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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

2 FEB 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: **The Honorable Nicholas deB Katzenbach**
 Under Secretary of State

The Honorable Paul H. Nitze
 Deputy Secretary of Defense

General Earle G. Wheeler
 Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Honorable Walt W. Rostow ✓
 Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT: **An Immediate Program for Vietnam**

A number of officers of this Agency who have been concerned over the years with Vietnam have put together the attached memorandum suggesting a possible course of action for the United States at this time. I pass it to you for your consideration in the light of some of the other factors bearing on the problem.

(Signed) Richard Helms

Richard Helms
Director

Attachment

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2 February 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Vietnam - Operation SHOCK

1. The Viet Cong Tet offensive is a clear indication of continued Viet Cong power which calls for a new look in our approach to the Vietnam war and to the Government of Vietnam. Over the years the current leaders of Vietnam have developed a complacent assurance that American support is immutable. Consequently, they have felt free to approach the war in terms of gradualism, favoritism among the limited circle of personalities at the top and only a casual attention to mobilizing popular support and engaging the population actively in the war. This gentle treatment of the members of the Establishment has worked to exclude from positions of responsibility younger, more dynamic and modern-minded leaders. The Tet offensive can be utilized in a frontal attack on these attitudes and habits, since it has forcefully demonstrated that the present GVN lacks some of the principal attributes of sovereignty. It cannot defend its frontiers without a half million U. S. troops and cannot even enable the American Ambassador to utilize his Embassy. In this frontal attack, the United States must insist on standards of performance and American participation in decision making during an emergency effort. While this would temporarily suspend the long-standing policy that the Vietnamese be encouraged and allowed to carry an increasing load of initiative and decision, the objective would be to remake the power structure to permit the emergence of new and more dynamic leadership to whom this role could be passed. This frontal attack would be thoroughly consistent with our long-standing public position that the U. S. effort in Vietnam is only to help the Vietnamese help themselves, not to carry the fight for them. These points should be expressed in an

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early urgent interview between Ambassador Bunker, accompanied by General Westmoreland, and President Thieu and Vice President Ky.

2. In specific terms, the United States should review for President Thieu the serious situation revealed by the Viet Cong offensive in terms of the weakness of Vietnamese security and the lack of popular resolution to contribute to the fight against the Viet Cong, with the implication that the prospects of success along current lines and current programs are insufficient. The point should be made that gradualism can no longer be accepted as an approach on our side of the war and it should be stated forcefully that henceforth the GVN must follow U. S. direction in an urgent program to redress the state of the war.

3. As the first point in this program, we should insist that General Nguyen Duc Thang be named Minister of Interior and of Defense, with "full powers" over the military, the police and the administrative structure. He should be assigned the immediate urgent mission of providing for the security of the nation. He should be given full authority over all Vietnamese forces in order to accomplish this and he should be directed to concentrate his efforts on strengthening and purging secure areas outward into less secure areas. He should be advised that Free World forces will be employed against Viet Cong and DRV main force units, through spoiling actions, etc., and in re-enforcement of the Vietnamese forces when needed, and that Vietnamese forces must be 100% committed to an aggressive pacification role. General Cao Van Vien of the Joint General Staff should be specifically instructed that all Vietnamese forces will henceforth be used in direct support of the pacification program commanded by General Thang through such subordinate commanders as Thang may select, including province chiefs. In the course of

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re-orienting the RVNAF, General Thang should be given full authority to reorganize its command structure and remove officers as necessary to carry out this new mission. Similarly, the Director General of Police, the Minister of Revolutionary Development and all other elements of the GVN which can contribute to pacification should be given the primary mission of direct support to General Thang's pacification program.

4. President Thieu should also be directed to appoint Vice President Ky as his Chief of Staff and Director of Operations. Ky should be given two major missions. The first would be to organize an individual review of the personal files and performance of all Vietnamese military and civilian officers and officials, with immediate purging of all found involved in corruption or other abuses of authority. Upon removal, immediate replacements should be appointed from subordinate levels or from other services. Vice President Ky's second major mission should be to organize a national political vehicle or front outside the government structure, including all non-Communist political elements, to share a massive rallying of the entire population in support of this new program to develop the country and free it of Viet Cong terror.

5. In order to focus the entire nation and government on this program, and still respect the provisions of the Constitution, President Thieu should seek the approval of the National Assembly on an urgent basis of the establishment of a War and Reconstruction Council. The War and Reconstruction Council should consist of President Thieu as Chairman, Vice President Ky as Vice Chairman and Director of Operations, General Thang as Deputy Director of Operations, and appropriate representatives of the Ministries and the Armed Forces as well as the Senate and the Lower House. The War and Reconstruction Council should have counterpart War and Reconstruction Councils at the province and district levels, with similar participation not only of representatives of the Administration but also of provincial and district councils. The function of the Councils would be to review the degree to

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which the normal operations of government are concentrated in support of this special program and to provide a means for ensuring the participation of all elements of the population in the national effort. These Councils should also be charged with ensuring that the programs initiated in this emergency be developed for the long term benefit of Vietnamese citizens through normal governmental and political structures. The proposal to establish these Councils should be announced to the nation in a Presidential speech within the next ten days, to be given maximum dissemination by all possible media. The National Assembly should be required to accept or reject the proposal within a matter of days in order to avoid legislative wrangling over details and permit full focus on this urgent problem while the implications of the Tet offensive are still fresh.

6. President Thieu should be advised that the United States and all its agencies will support this program to the fullest and will utilize all its officers actively to assist, monitor and participate in the effort at all levels. Should additional financial, logistical, etc. support be necessary, it will be immediately supplied outside normal channels if necessary.

7. President Thieu should be advised that we consider that this program must show obviously positive results within 100 days of Tet (i. e., by early May). If this does not occur or if President Thieu refuses this proposal, he should be advised that the United States will reserve its position with respect to the GVN. In this event, he should be left in some doubt as to whether this implies that the United States might seek an alternate GVN through other leadership or whether it might begin the process of working out some accommodation

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with the NLF and the DRV at the expense of the GVN. He could be assured that this 100 day showing is essential to the American nation, as if it does not occur there will only be a matter of weeks thereafter before the American nation begins to make its basic political decisions for the next four years. If the GVN is not able to show the kind of progress which makes further U. S. support justifiable, the United States might then have to examine alternative courses of action.

3. The United States options at the end of the 100 days would deliberately be left undefined for President Thieu and Vice President Ky. We might, of course, find that sufficient forward momentum has been achieved to warrant continued U. S. support. Should this not occur, the United States might take one of the following courses of action:

a. Insistence that President Thieu or other GVN leaders resign in favor of individuals who might have proven themselves during the 100 days, who could be duly elected according to Constitutional processes at the election three months after the President resigns.

b. Suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam and the initiation of talks with the DRV. This action could be justified as the result of the GVN's inability to respond to the challenge and consequently an American decision to adjust to this situation. Alternatively it could be utilized as a further stimulus to Vietnamese leadership to take more vigorous action.

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c. Development of a dialogue between the United States and the NLF suggesting the possibility of some move toward a coalition government. In this situation, United States assistance could still be provided to some non-Communist Vietnamese elements, continuing our policy of helping resolute Vietnamese fight and help themselves.

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