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Monday, March 25, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Meeting with Hedley Donovan

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By: cap/12 NARA, Date: 4/22/92

You agreed to meet with Hedley Donovan (Editor-in-Chief of LIFE) at 5:30 p.m. today.

This memo covers the current situation in Viet-Nam.

Overall picture

GVN picking itself up after Tet Offensive. ARVN, U.S. and allied forces moving out to keep enemy off balance. GVN showing new vigor. Present problem: keep cities secure, win the race into the countryside, be ready to meet any new major assaults.

Enemy failed in his first-phase goals: capture and hold some towns, shatter the GVN, break the ARVN, stir the people to an "uprising." But enemy capacity to continue Winter-Spring offensive remains. New forces have been coming in through Laos. VC are scouring the countryside for recruits.

Present enemy tactics: try to isolate the towns and cities, cut lines of transport and cut off food, consolidate hold in rural areas, gather food and recruits, prepare for another round of major attacks. Most likely targets: Hue-Quang Tri area, Khe Sanh, the Highlands (Kontum and Pleiku), Saigon.

Military Situation

Enemy has taken severe losses at Khe Sanh (B-52's, artillery). Some evidence of pull-back by the 325th Division (westward to Laos, eastward toward Quang Tri). But new units may be moving in. Buildup along east coast (Quang Tri and Hue) has been significant, but spoiling operations have kept them off balance.

Not much activity in II Corps. But enemy buildup along Laos-Cambodia border continues. In Saigon area, intelligence forecast a major effort. But big ARVN/U.S. sweep in surrounding provinces forces VC to pull back. Several large arms caches discovered.

Enemy has been pushing its drive in IV Corps (Delta) to isolate towns, pick up rice, find new recruits. But new Corps Commander (General Thang) has been pushing his people to chase the VC. Average of 50-60 operations a day. He is trying to reverse the defensive psychology that dominated the Delta for so long.

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GVN Actions

President Thieu and Vietnamese leaders have recognized heavier burdens must be carried by them. Thieu announced 135,000 Vietnamese will be drafted this Spring and Summer. 10,000 drafted last month and 10,000 volunteers.

President Thieu also moving on other fronts: reconstruction and care for refugees (about 200,000 of 600,000 have already moved back to their home areas and begun to rebuild); civil defense (26,000 Vietnamese have volunteered and are being trained); removing incompetent military officers and province officials (8 province chiefs replaced, six more soon); anti-corruption (32 military men, 8 civilians recently brought to trial -- 3 got death penalty; 138 province officials removed last year).

Suggest give Donovan a copy of Thieu's recent speech (copy attached) which outlines what he is doing and plans to do.

Pacification

Far from "dead." RF/PF forces lost heavily during Tet, but are now 85-90 per cent of pre-Tet strength. Revolutionary Development cadre actually larger (with addition of a new 2,000-man class). 383 teams of 564 total are working in assigned hamlets.

Main problem: psychological, defense-minded outlook. Thieu is working to get RD teams back into the country. Situation is best in II Corps, worst in IV Corps.

Economic

Food situation fairly good. Saigon price index fell two points last week. Main threat: enemy effort to cut off all main lines of transport. Route 4 in the Delta is main target, and we are putting high priority on keeping it open.

Biggest economic dislocation was in Hue -- where hundreds of government officials were killed by the North Vietnamese.

North Viet-Nam

The enemy has his problems -- which he doesn't publicize.

Ho Chi Minh issued a decree last week announcing severe penalties for subversion, sabotage, desertion, and other "crimes against the state." Reports contain unusual admissions of antiwar sentiments in the North and even a reference to security problems in the armed forces.

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Summing Up

We have problems. Tough road ahead. But enemy has problems, too. And South Vietnamese are showing new energy, new national unity, and new determination to save their own country. The next six months will be crucial. Much, perhaps everything, depends on our will and determination.

William J. Jorden

Attachment

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