine the enemy deliberately choosing his present course of action and confining his major operations almost entirely to the border areas if it were not for friendly military pressure.

We have blocked his attempts to infiltrate by sea. We have inflicted heavy losses in his infiltration by the Ho Chi Minh trail. We have seized the military initiative in most areas of the country. The enemy now controls fewer miles of roads, fewer thousands of the population, less geographical area, and he is unable to prosecute the war in the manner and to the extend he enjoyed in 1965.

Thus his current tactics simply represent the best choice of the poor alternatives available to him to try to prolong the war while he hopes for a change in the political will on the U. S. home front.

Q: What evidence is there that we are making any military progress?

Ans: The enemy has been unable to mount a major offensive although intelligence indicated he planned to do so last May and June.

The enemy has gained no major victories comparable to his 1965 successes in an engagement of battalion size or larger in over a year.

A program to neutralize 41 enemy base areas in South Vietnam (that is to say to drive the enemy there from and destroy enemy installations therein) was initiated in June 1966. To date, we have penetrated or attacked almost all these bases, and, as of August 1967, had neutralized 14 of them. We believe the enemy may need fewer big in-country base areas now versus two years ago, but he does have a need for some since he has less freedom of movement outside these areas.

From 1966 to 1967 thus far, enemy killed in action per month has increased 63%, enemy weapons captured have increased 65% (1,600 to 2,600 per month), enemy mortar rounds destroyed have increased 500% (7,500 in 1966, and 19,000 in six months of 1967). Small arms

ammunition captured or destroyed has increased 125% (1.1 million rounds in 1966, and 1.5 million in six months of 1967), and enemy rice captured or destroyed has increased nearly 50% (13,000 tons in 1966, and 10,000 in six months of 1967).

The enemy to friendly killed in action ratio has increased from 3.2 to 1 in 1966 to 4.0 to 1 during the first six months of 1967, and has continued to increase since then. The weapon gained to lost ratio has increased from 2.1 to 1 in 1966 to 3.8 to 1 in the first six months of 1967, and has continued to increase since then.

Q: How can we expect to win when the Communists have been fighting for 20 years and are prepared to keep on fighting for 20 more?

Ans: There is solid evidence of the weakening, at least at the lower level, of the enemy's will, especially the Southern Viet Cong.

Under the Chieu Hoi program there has been an increase of ralliers from about 11,000 in 1965, to about 20,000 in 1966, to nearly 24,000 to date in 1967.

Numerous captured documents, ralliers, and prisoners of war testify to the difficulties of Viet Cong administrators maintaining contact with their cadre under U. S. military pressure, the difficulties in Viet Cong recruitment and taxation, resulting in forced conscription and higher Viet Cong taxation, the greater difficulties of the Viet Cong in dealing with the population, and the difficulties in some areas of obtaining food and medicine, and the increased failure of Viet Cong administrative cadre in many areas.

Numerous captured documents, ralliers, and prisoners of war testify to North Vietnamese Army losses of 20-25% and more from bombing, sickness, disease and desertion before reaching their destinations in South Vietnam, and to lack of food and medicine and poor morale among North Vietnamese troops after they arrive. However, about ten percent of North Vietnamese Army recover from their sickness and eventually complete the trek. Hence the overall attrition is about 15%.

Q: How can the U. S. expect to achieve its objectives in view of the ineffectiveness of the government and the armed forces of South Vietnam?

Ans: During the past two years the South Vietnamese have had a reasonably stable government and a political evolution which is

impressive in a very young country in the midst of war. We now have a Revolutionary Development program which has been well led and which for all its imperfections is better than anything we have had in the past. Although there are many imperfections in the Vietnamese Army, it must be remembered that this Army has been increased by more than 50% in the last three years, and leadership was not automatically available for the expanding forces. It has been only during the last year that the main focus has been on qualitative as opposed to quantitative improvement. During this period the Vietnamese Armed Forces have improved. All the usual indicators of combat effectiveness--killed, missing, weapons captured ratios, desertion rates, operational contact rates--show a favorable trend.

A. The number of desertions this year is less than half the number for the same period last year and the number of missing in action has dropped from 1,500 in the first quarter of 1966 to 750 in the first quarter of 1967, and to 312 in the second quarter of 1967.

B. The trend of weapons lost has reversed. In the first quarter of 1966, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces lost 2,850 weapons and captured 1,400, or an unfavorable ratio of two to one. In the first quarter of 1967, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces lost 2,050 weapons and captured 4,425, or a favorable ratio of two and one-fourth to one.

C. The percentage of contacts to total operations is up. In the first quarter of 1966, there were 360 contacts in 820 large unit operations, and in the first quarter of 1967, there were 380 contacts in 760 operations, or an increase of 15 percent. In small unit operations, the rate of enemy contacts has risen from 2.8 contacts per 1,000 in the first quarter of 1966 to 3.7 contacts per 1,000 for the first quarter of 1967 (a rise of 30%) to 4.3 contacts per 1,000 in the second quarter of 1967 (or a rise of over 50%). The total number of operations is down because of the present heavy commitment to pacification.

D. ARVN has taken a number of actions to improve its general effectiveness. This includes: (1) increased fighting in close association with American units and the corresponding increased availability of U. S. artillery and air support, (2) new and improved training courses, such as the long range reconnaissance patrol course, graduates of which are integrated with U. S. long range reconnaissance patrols and the recycling of maneuver battalions through a six-week national training center course, and (3) increased promotions from the ranks (during 1966, 500 direct commissions, 20 battlefield commissions, and 4,500 battlefield promotions were awarded NCO's; also a special OCS course was offered, from which 1,700 were graduated).

E. Programs have been installed to improve the morale of ARVN, such as a pay increase in July 1966, the establishment of an ARVN commissary, and a free issue of an operations ration in the field beginning July 1967, designed to give greater mobility in the field and to prevent living off the people in the countryside.

F. Far fewer Regional and Popular Force positions have been overrun in 1967 than in the corresponding period of 1966: a revitalized training program has been instituted for Regional and Popular Forces; and U. S. advisers are working more extensively with Regional and Popular Force units.

G. Perhaps most important of all, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces leadership now displays increasing confidence in their own units' capabilities versus those of the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army.