

MEMORANDUM

INFORMATION

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

February 15, 1973

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MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. KISSINGER

FROM: WILLIAM L. STEARMAN, *WLS*

SUBJECT: Ceasefire Developments
(February 15 - 4:00 p.m. EST)

MORI C05082157

The following is a report on current ceasefire developments in South Vietnam and on the present situation in Laos and Cambodia. This report includes information received from State, Defense and CIA as of 4:00 p.m. EST February 14, 1973.

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

DOS, NSA, OSD, Army Reviews Completed

Vietnam

Military

-- Significant military activity is continuing in MR I. The GVN is making a maximum effort to recapture the strategic Sa Huynh area astride Route I in southern Quang Ngai Province.

-- Sharp clashes have occurred along the Quang Tri/Thua Thien front involving enemy infiltration and artillery duels.

-- Military activity continues in MR II provinces such as Kontum, Pleiku, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. The GVN is responding with air, artillery and ground actions and has had considerable success in reopening lines of communication.

-- In MR III, the situation remains quiet.

-- MR IV continues to experience relatively high levels of military incidents. It remains impossible to separate VC from GVN initiated activity, despite GVN reporting that all operations are in response to enemy initiatives. There are indications that the GVN is mounting pre-planned offensive operations.

There is some evidence that Communist holdings in the countryside may be more extensive in certain areas than is being officially acknowledged by the government. During the past week, reports from both American observers and [redacted] have pointed out discrepancies in the official South Vietnamese appraisals of the local security situation.

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-- Embassy Saigon has reported that two and a half weeks after the ceasefire, the fighting continues at a somewhat higher level than at the Tet holidays ten days ago. Casualties are comparable to those of "high points" in recent years and there has been considerable movement of refugees and damage to civilian property. According to GVN figures, 5,770 enemy and 929 ARVN soldiers have been killed since the signing of the ceasefire agreement.

-- We have received our second reflection in DRV civil communications that North Vietnam is continuing to send supplies into Quang Tri Province.

Political

-- President Thieu reportedly has told a group of legislative leaders on February 12 that he will propose new presidential elections within 3-6 months, but that he also may have to accept a PRG demand for the election of a constituent assembly. Thieu reportedly said that he probably will accede to this Communist proposal but that he will insist that the NVA first withdraw from South Vietnam.

-- According to a Saigon domestic press report, a GVN official spokesman has said that the GVN does not consider such prominent GVN detainees as Tran Ngoc Chau, Ngo Ba Thanh or "militant students" as falling within the purview of prisoners envisaged for release by the Paris Agreement.

-- There are reports from MR I that Communist propaganda efforts are increasing, stressing themes such as "send the soldiers home" and "let the refugees go home."

-- While there is some skepticism in certain areas of the country over the effectiveness of the ceasefire mechanisms, overall the popular mood remains stable and morale is relatively good.

-- Ambassador Sullivan gave Foreign Minister Lam a general description of your visit to Hanoi. Lam described the impasse that has arisen over the PRG demands for a site in Saigon and the GVN position that these would be the external signs of a second government in South Vietnam. As a result of the difficulty, the GVN was to propose on February 14 that the formal negotiations initially take place outside Vietnam.

-- Lam thought it would be relatively easy to set up the NCNRC once substantive negotiations started, but the nature of elections and other political matters would be more complicated.

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-- Sullivan noted that the activist GVN position on the negotiations was an excellent one. It was important for U.S. public opinion to believe that the GVN was anxious to move ahead, while the PRG was reluctant, and Lam said this was the GVN intention.

Four Party Joint Military Commission

-- Two members of the DRV's regional FPJMC delegation in Hue were harassed without injury by a crowd of young Vietnamese, and a tear gas grenade was set off inside the Communist compound in Saigon. Also on February 15, wire services reported that GVN military police blocked the chiefs of the Indonesian and Canadian ICCS delegations and numerous correspondents from attending a PRGJMC reception in Saigon.

ICCS

-- At the February 15 plenary session, the political, military and administrative committees were upgraded from provisional to official status.

-- In a February 14 conversation with Ambassadors Bunker and Sullivan, Canadian ICCS Delegation Head Gauvin assessed progress to date as satisfactory and said that relations between delegations were cordial and that no rigid positions have emerged.

-- Embassy Ottawa reports that Minister for External Affairs Sharp is considering a visit to Saigon prior to the GOC's decision on ICCS participation beyond the initial 60-day period.

Mine Countermeasures

-- The Commander of our mine sweeping operation in Haiphong has reported a slowdown of progress in negotiations with his DRV counterpart and believes that a written agreement may not be forthcoming in the near future. He also claims that the DRV desires their own form of an "Operation Enhance" to include heavy equipment such as dirt movers, cranes, medicines, water pumps, detection devices, tractors and trucks.

Ceasefire Violations

-- For your violations bar graph, there were 17 major and 149 minor violations recorded during the 24 hour period ending at 1700 EST February 15.

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Withdrawal and Redeployment of US/FWMAF

-- From an in-country total of 23,516* U.S. troops on January 27, 7,772 were reported withdrawn by 1600 EST February 15.

-- From an in-country total of 35,396 ROK troops on January 27, 11,242 were reported withdrawn by 1600 EST February 15.

POWs

-- Returning U.S. POWs have told escorts that they "cheered B-52 raids until they were hoarse" and have stated their conviction that massive bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong was the principal factor in North Vietnam's capitulation.

-- Forty former U.S. POWs returned to Travis AFB on 14 and 15 February.

-- At the FPJMC Sub-Commission meeting on 15 February, the U.S. delegate proposed that the DRV release the 20 POWs which they have agreed return ahead of schedule on 17 February. The DRV delegate assented provided Hanoi can complete arrangements by then and gave February 18 as an alternate date.

-- A total of 1,939 VC POWs and 775 NVA POWs have been reported as being released/repatriated during the period 12-15 February.

Thieu-Sullivan Meeting

-- On February 14 President Thieu told Ambassador Sullivan that three months would be sufficient to reach a political settlement but if no agreement was reached or if solution were unacceptable, North Vietnam might launch massive attacks in one or two locations to test U.S. reactions. Thieu expressed dissatisfaction with the number of GVN POWs listed by the Communists and the PRG's failure to produce a list of civilian detainees. He added that U.S. willingness to retaliate, continuing (U.S.) assistance and Sino-Soviet cooperation with the agreement are the only guarantees for a peace in South Vietnam.

International Conference

-- The Chinese Ambassador at the United Nations reportedly has told the British that UN Secretary General Waldheim should by no means

* adjusted total

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act as chairman of the Paris Conference on Vietnam but that the U.S. and the DRV should serve as co-chairmen.

Diplomatic

-- The Peking People's Daily has issued its first charges of ceasefire violations against South Vietnam since the signing of the ceasefire. In a February 15 article, the paper claimed that North Vietnam has "strictly implemented" the Paris Agreement, but that the "Saigon authorities have taken despicable means of all descriptions to deliberately violate and sabotage the agreements" (e.g. continued "nibbling operations," delayed release of military and civilian prisoners, and obstruction of the Joint Military Commission.) The article noted resolute Chinese support for the DRV/PRG charges and concluded that the U.S. government has the "responsibility of enjoining the Saigon authorities to observe and implement the Agreement earnestly."

-- Following a one day meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers issued a communique which "welcomed" the Vietnam Agreement, "recognized the desirability" of convening another conference of all South-east Asean countries in the future and of expanding the membership of ASEAN.

Laos

-- The military situation in Laos remains generally unchanged, but combat intensified as Communist forces strongly resisted friendly advances in the Panhandle east of Thakhek and in the Muong Phalane area. Government forces nearly completed operations to clear out remaining enemy units in Paksong.

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-- Singificant North Vietnamese logistic activity continues in Laos, but no new personnel groups have been detected since January 16. During the past week, truck activity reached its highest level this dry season. There is indirect evidence that some of these supplies are moving into South

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Vietnam's MR I. Also, intercepted messages indicate that NVA logistic units are making preparations for continuing activity after a ceasefire in Laos.

Cambodia

-- Heavy fighting was reported in Cambodia along Routes 15 and 1, east of the Mekong. Friendly counterattacks appear to have stalled, but the enemy reportedly failed to make new gains. Route 2 south of Phnom Penh remains cut and enemy pressure against Kampot has increased.

-- President Lon Nol reportedly has told Sirik Matak that he still is pressing for his appointment as Vice President and that a visiting U.S. neurosurgeon has encouraged his plans to come to the United States for another operation in the near future.

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