

MILITARY FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

The South Vietnamese armed forces, regular and paramilitary, are one of the largest in the world when compared with percent of total population and eligible males in the military. Currently about 810,000 South Vietnamese are in the military forces and about 200,000 in paramilitary forces; this is about 85 percent of the physically fit males and about 6.3 percent of the total population. Yet these forces have been unable to defeat VC/NVA forces considerably smaller in number. This has entailed commitment of about 600,000 US and free world forces to South Vietnam, seriously affecting US military posture world wide.

Currently there is some evidence that our military operations have hurt the VC/NVA but the extent of communist difficulties is not completely known and their military capabilities are considered to remain undiminished. Even if NVA and US forces were to withdraw, it is doubtful whether RVNAF could cope with the VC without significant improvement.

The war in Vietnam is a political war. Yet our strategy, tactics and organization are for a conventional war. Further, RVNAF organization and tactics are copies of the US rather than being matched to the situation. No matter what course of action we chose in Vietnam, improvement of RVNAF is essential. If we seek a military and political victory, RVNAF must be the in/forefront; if we negotiate a withdrawal of US/NVA forces, RVNAF's capability against the VC must be maximized. Further, probably the best way to improve our military position worldwide and satisfy domestic public opinion is to withdraw some US forces -- and this hinges on an improved RVNAF. Accordingly, such improvement should have the highest priority.

This paper will examine mainly what we must do to improve RVNAF and how we can obtain maximum payoff from the employment of all military forces in SVN. Many of the proposals herein are underway and few are original -- they are brought together couched in terms of certain policy alternatives.

FORCE STRUCTURE

The threat in SVN is mainly internal and political. The VC/NLF have some degree of control over 65-70 percent of the population and are likely to continue to develop both their rural and urban base, contesting the GVN. Militarily, it is expected that enemy activity will continue at the present level; even if NVA forces withdraw, activity will probably be at the 1964-65 with level / some regimental but mostly battalion sized operations utilizing about 130 battalions (many individual NVA would go into VC battalions). Withdrawn NVA forces would pose a serious external threat with about 40 regiments capable of moving into South Vietnam from Laos, Cambodia and NVN in a short period of time. While there is some NVN air threat capable of operations down to mid-II corps, NVN air is expected to remain primarily defensive. With the exception of sea supply and infiltration, the naval threat is insignificant.

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Based on proposed force levels/ current effectiveness and equipment comparisons, RVNAF is estimated to be capable of controlling but not defeating VC forces. A modernized RF company would be roughly equivalent in effectiveness potential to a VC/NVA main force company. VNAF is expected to have the capability of providing helicopter lift to four battalions simultaneously; it is also considered adequate to counter the external air threat from NVN. Navy forces will have a fair anti-infiltration capability and will be able to provide a river lift capability for about 16 combat battalions;

they lack the capability to operate the entire sea anti-infiltration program and to provide the necessary coastal transport to support RVNAF.

Under the current modernization program, DoD made the decision to first maximize RVNAF ground combat capability and then to attempt to achieve some degree of self-sufficiency. Regardless of which goal is emphasized, RVNAF is expected to require some US support forces for at least four years. The main limiting factor, particularly with the VNN and VNAF, is the availability of trained and capable manpower. US support is necessary to fill voids until RVNAF can develop the necessary capability. Any settlement should take into account this limitation, but for the immediate future improvement programs and contingency plans must be developed to allow for a more rapid transition and probable turnover of US equipment associated with this. Maximum use should be made of in-country combined and on-the-job training facilities.

The proposed 200 regular force maneuver battalions and almost 500 Regional Force battalion personnel equivalents, when all modern equipment is provided, provide a structure that could counter conventional military operations by the VC and provide at least a buffer force to counter overt military invasion by the NVA forces.

Currently, and under proposed plans, RVNAF is conventionally organized and equipped; it resembles a US force, yet it must operate in an Asian social/political milieu against a revolutionary enemy fighting in unusual terrain. While the threat today is mainly conventional, it is not likely to remain so. The chief problem is to develop a force capable of countering revolutionary war and the internal political threat while maintaining some capability to counter an external conventional military threat. There are several alternatives, we can: (1) maximize the capability against the external conventional threat,

retaining some internal security capability; (2) maximize the internal security capability, while retaining some conventional capability; or (3) a combination of the two with a balanced force. We are moving in the direction of (1), yet this option is not considered satisfactory. An enemy only need assess structural limitations and adopt a strategy that maximizes them. For the immediate future, we should develop RVNAF to counter both threats, but in the long term concentrate on the internal threat. As previously stated, the RVNAF struggle would be capable of controlling the VC but not defeating them. Other actions are required to maximize RVNAF's capability for this task -- these are addressed in the following paragraphs.

MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The current organization of GVN and FWMAF forces is a nightmare of separate and overlapping command. Current RVNAF organization maximizes divisive trends in the Vietnamese political system. It depends on the existence of a governmental system which the Vietnamese do not have and are not likely to develop. The essential task is to build an organizational alternatives, there are several options: (1) centralized structure under a single command chain; (2) decentralization to several regions; or (3) decentralization to sector/province level. Probably the best course is some combination of these. Regular military forces (Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force) should be under a central command. Ground forces and their necessary support should be organized in brigade sized elements to be employed under the command of small tactical headquarters. (The power of the corps commanders has been broken and should remain so, but a control headquarters for cross-province boundary operations is necessary.) Rather than a series of separate

commands, difference in ground forces should be manifested in mission and training, rather than in separate organizations.

The internal security mission should be given to a pacification security under province control. This force would be comprised of the RF, PF, NPF, PRU's and the security elements of the RD cadre. Part-time self defense forces would assist in providing local security. Such a force could be "civilianized" into a type of constabulary in the event negotiations so require. This force would be backed up by modernized regular ground forces which would be charged with operations against VC main force units and defense of cities and against the external threat. Constant improvement of pacification security forces could be effected by cross assignment of good regular force personnel and by continual high level emphasis. Such a force would provide a vehicle for demilitarization if such was required by negotiations, but more important, it could be used as a vehicle to counter SVN pressures for some demobilization that are bound to occur in the event of a reduction in the level of hostilities. Personnel could be phased out of the regular forces in to the PSF and stationed near their homes. As a further impetus, it appears that the South Vietnamese cannot sustain the currently programmed force levels of RVNAF much beyond end CY 1970 without some rather serious consequences.

Paramilitary border security forces (CIDG) anticipating possible US disengagement, also should be integrated into the force structure. Because of the minorities problem and high level of US support to which these few have become accustomed, this is most difficult and requires high level RVNAF leadership support plus some attitudinal changes.

EQUIPMENT AND LOGISTICS

RVNAF is still conventionally equipped - mainly with cast-off US gear, much of which is inadequate for use in SEA. We can (1) continue to provide such equipment; (2) provide more modern US equipment to RVNAF; (3) develop some

new equipment specifically for SEA and revolutionary war and provide it to RVNAF. In general, to get the maximum pay-off from RVNAF, we should adopt a combination of (2) and (3). In particular, light weight automatic weapons, communications gear, operational rations and other equipment to allow Vietnamese forces to conduct sustained day and night operations are required.

A second area of concern is the logistical system in SVN. One of the chief difficulties with respect to RVNAF is their minimal logistic capability (8-15% of their current force structure compared with about 40% for US forces is devoted to logistic support). This capability can be improved by (1) building such a capability within RVNAF; or (2) utilizing some of the US capability. For the immediate time frame, the quickest improvement will come from increasing US support, but an improved organic RVNAF capability is essential.

STRATEGY

Our strategy in SVN has been essentially a strategy of attrition through major unit operations and attempts to stop enemy infiltration at the borders. Pacification and local security have never really been given a high priority, yet they are essential to countering both the political and military threat. Further a large percentage of our forces are engaged in essentially defensive operations. Only about 90,000 regular forces (US, RVNAF, and 3d company) are directly involved in offensive operations against an enemy regular force that has about 70,000 engaged in similar offensive operations. About 70 percent of these are US and 3rd country. Approximately 200,000 additional regular and local forces are involved in pacification and the provision of local security for the population. The remainder of the 1.5 million allied force in SVN are involved in combat support of source support, defensive operations,

training, etc. We can either (1) continue with present efforts to achieve a military victory; or (2) reorient our strategy towards achieving a political victory in SVN; or (3) deescalate US military operations and forces either with or without a corresponding decrease in NVA activity force levels. With regard to (3), deescalation of US activities not tied to a significant increase in RVNAF effectiveness or NVA deescalation would also be counterproductive. Mere defense of GVN a la Bundy would only give the VL/MF more chances of extending their political control and increase the chance of defeat. A fourth escalatory option may be feasible with improved RVNAF capabilities, but would probably require additional US forces and/or increased operations in NVN, and may be counterproductive with respect to our national security and efforts for strategy in other areas of the world. It is evident that, despite some weakening of the VC/NVA, efforts to achieve a military victory without escalation will not result in a lasting solution in SVN. It is further evident that "more of the same" will not be accepted by the US public. Therefore, a strategy reorientation is necessary. There are two feasible directions for this reorientation. One is to adapt a modified "no win" strategy through negotiation and reducing of our forces in South Vietnam. A second is to adapt the political strategy, (2) above. The latter, however, requires some significant change in both the SVN military and political system. Baring successful achievement of these changes, the best we can do is go the "no win" path to maximize our gains and minimize losses. But we should at least first attempt the political strategy course and try for a reorientation. Further, many of those actions necessary for a "no-win" approach are also part of a "political strategy", for example: involving more RVNAF in offensive operations is necessary to allow reduction

of US force levels.

Five actions are deemed essential in this reorientation. These are (1) concentration on pacification and increased security in critical areas; (2) strengthening internal security forces and providing better rural internal security; (3) defense of key urban areas; and (4) countering infiltration and major enemy forces by long range patrols, better intelligence and highly mobile reaction forces; (5) involving more Vietnamese forces in all these. A key area for priority operations is IV Corps -- the major source of men, food and funds for both sides in the war. Operations here would be primarily by RVNAF, but significant US assistance in the form of helicopter/naval lift plus air mobile forces is necessary. There is no functional breakout of these tasks between RVNAF-FWFMAF with the exception of pacification security forces and forces operating in the Delta being primarily Vietnamese. The pacification security force would be targeted against VC local-regional forces; close-in security would be provided by the organizing of the population into viable self-defense units. (4) is particularly critical in the DMZ area. In the event of US troop reduction, RVNAF forces are neither adequate in quantity nor should they be tied down in a strong point obstacle system.

OPERATIONS AND TACTICS

The war in Vietnam is a revolutionary war, yet our tactics have been conventional. The results achieved by friendly military operations are correlated with enemy intentions and activities; the VC/NVA can control their casualty levels against US/RVNAF military operations employing current tactics. Further, RVNAF operational results and their level of military effort are much lower than for comparable US units -- RVNAF maneuver battalion effectiveness is only about 40-50 percent that of a US unit. Combined operations, US-RVNAF, achieve better results as do small unit saturation operations and long-range patrolling operations of a covert nature. Sustained day and night patrols, emanating outward from critical areas, can develop useful intelligence for highly mobile reaction forces. Closely associated, such combined operations and joint ARVN-security force operation, similar to the CAP program, would tend to improve RVNAF. Despite some success with the CAP, encadrement with US forces is not the answer due to difficulties in withdrawal. These operations must concentrate on critical areas so as to ensure adequate forces are available

-- LOC's can be opened as necessary, but forces should not be tied down to static type missions.

RVNAF air and artillery support is not on a par with that provided US forces -- current modernization plans provide additional air and artillery to RVNAF, but for the immediate future substantial increases in effectiveness potential can accrue by more US combat support being provided RVNAF.

But control of this support is essential; currently forces are controlled by sector and subsector commanders. Yet often these commanders either over-control or use them indiscriminately. Control procedures for forces and for military operations in the province must be firmly established.

POLITICALIZATION

The chief difficulty with the Vietnamese military system is that it is organized along non-political lines, yet advancement within the system depends on political loyalty or corruption rather than military professionalism. The military has become the source of a political future -- choices of military courses of action and strategies depend on their political safeness. There are essentially two options: (1) politicize the military or (2) professionalize the military. It appears that the latter is the best choice, separating the military from politics. This has already been partially done. Politicization would only develop counter factions within the military and civilian political system. Further military involvement in politics in South Vietnam would be extra legal and would cause further disorientation of the social-political system. (The military are separated from the people functionally and from the politicians ideologically.)

The chief difficulty in achieving this is that the political leaders, to enhance their position of political power, need military leaders who are both competent and loyal -- a dichotomy: if loyalty predominates there is inefficiency; competency is required for development, yet competent people loose out because of the lack of institutional arrangements for their personal security. Further, if the present political and military leadership modernizes, they loose some of their existing base of support because institutions become more important

as does a developing counter-elite. But professionalism can only come after the military are out of politics -- and they will only get out if they have a chance of advancement by other means (a sizeable portion of the officer corps is efficient, but is completely frustrated in seeking advancement). This reform must come from the top, from a few selected leaders who make the military aware that effectiveness is now the name of the game. Political pressure is needed to change the incentives of the system. Political leaders must be convinced their long term political stability will more likely increase through a professionalized military; military leaders must be convinced that the politicians can provide stability.

Conversely, with withdrawal from the political arena, the military must become politically aware to counter revolutionary warfare -- they must become more attuned to the desires/needs of the peasantry and inculcated with

national loyalty. This can be accomplished by an internal political action program -- one that is not tainted with loyalty to a particular group. The military can be a potent force in nation building and should be used in this manner since they are the only mass action organization with a wide political base ... veterans organizations can be established for the same purpose, as well as in-source political or national indoctrination. RVNAF must build conscience and national loyalty.

LEADERSHIP

As discussed previously, changes in the military system must come from the top via political pressure. Once this is done, once professionalism

and esprit are inculcated at this level, it should pervade the system. Associated, a system for identifying poor or marginal leaders must be developed and these should be eliminated; weak units must be singled out and given priority retraining prior to modernization with new equipment.

But in addition, another attitudinal change is necessary -- currently pacification activities and dealing with the peasantry is considered to be a rather distasteful task by most of the Vietnamese leadership and political elite. RVNAF officers are an inbred lot, mostly French trained, and forming a closed system. Further, they lack the skills necessary for modernization. In most societies with a politicized military, military leaders can offer their administrative skills and efficiency in running the political system -- in Vietnam this is not the case. Military schools must provide vocational and administrative training to impart the necessary modernizing skills; this requires an overhaul of the Vietnamese school system. Leaders also must be taught that the people are worthwhile and are what count in a revolutionary war.

ADVISORY EFFORT

The US military advisory effort in SVN has been counterproductive. Despite the extensive growth of RVNAF, the advisory structure and many improvement programs, basic problems still exist. We have too many advisors attempting to apply pressure in the wrong places -- advisors at low levels were attempting to ^{overcome} / the Vietnamese system previously discussed. They did not realize that rewards for fighting were small. There were few active advisors trying to change the system at the top. We should tailor our advisory structure and efforts to correcting system deficiencies. A good start is to select high level advisors to work full time with a

corresponding high level GVN counterpart -- RVNAF military leaders could be asked to select their own advisors. In addition, the quality of our advisory effort has not been particularly high. First, training has not prepared advisors for the problems they meet. Second, promotion in the US military has gone mainly to combat commanders rather than to advisors -- thus advisory positions have not been sought after. Third, advisory tours for the most part have been too short. Actions to overcome these difficulties are obvious -- but will require high level emphasis within the US military.

DESERTIONS

One of the most serious problems facing RVNAF today is desertion; about 90,000 personnel have deserted since 1 January 1968 (to 1 Sept 68). The attainment of programmed force levels depends on reducing desertion rates by about 50%. Efforts are underway to effect tighter legal control, but imaginative efforts in welfare, morale and motivation programs are also necessary. These would also tend to increase overall effectiveness of RVNAF.

SHORTAGE OF OFFICERS AND LEADERSHIP

The RVNAF officer corps suffers both qualitative and quantitative deficiencies. The quantity problem is being solved to some degree through promotion. By the end of 1968, RVNAF overall should be up to authorized officer strength; however, a significant shortage in captain to colonel grade will remain (only 75% of authorized). The quality deficiency is more difficult to assess but if systemic changes are made as previously outlined and overall training improved, qualitative changes should occur. In addition, the basically closed officer corps requires a more open entry to attract leaders with diverse backgrounds, from minority groups, from the peasants, etc. A regularized promotion system, together with a more professional training and

school system, should be developed to enhance professionalism.

COURSES OF ACTION

RVNAF is a potent political force in SVN that must be reckoned with when considering political solutions. It is best suited to support a "continue as we are" approach; any other course requires reorientation within RVNAF and may be constrained by RVNAF limitations. For example, inclusion of the NLF in a coalition government would probably be unacceptable to RVNAF leadership, who would in turn attempt to take control of the government; certain less drastic political solutions might precipitate factional crises within RVNAF; a bombing cessation may undermine existing RVNAF cohesiveness; a quick reduction of US force support would leave some critical gaps in the RVNAF structure; a ceasefire would throw the conflict into the political arena where RVNAF is seriously deficient and civil forces lack even a minimal capability to contest the VC/NLF; a reduction in the level of hostilities would require RVNAF to counter a revolutionary war for which it is ill organized and trained; a reduction in the level of hostilities would also remove much of the pressure for RVNAF improvement and develop counter-pressures for demobilization.

But a reduction in the level of hostilities would reduce friendly casualty rates and would allow some of RVNAF to devote efforts to helping establish political control; it would also provide some breathing room for RVNAF re-training and reequipping, and allow some reduction in force levels that are higher than SVN can sustain. In any event and whatever course is chosen, RVNAF requires improvement and this can only come from political pressure applied at the top. Quality should be the aim rather than quantity.