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~~SECRET/NODIS~~

ACTION

Sept 5, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Analysis For Vietnam

Over the past few months, I have become convinced of the need for systematic analysis of U. S. policies and programs in Vietnam.

Looking back on our experience over the last few years, it is remarkable how frequently officials have let their preconceptions about Vietnam lead them astray even though a careful and objective analysis of readily available facts would have told them differently. The examples are legion:

- the shortcomings of the Strategic Hamlet Program were obvious to any discerning observer of the rural political and economic situation in Vietnam;
- U. S. force deployments in 1965 were based on intelligence estimates of enemy strength that underestimated it by half;
- our expectations for the bombing campaign against North Vietnam were overly optimistic;
- our mistaken optimism in 1966 that the North Vietnamese could no longer sustain heavy casualties in the South was completely contradicted by the facts of North Vietnamese demography;
- our excessively optimistic expectations for the various "revolutionary-development" type cadre programs;
- the shock of the Tet offensive was in part attributable to our failure to analyze available intelligence accurately.

I cite these examples because of my concern at the current paucity of analysis on Vietnam at a time when major changes are taking place in our policy.

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For example, I believe we should give careful consideration to whether we have marshalled and analyzed all the available evidence on:

- the progress of Vietnamese force modernization and the current performance capability of Vietnamese forces;
- the effect on Viet Cong political activities and the rebuilding potential for Viet Cong local force and guerilla units pursuant to U. S. troop withdrawals from the Delta;
- the real progress, if any, of the GVN toward the implementation of the recently proposed land reform program;
- the extent to which some of our more successful economic assistance programs might allow us to quicken what has been the quite remarkable eroding effect that our economic assistance has had on Viet Cong political fortunes in the countryside;
- the nature of the recently registered gains in pacification efforts and their vulnerability to a decline in GVN-US military capability;
- internal developments following any major U. S. program changes in Vietnam.

We need a special group with semi-permanent status to give continuous direction to the analyses and serve as a touchstone for those in Washington and elsewhere who can make analytical contributions.

One way to accomplish this task is to establish a Vietnam Special Studies Group under my chairmanship on the model which has worked so well with the Verification Committee and the Intelligence Estimates. The group would include representatives from OSD, JCS, CIA and State ;with other agencies represented as appropriate. It would sponsor analytical efforts of the type I've mentioned and provide for the circulation and discussion of the results within the government. As appropriate, these studies and the issues they raise would be forwarded to you or to the NSC.

RECOMMENDATION:

I recommend that you approve the establishment of a Vietnam Special Studies Group chaired by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and with appropriate representation from the agencies.

Approve 

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_