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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY TODAY

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY TODAY

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
12 December 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The South Vietnamese Army Today

Summary

Plans are under way to shift the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) away from large-scale offensive operations against Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army main force units and employ it largely as a force to support pacification activities. The problems and characteristics of the ARVN as it exists today will to some extent determine its performance in this mission. This study sets forth some aspects of the ARVN's current status and reviews many of its more important problems on the eve of its re-assignment.

NOTE: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Research and Reports, the Office of National Estimates, and the Director's Special Assistant for Vietnam.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Up to the present, neither the sharply increased level of US military assistance nor the large-scale commitment of US combat troops to South Vietnam appears to have resulted in a significant improvement of the over-all operational posture or combat performance of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN).

2. The inclusion of major ARVN elements in the planning and execution of combined operations with American forces has, to some degree, improved the morale and aggressiveness of certain ARVN units, including two of the three divisions based in the western half of III Corps. In much of the rest of the country, however, ARVN combat performance has been generally unsatisfactory or, at best, marginal, with the result that US and third-country deployments have been required to counter major Communist thrusts in most critical areas.

3. During the past year, the ARVN's forces have been most effective in the IV Corps area south of Saigon, largely because Viet Cong main forces in this region have been weakened by sizable cadre and combat troop withdrawals to the III Corps and elsewhere.

4. While there has been a generally favorable trend during 1966 in terms of the number of ARVN units considered combat effective,* the over-all capability of the regular army has, nonetheless, continued to be adversely affected by a number of important factors. Among them has been the general expansion of Communist military resources in the I, II, and III Corps Tactical Zones. The ARVN is unable, in many instances, to engage Communist main force units in the field on equal terms because of understrength units and inferior firepower. Another problem has been the ARVN's training. It is considered poor in quality and

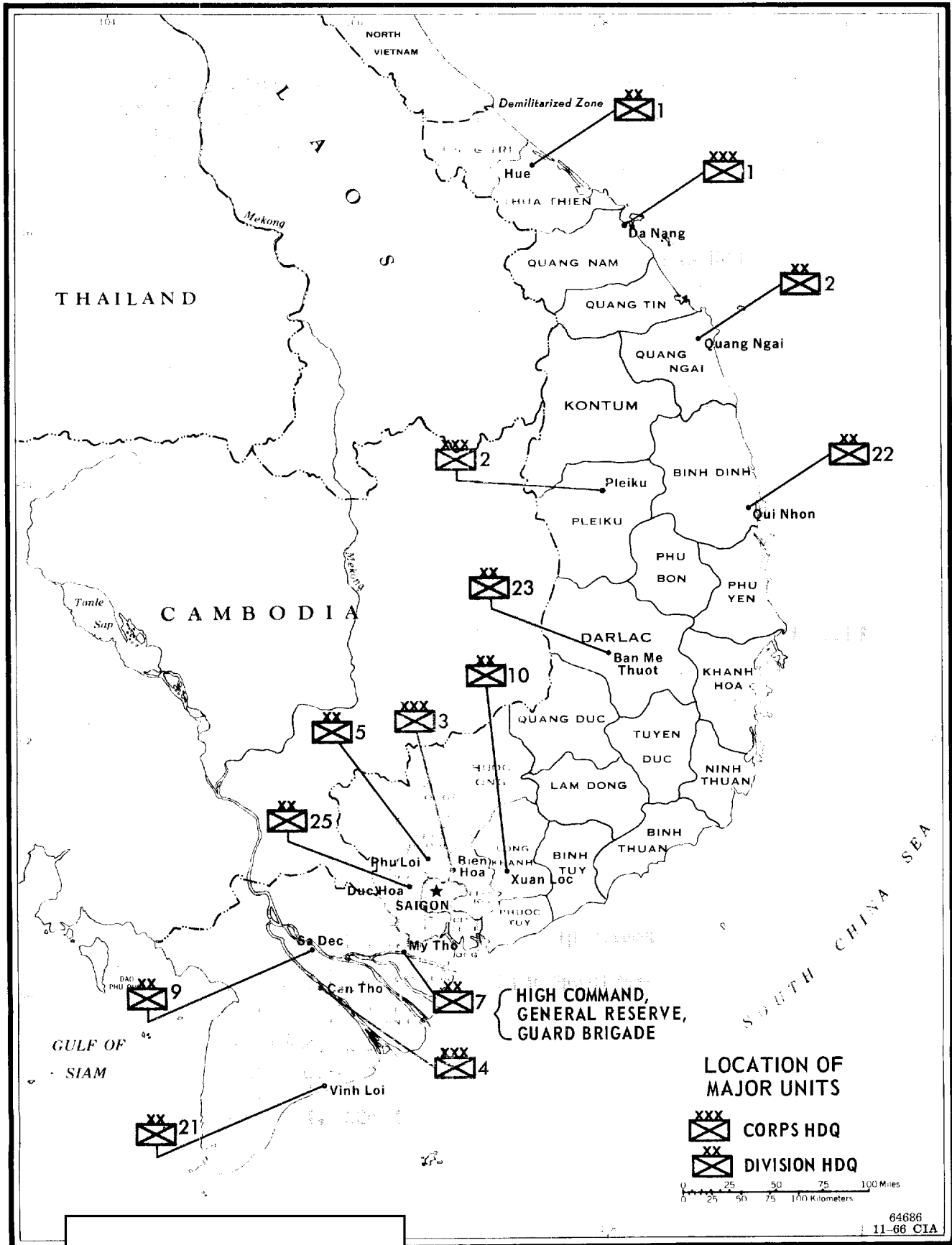
* As of 30 September 1966, 130 of ARVN's 158 maneuver battalions were rated by US advisers as combat effective, 24 marginally combat effective, and four combat ineffective.

often oriented more toward conventional warfare than toward counterinsurgency methods and tactics. The insufficient number of qualified, aggressive and highly motivated officers and NCOs is reflected in frequent tactical blunders in conducting both large and small-unit operations.

5. The desertion rate of all component services of South Vietnam's armed forces, especially that of the ARVN, continued to rise throughout much of 1966. Although the rate has declined somewhat in recent months, it is problematical whether the induction system of the armed forces can continue to keep pace with losses from desertions and combat casualties.

6. On balance, the ARVN is considered generally capable of maintaining internal security in most major population centers, in a few outlying areas, and along certain lines of communication. It is considered wholly incapable, however, of prolonged effective resistance by itself to the military threat posed by intensified North Vietnamese Army (NVA) infiltration and combat activity. It is also questionable whether the ARVN could cope alone with the Viet Cong, were Allied and North Vietnamese combat units to be withdrawn from South Vietnam.

ARVN - Order of Battle



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II. GENERAL DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES

1. The 284,633-man ARVN is the predominant force within the South Vietnamese military establishment and comprises about 90 percent of the personnel strength of the regular armed forces.* ARVN forces are deployed by corps zones north to south. For purposes of military command, administration, and logistics, the corps are further subdivided into division tactical areas. Approximately 34,000 ARVN combat troops, including 22,700 in the 1st and 2nd Divisions, operate in the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam which form the I Corps area. Some 30,000 regular army troops, 19,500 of them subordinate to the 22nd and 23rd Divisions, are based in the central highlands and central coastal provinces of II Corps.

2. The heaviest concentration of ARVN units is in the III Corps area, where nearly 50,000 combat troops, including 34,400 attached to the 5th, 10th, and 25th Divisions, are deployed in an arc screening Saigon and its suburbs on the north, northwest, and northeast. About 38,000 combat personnel, 31,000 of whom are organized under the 7th, 9th, and 21st Divisions, are stationed in the IV Corps southern delta area below Saigon. Finally, the 8,500-man Airborne Division, reinforced by five South Vietnamese Marine battalions, composes the ARVN General Reserve headquartered in the Saigon Capital Special Zone.

Division Alignments

3. The present pattern of ARVN deployment has existed for the past two years, the sole major

*Major ARVN combat units presently include four corps headquarters, ten infantry divisions, one airborne division, one Guard Brigade, one separate infantry regiment, four separate infantry battalions, seven separate artillery battalions, nine armored cavalry squadrons, one Ranger group headquarters, 20 Ranger battalions, and two Special Forces groups.

exception being the creation of the 10th Division in III Corps late in 1965.

4. In 1963 and 1964, two ARVN divisions--the 9th and 25th--were moved from Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces to reinforce the delta because of concern over the deteriorating security situation there. These redeployments, which brought the number of ARVN divisions stationed in the southern III Corps and IV Corps region to four, significantly improved the government's military posture in the delta.

5. Subsequently, the Viet Cong began to skim off cadres and combat elements from their main force units in the delta to permit expansion of their regular force structure in the III Corps area. The withdrawals lowered the combat effectiveness of the Viet Cong main forces in the IV Corps. Communist regulars were largely obliged to disperse and revert to small-unit operations in conjunction with local force battalions. For this reason the ARVN has generally held its own in the delta over the past 18 months, although large Communist forces remain there and the area still serves as a source of manpower and food for enemy units elsewhere.

6. Following the redeployment of the 9th and 25th ARVN Divisions to the delta in 1964, the security situation in Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces went rapidly downhill. During the past year, however, the deployment of US Marines to Chu Lai and of South Korean forces to Qui Nhon has tended to stabilize the military situation in Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh. Offensives by these and other allied units in the area, culminating in the recent highly successful Operation IRVING, have substantially reduced the Communist threat, at least in Binh Dinh Province.

7. The 1st and 7th ARVN Divisions, based in Hue and My Tho, are generally considered the best of the major South Vietnamese units apart from the airborne and ranger outfits. Until six months ago, the 1st Division was more or less holding its own against Communist main forces in Quang Tri and Thua

Thien provinces. The influx of North Vietnamese regulars into the northern part of I Corps, however, was of necessity met by US redeployments. It is questionable, moreover, whether the 1st Division has fully recovered from the heavy involvement of some of its units and officers on the side of antigovernment elements in this spring's political upheaval in I Corps.

8. The ARVN 7th Division has executed a number of successful operations over the past two years which have kept Viet Cong main force units largely off balance in Viet Cong Military Region 8 (the northern Delta area immediately below Saigon). The division has had a number of able commanders and played a key role in supporting the government against coup attempts in 1964-65.

9. The 5th and 25th Divisions, based in the III Corps provinces of Binh Duong and Hau Nghia, were for some time acknowledged as the least effective major ARVN units. However, both divisions have displayed signs of general improvement in the last six months. The greatest single factor in improving tactical efficiency, pacification prowess, troop welfare, and morale of these divisions has been their inclusion in combined operations with US 1st and 25th Infantry Division forces in the area. The division commanders are developing a higher degree of confidence as a result of their direct relationships with American commanders in the planning and execution of joint operations.

10. Since no major US tactical elements are permanently assigned to Long Khanh Province, the 10th ARVN Division (based at the provincial capital of Xuan Loc) has not had a similar stimulus for improvement. This appears to be the major factor in the continued lack of progress in this unit as compared with others in III Corps.

11. In the provinces adjacent to Saigon, and in the Capital Special Zone itself, political as well as strategic considerations play a major role in governing the disposition and effectiveness of ARVN units. The screen of ARVN forces around

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Saigon is designed to block any major Communist military effort against the capital as well as a possible movement on the city by coup forces from distant corps areas. Regular army units operating in the capital area thus must be loyal to the government in power. Therefore the zone commander and the commanders of the airborne division, the marine brigade, and the guard brigade which are headquartered in Saigon and make up the ARVN general reserve and the palace guard, are selected as much for their political reliability as for their demonstrated effectiveness in combat.

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III. CAPABILITY AS EFFECTIVE FIGHTING FORCE

1. For a number of years, the performance of ARVN combat units in the field vis-a-vis the Viet Cong has been adversely affected by the nature of the training they have received, first from the French during the Indo-China War and then from the US after 1954. In essence, ARVN units have been trained to fight a conventional-type war in a counterinsurgency environment. This, of course, would apply as well to the great majority of US combat troops presently in South Vietnam, who are on the whole outperforming enemy main force units chiefly through the application of conventional warfare techniques. The basic difference, however, lies in the mobility and in the massive logistics-support base available to American combat forces in the field--helicopters, tactical aircraft, heavy artillery, and naval gunfire. US forces, therefore, enjoy an enormous firepower and quick-reaction capability over any Communist unit, a capability which is simply unavailable to most ARVN units on any comparable scale.

2. The large number of automatic weapons available to a main force Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army (NVA) unit gives it an overwhelming superiority in firepower against the average ARVN infantry unit equipped primarily with M-1s and carbines.* The bulk of the Viet Cong main forces in III and IV Corps, as well as NVA units in I and II Corps, are equipped

* ARVN units have been supplied mainly with US arms and military equipment, most of which is of World War II design and manufacture. In addition to the usual inventory of small arms and automatic weapons, the regular army's heavy weapons include mortars (60-mm., 81-mm., and 4.2-inch), rocket launchers (3.5-inch), recoilless rifles (57-mm.), and howitzers (75-mm. self-propelled and pack, 105-mm., and 155-mm.).

with the modern 7.62-mm. family of small arms, 75-mm. recoilless rifles, 12.7-mm. and 7.92-mm. AAA machine guns, and B-40 rocket launchers. Faced with such superior firepower, ARVN units are generally very wary of closing with the Viet Cong, and rely heavily on artillery and air support in situations where close-in combat is almost mandatory to achieve satisfactory results.

3. Individual ARVN battalions are also often unable to meet Viet Cong/NVA main force units on numerically equal terms. As of September 1966, the average present-for-duty strength for the 158 ARVN maneuver battalions was 458, or 63 percent of the authorized strength of 714. Beyond this, the limited mobility capability of the ARVN, and its continuing requirement to provide security for populated areas, tends to reduce even further the actual number of troops available for offensive operations. For example, many infantry and ranger battalions are frequently unable to put more than 250 to 300 men into a field operation, compared with 400 to 600 men in a Communist main force or provincial battalion. This numerical disadvantage is quite evident to ARVN troops as well as to their commanders, and hence limits their confidence and willingness to take risks.

4. US ground forces, on the other hand, have a more substantial capability. In September, the present-for-duty strength of the 66 US combat maneuver battalions in South Vietnam (48 US Army, 18 USMC) averaged 92 percent. The authorized strength of a US Army infantry battalion in South Vietnam is 837 and that of a US Marine infantry battalion 1,200. American units are thus able to field a much larger combat force in the same number of battalions than their ARVN counterparts. This permits them to engage enemy forces on a unit-for-unit basis on numerically favorable terms.

Leadership in Combat

5. As in any army, ARVN combat effectiveness is directly related to the capability of the unit commander. During the first nine months of 1966, leadership in 22 to 35 percent of ARVN's 158 battalions was rated by US field advisers as unsatisfactory or marginal. Such factors as the rapid

expansion of the force structure necessitated by the acceleration of enemy military activity, the lack of an adequate base of experienced leaders, especially junior officers and NCOs, the preoccupation with political maneuvering at the senior officer level, and the frequent command changes in top echelons, have all contributed significantly to the leadership problem. The ARVN also has a tendency to overstaff its headquarters elements at the sector, regimental, divisional, and corps level with an inordinate number of junior officers and NCOs, many of whom have reportedly paid for the privilege of avoiding combat duty.

6. The importance of good leadership is clear. The 9th ARVN Division, for example, has had a good combat record largely because it has consistently had effective and efficient leaders. A number of ARVN regiments have had poor combat records except during the tenure of one specific commander; others, such as the 42nd and 47th Regiments, based in Bac Lieu and Phu Yen provinces, have had a succession of able commanders under whom they performed creditably, only to deteriorate under a bad one.

Employment of Forces

7. During the past few years, the most prevalent type of combat activity engaged in by ARVN units of battalion strength or larger has been the search-and-destroy operation. The great majority of these operations have been conducted independently of other allied forces, and have been controlled by a sector, regimental, or divisional headquarters element. When ARVN units have participated in joint search-and-destroy operations with US and third-country combat forces, their role has often been limited to one of support--such as serving as a blocking force along enemy withdrawal routes. Battalion-size and larger ARVN forces also have engaged in operations designed to protect rice harvests or clear and hold territory for pacification, and in road-clearing and local security.

8. There have been a number of basic weaknesses in the conduct of large-scale ARVN operations. In the first place, many of the multibattalion ground

sweeps have not been adequately coordinated with the general pacification objectives in the local sector and thus have failed to produce lasting results. Secondly, as has already been noted, the relative inferiority in ARVN infantry unit firepower vis-a-vis the Viet Cong has resulted in an overdependence upon preparatory artillery fire or tactical air strikes against known or suspected enemy positions prior to the start of an operation. In many instances, the enemy, forewarned by the preliminary action, has been able to elude government forces.

9. A third and often fatal weakness reflected in many large-scale operations has been the dependence of participating ARVN units on the presumed security provided by vehicular convoy deployment to a battle area. In many operations, ARVN units are completely roadbound; they often refuse to venture into enemy territory except in large truck convoys accompanied by equivalent numbers of armored personnel carriers and other armored vehicles. Such units have often become prime targets for annihilation by enemy ambush units. A classic example was provided in the November 1965 ambush of the ARVN 7th Regiment in the Michelin Plantation area of Binh Duong Province, in which government regulars sustained more than 700 casualties in less than two hours.

10. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, tactical plans for ARVN large-unit operations are normally based on attainment of terrain objectives, and success determined on the basis of executing the prescribed maneuver plan, rather than on the basis of destruction of the enemy force in the area. In addition, these operations are usually planned to terminate at nightfall, thus enabling participating units to return to their cantonment areas either to spend the night with their families or to perform static security duties. This is frequently done at the cost of breaking a potentially fruitful contact with the enemy.

11. Operating in a strength of three companies or less, ARVN forces have also participated in numerous "small-unit actions," usually with reinforcement from Vietnamese paramilitary units. These actions are normally of very short duration, involving

for the most part routine day or night patrol activity or the establishment of ambush sites along known or suspected enemy lines of communication.

12. In small-unit operations, ARVN forces can generally be faulted for their lack of aggressiveness, and for their failure to direct these actions toward the neutralization of Viet Cong capabilities to interfere with pacification. In addition, ARVN small-unit operations often suffer from the absence of clear, coordinated patrol and ambush plans. Very often, participating units will establish tactical patterns easily detected by enemy forces, e.g., utilizing the same ambush site for several consecutive nights or traversing by the same paths and roads while on reconnaissance missions.

Effectiveness in Large-Unit Operations

13. A general idea of the combat effectiveness of the ARVN can be derived from an examination of some of the statistics associated with ARVN operations and by a comparison with similar statistics on US military activities in South Vietnam. The comparison is not intended to play up US combat proficiency vis-a-vis the ARVN. It does, however, provide a general reference point from which to evaluate ARVN operations. As noted in the preceding pages, the ARVN suffers from manpower, leadership, and ground and air support problems which are not experienced in the same degree by US units. It is unlikely, therefore, that the ARVN could ever hope to achieve the level of combat effectiveness of US units.

14. ARVN maneuver battalions spent about 30 percent of their available time during the first nine months of 1966 engaged in large-unit actions, while US units spent about 48 percent of their available time in similar operations. Numerically, nevertheless, the ARVN conducted more large operations than did US forces. ARVN actions, however, were substantially shorter in duration, averaging 5.4 battalion days per operation compared with 22.8 for US forces. Often, the longer operations

in Vietnam yield better results, since the enemy is forced to commit himself to combat through the continued tactical maneuvering of the two sides.

15. About 38 percent of the ARVN's large-unit operations during the first nine months of 1966 resulted in contact with the enemy. This was a substantial decline from 1965, when the rate of contact during similar actions was about 44 percent. US units contact the enemy in about 90 percent of their large-unit operations. The over-all ARVN/enemy kill ratio was 1 to 3.2 on large operations. The US/enemy kill ratio was 1 to 5.4. ARVN forces captured an average of 2.2 enemy soldiers per month per battalion, as compared with 4.2 enemy soldiers per month per US battalion. Finally, ARVN forces took an average of 2.3 enemy weapons per month per battalion and US forces an average of 9.3 per month per battalion. The latter figures do not include weapons taken from overrun enemy supply caches.

IV. THE MANPOWER PROBLEM

1. During 1965, a modest manpower buildup was achieved by the South Vietnamese Army despite increasing desertions and battlefield losses. The number of infantry-type battalions increased from 123 at the end of 1964 to 133 by the fourth quarter of 1965, while personnel strength increased from 220,400 to 267,900.

2. However, while ARVN forces increased numerically from 278,000 at the end of the first quarter of 1966 to 284,633 during the third quarter, the rate of growth has tapered off sharply. The drop may be attributed in part, at least, to the growing inability of the South Vietnamese armed forces induction system to keep pace with losses in the regular army accruing from desertions, combat casualties, and other manpower attrition factors.

Desertions

3. The nearly continuous rise in military desertions, dating from at least 1962, constitutes the most serious manpower problem in all the component forces--regular, regional and popular--of the South Vietnamese armed forces (RVNAF). The monthly average of desertions increased from approximately 9,500 in 1965 to about 11,300 during the first half of 1966. At this rate, projected total desertions for 1966 should exceed 135,000--the highest annual total on record.

4. Moreover, for the first time, the number of desertions in the ARVN or regular army this year comprises more than half of the total desertions reported. The average monthly desertion rate per 1,000 personnel in the ARVN has risen sharply from 8.3 and 14.2 in 1964 and 1965, respectively, to 18.3 for the period 1 January - 30 June 1966. Most of the deserters in all components were conscripts.

5. The ARVN reported a total of 43,617 personnel losses for the first half of 1966, 35,387 of whom were dropped from the rolls as deserters. Desertions among officers and NCOs have risen from 116 and 656, respectively, during 1965, to 117 and 941 for the first six months of 1966. Desertions are heaviest from the Airborne Division.

6. A number of factors have contributed to the continued high level of desertions. One factor is that much of the army rank and file, like the population in general, lacks a positive commitment to the government. Political turmoil, such as the 1966 "struggle movement" in I Corps, has also played a role in accelerating the pace of military desertions.

7. Another cause of desertions has been the increase in Viet Cong combat strength and firepower, which has resulted in increased physical danger for ARVN troops during contacts with enemy main force units. Other factors include the lack of attention on the part of unit commanders to personnel management and troop welfare problems, the absence of an effective disciplinary program, and the lack of prospects for discharge from military service for many individuals.*

8. The dissatisfactions which lead to low morale and heavy desertions within the enlisted and conscripted ranks can often be traced to low pay rates, inadequate dependent housing, concern over the welfare of families, infrequent rotation of units in isolated outposts, and inadequate medical care of the wounded. Among junior officers, there is considerable dissatisfaction because rewards, in the form of assignments, honors, and promotions are more often than not predicated on political considerations rather than merit.

9. A solution to the desertion problem has been of major concern to the South Vietnamese military command, and a number of significant steps have recently

* Many reserve officers and NCOs, for example, have been on "emergency" active duty since 1950-51 with no real prospects for release. Similarly, few conscripts are released at the end of their two-year active duty obligation.

been undertaken in the hope of reversing the trend.* It is too early to tell whether the problem will be diminished over the long run by these measures. However, total RVNAF desertions for the month of June (9,873) were about 1,500 less than the monthly average for the first half of 1966, while those for July and August were approximately 3,000 less. In fact, the August desertion total (8,108) was the lowest recorded for any month of 1966.

Defections to Viet Cong

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10. How many of the South Vietnamese deserters defect to the Viet Cong is unclear. [redacted]

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[redacted] there are considerable numbers of ex-RVNAF soldiers in Communist ranks. Some are defectors, others are deserters who have been conscripted by the Viet Cong after their return home. The percentage of former GVN soldiers is probably much higher in Viet Cong irregular units than in main force units. The percentage in the latter, however, seems likely to rise as the Viet Cong's need for manpower outweighs the risks involved in taking in their former enemies.

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[redacted]

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* In June, a comprehensive law providing stiffer penalties for deserters and accomplices, including capital punishment for those crossing over to enemy ranks, was adopted. At the same time, legislation providing a substantial pay raise and other benefits (such as PX and dependent housing privileges) for all military and civil service personnel was put into effect.

Other corrective measures include the adoption by military authorities of modern techniques of deserter investigation and apprehension, and the development of a long-range and comprehensive military leadership improvement program. Finally, a series of major security operations conducted in the Saigon area by the ARVN General Reserve and the National Police have yielded excellent results. Several thousand deserters, draft dodgers, AWOLs, and civilians without proper identification papers have been rounded up.

V. CHANGEOVER TO PACIFICATION ROLE

1. The new mission of ARVN in the Revolutionary Development (RD) program will be, first, to clear areas of whatever organized Communist forces may be present to disrupt the securing of hamlets, and second, to reassert a GVN presence among the people. How successful ARVN will be in this transition is still uncertain. In the IV Corps Zone, for example, where ARVN has not been supported by US ground units, it has done little more than hold its own against the Viet Cong.

2. Some indication of the number of ARVN units which will be committed to the pacification support role is provided in preliminary reports on the changeover. In I Corps, the 1st ARVN Division will commit two maneuver battalions to each of the corps' two provinces; in other words, four of the division's 12 maneuver battalions initially will support RD. In the 7th Division's tactical area, which covers the delta provinces of Go Cong, Kien Hoa, and Dinh Tuong, five of the division's maneuver battalions are initially to be committed to the RD effort.

3. The effect the new mission will have on the morale and efficiency of ARVN officers and men is difficult to judge at present. It may be some time, in fact, before a definite trend can be discerned. Since the ARVN's mission will be to keep Viet Cong units at bay so that RD activities may be carried on, the ARVN may be involved in even more combat than it presently carries out. It is possible that the new mission will result in fewer casualties, but this depends to some extent on how the Viet Cong react.

4. If the Communists decide, for purely psychological reasons, to concentrate their efforts against ARVN units engaged in RD support, casualties could be high and might adversely affect ARVN morale. Also, the Viet Cong may be expected to try to portray the ARVN as playing a secondary role in the war, in the hope of fomenting ill feeling between the ARVN and other allied forces. There is evidence in Viet Cong radio propaganda that such an effort is already under way.

5. The effect of a pacification support role on ARVN desertions is problematical; but in any event, it seems unlikely that the redirection alone will be a critical factor in the desertion rate.

6. The probable reaction of the rural populace to the ARVN's presence in the pacification picture depends in great part on ARVN's performance. The main mission of ARVN will continue to be one of combat rather than one of greater contact with the rural population, but the shift in mission from search-and-destroy to clear-and-hold operations will probably increase contacts with the rural population in the future. Although these conditions will multiply the opportunities for the abuses and pillaging by ARVN which have been so prevalent in the past, there is now an opportunity for a closer sense of identity to develop between the ARVN and the people. The critical factor of troop behavior will depend largely upon the ability and willingness of ARVN troop commanders to maintain close troop discipline. In areas where troops are well led, properly disciplined and behave correctly, they may be expected to be an asset to the RD effort, but the reverse will be the case if units involved do not meet these standards. Because of the importance of harmonious relations between the ARVN and the populace, it is essential that command and troops committed to pacification be aware of the need to present a favorable image to the people with whom they deal. A program is already under way in Saigon to provide the necessary reorientation of those units which will be committed to the support of the RD effort.

7. In the final analysis, the success of the new ARVN mission is likely to depend, to a considerable extent, upon the degree to which it is understood and accepted by individual ARVN field commanders. Political repercussions could be felt, for example, if the present divisional structure is not carefully integrated into the planning of the new mission, or if division and corps commanders feel that their prerogatives are being diminished under the new concept.

8. Top GVN military planners are apparently mindful of these problems in giving their backing to ARVN's supporting role in revolutionary development. Chief of State General Thieu has reportedly indicated that there will be a need to reshape the outlook of many senior officers and that this effort will be undertaken. The chief of the Joint General Staff, General Vien, has also made a point of stressing his own full commitment to the RD support mission by sending a command letter to his subordinates. Moreover, ARVN leaders have made plans for the training in Saigon of teams from all ARVN divisions concerning the new mission. These teams are to return to their parent divisions and initiate similar training programs down to battalion level.

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12 December 1966

MEMORANDUM TALKING PAPER

MEMO TITLE: The South Vietnamese Army Today

1. The subject memo reviews the activities of the ARVN during the past two years, evaluates its effectiveness as a combat force and discusses current problems and future prospects. The ARVN comes through in the memo as a mediocre fighting force at best. This judgment, however, is solidly backed with facts and statistics on ARVN past performance. The memo also compares ARVN fighting prowess with US combat performance, pointing out that this is done to provide a frame of reference and not to denigrate the ARVN or brashly play up US performance.

2. The memo discusses the upcoming shift of ARVN activities into the field of pacification, pointing out the morale and organizational difficulties that may emerge during the changeover. The memo takes the position, however, that ARVN may well make a substantial contribution to pacification if the changeover is well planned and organized by the SVN authorities.

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4. Because of the nature of the content, the distribution, perhaps, should be worked out with the DDI.

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