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9 February 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR GEORGE A. CARVER, JR.

SUBJECT: Possible SAVA-VAS/RAC Problem Areas Resulting From the Tet Offensive

1. The VC/NVA offensive is almost certain to produce major revisions of US thinking about the war -- in areas of (1) policy, (2) programs, (3) evaluation, (4) reporting, and (5) intelligence systems. In view of the "crisis" atmosphere that prevails in Washington and Saigon, it is my view that we should endeavor to prepare ourselves for an onslaught of requests for analytical opinions on subjects which are crucial to US interests in South Vietnam and the Far East. Although a continuous flap environment is not the most conducive to clear thinking on such subjects, the purpose of this memorandum is to bring to your attention those subjects that I think are likely to cause us difficulty and, consequently, are perhaps worthy of some study now -- rather than 30 minutes prior to a NSC meeting.

2. One predicted area of interest relates to the problem of negotiations. The questions that I feel will come up are:

(a) What is our evaluation of the capability, current and projected, of the various barrier projects to detect infiltrators, whether in military units or small groups?

(b) What sort of limitations will the GVN attempt to put on the US government in terms of negotiating with (1) North Vietnam, and/or (2) the National Liberation Front?

(c) Will a US negotiation with North Vietnam strengthen or weaken the position of the current government of South Vietnam?

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(d) Suppose we were to ignore the current GVN administration or discredit it. Could negotiations with the NLF, through a controlled SVN representation, bring about any meaningful results? How would these results affect our relationship with Thailand? Singapore? Cambodia? Etc.?

(e) How should Laos be treated in any negotiations?

3. The second area of interest relates to the Khe Sanh problem itself. The problem areas will be:

(a) What will be NVN's next step if they win at Khe Sanh? What if they lose?

(b) What is our estimate of the effectiveness of tactical nuclear weapons in the Khe Sanh area or in the staging areas if our troops would be endangered? NOTE: I do not know your TO&E as far as "Q" clearances are concerned. I think, however, that it would be a good idea to ask Carl to arrange for a "Q" for at least one or two key members of your staff.

(c) Could the Khe Sanh attacking force be cut off by an invasion, say at Dong Hoi? Could they be entrapped by a major attack launched by US forces from Laos?

(d) What will be the political impact in South Vietnam if we lose Khe Sanh? Will our position be irretrievable? How well informed is the population on the Khe Sanh issue? What do members of the GVN think?

4. The third area of interest relates to the effect of the Tet offensive on pacification. The questions will be:

(a) Has the general populace lost confidence in the government? Do they make a distinction between the government and ARVN? Would a negotiating posture on the part of the US cause the GVN to lose face?

(b) Assuming that we weather the current storm, what types of pacification programs could we adopt that can cope with the present problems of SVN? Would these programs have a better chance of preventing the type of disaster experienced over the last 10 days than the programs now in use?

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5. The fourth area of interest relates to the intelligence-gathering and reporting systems currently in use. I estimate that the questions will be:

(a) Is HES going to be of any value in estimating the overall impact of the Tet offensive? Should we initiate a system for evaluating urban areas? What sort of pacification effort has been made in urban areas? What is planned?

(b) Given the type of warfare we now appear to be engaged in, should we still commit the planned amount of resources into the ICEX program? Would ICEX have given us a better picture of the Tet offensive prior to the attack? If not, what would?

(c) Does the Tet offensive represent a true failure of our intelligence system or a lack of action on the part of area commanders? What can be done to improve the system? Is it simply a question of "more" everything, or should our efforts be redirected? Should the Agency's relationship to USMACV be revised? If so, what would we have in mind?

(d) What is the best thing to do about HES? Should it be abandoned? Should it be expanded to incorporate more information on military actions, movements, weapons, etc. in the areas of the hamlets being reported on? Should the results of the next HES reports be suppressed? If we inform the press that there has been a slight improvement in population under GVN control, will this get us into a new, more serious "credibility gap"?

6. Although obviously some of these questions are easier to answer than others, I believe that we should give some thought to all of them. I think, also, that the various Agency components dealing with the Vietnam problem should be tasked with some preliminary research on some of the problems. If you should so desire, I will follow up this memorandum with one dealing with specific SAVA courses of action.

[Redacted]
Vietnamese Affairs Staff

O/DCI/SAVA/ [Redacted]

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