

**Larry Berman**

# **PLANNING A TRAGEDY**

**The Americanization  
of the War in Vietnam**



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## Appendix A

### MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Program of expanded military and political moves with respect to Vietnam

*Introduction.* Our objective is to create conditions for a favorable settlement by demonstrating to the VC/DRV that the odds are against their winning. Under present conditions, however, the chances of achieving this objective are small—and the VC are winning now—largely because the ratio of guerrilla to anti-guerrilla forces is unfavorable to the government. With this in mind, we must choose among three courses of action with respect to South Vietnam: (1) Cut our losses and withdraw under the best conditions that can be arranged; (2) continue at about the present level, with US forces limited to, say, 75,000, holding on and playing for the breaks while recognizing that our position will probably grow weaker; or (3) expand substantially the US military pressure against the Viet Cong in the South and the North Vietnamese in the North and at the same time launch a vigorous effort on the political side to get negotiations started. An outline of the third of these approaches follows.

I. *Expanded military moves.* The following military moves should be taken together with the political initiatives in Part II below.

A. *Inside South Vietnam.* Increase US/SVN military strength in SVN enough to prove to the VC that they cannot win and thus to turn the tide of the war.

1. *Increase combined US/GVN ground strength to the level required effectively to counter the current and likely VC ground strength.* \* On the assumption that GVN strength holds its own, a decision should be made now to bring the US/3d-country deployments to 44 battalions within the next few months. Their mission would include hounding, harassing and hurting the VC should they elect not to stand and fight. General Westmoreland says that infusion of such forces with such missions on the schedule proposed "should re-establish the military balance by the end of December." He continues that "it will not per se cause the enemy to back off."\*\* General Westmoreland's recommendations are shown below:

## MACV RECOMMENDED FOR 1965

III MAF	9 bn (2 due 7/5)
173d Abn Bde	2 bn
1st Inf Div	9 bn (3 due 7/15; 6 could arrive 9/1)
101st Abn Div	3 bn (due 7/28)
Air Mob Div	8 bn (due 9/1)
1 MAF	<u>3 bn</u> (1 due 7/1; 2 could arrive in 12 days)
Total US	34 bn (175,000)
A/NZ	1 bn
ROK (or US?)	<u>9 bn</u> (could arrive approx. 10/15)
TOTAL	44 bn

2. *Deploy 13 additional US helicopter companies and 5 additional Chinook platoons to increase effectiveness of US/GVN forces.*

3. *Deploy additional US artillery batteries and engineers to reinforce ARVN divisions and corps.*

4. *Carry out 800 B-52 sorties a month in strikes against VC havens (followed promptly by entry of ground-forces into the struck areas).*

\*Discuss with Ky his view of the military outlook, his plan for improving the situation and his appraisal of the extent to which an increase in US presence along these lines (a) would arrest the deterioration and/or (b) would have a net counter-productive "French colonial" effect. If he suggests the latter, ask how he can offset the VC strength advantage without using additional US forces.

\*\*Westmoreland reports that he "cannot now state what additional forces may be required in 1966 to gain and maintain the military initiative." He says that "instinctively, we believe that there may be substantial US force requirements." He has a study under way, with a fairly solid estimate due soon.

B. *Against North Vietnam.* \* While avoiding striking population and industrial targets not closely related to the DRV's supply of war material to the VC, we should announce to Hanoi and carry out actions to destroy such supplies and to interdict their flow into and out of North Vietnam.

1. *Quarantine the movement of war supplies into North Vietnam—by sea, rail and road.*

a. *Mine the DRV harbors.* Seaborne traffic accounts for 80% of the DRV foreign trade, including practically all POL, the single import most vital to the DRV (the DRV armed forces consume 40% of the POL and transportation most of the remainder). Sixty per cent of the bottoms are Free World under charter mainly to China, but almost all POL is carried by Communist tankers. Practically all of the seaborne traffic moves through four ports. Mining of those ports could be launched on 72 hours notice, and delayed fusing (three days) could be employed to permit ships time to exit after the fields were laid. A full mining effort to plant all fields would require 97 sorties; the fields could be sustained with 38 sorties per month.

b. *Destroy rail and highway bridges leading from China to Hanoi.* There are 15 highway, 5 railroad and 8 railroad/highway bridges north and east of Hanoi. The railroads now carry between 1600 and 1900 short tons per day. Roads to Hanoi from China can support considerable truck traffic. It would take approximately 1000 sorties to carry out strikes on the 28 bridges, with 85% probability of dropping one span in each case.

c. *Conduct intensive armed reconnaissance of the LOCs from China.*

2. *Destroy the war-making supplies and facilities of North Vietnam wherever they may be located.* There are 56 unstruck targets in this category—1 explosive plant, 1 airfield, 5 supply and ordnance depots, 7 ammunition depots, 9 POL storage, 12 military barracks/headquarters, 2 communications facilities, 6 naval base/port facilities, and 13 power plants. Approximately 1650 strike sorties would be required to attack all of these targets. About half of them would be suitable for B-52 attack. Only three are likely to lead to more than 100 civilian casualties under daylight alert conditions.

3. *Interdict movement of war supplies within and out of North Vietnam by an expanded strike and armed reconnaissance program against LOCs west and south of Hanoi.*

a. *Expand strike program against bridges, ferries, railroads and roads.* Other than 6 locks-and-dams targets, only 4 bridges and 4 railroad shops and

\*Because of the short lead-times involved in all of these actions, no decision with respect to them is needed now. Actions to quarantine the ports or to intensify the strike program against the North can on short notice be made a part of an increasing-pressure program.

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yards remain unstruck in this category. These eight targets would require approximately 266 sorties. Two of them—both railroad yards in Hanoi—would probably result in more than 100 civilian casualties. Three of them—the two Hanoi railroad yards and the Yen Vien railroad yard—would be suitable for B-52 strike.

b. *Expand armed reconnaissance against LOCs.* These LOCs south and west of Hanoi, together with the LOCs north and east of Hanoi referred to in para 1c above, should be struck by 1000 sorties a week. This would increase the total strike-plus-armed recon [reconnaissance] sorties against North Vietnam from 1800 to 5000 a month. (Efforts should be continued in Laos to interdict the "trail" there, and at sea preventing infiltration by water.)

4. *Be prepared to destroy airfields and SAM sites as necessary to accomplish the objectives of sub-paras 1-3 above.*

C. *In the United States.* Even if US deployments to Vietnam are no more than 100,000 men, we should:

1. *Call up selected reserve forces* (approximately 100,000 men).
2. *Extend tours of duty in all Services.*

II. *Expanded political moves.* Together with the above military moves, we should take the following political initiatives in order (a) to open a dialogue with Hanoi, Peking, and the VC looking toward a settlement in Vietnam, (b) to keep the Soviet Union from deepening its military involvement and support of North Vietnam until the time when settlement can be achieved, and (c) to cement the support for US policy by the US public, allies and friends, and to keep international opposition at a manageable level. While our approaches may be rebuffed until the tide begins to turn, they nevertheless should be made.

A. *Political Initiatives.*

1. *Moscow.* Place a high level US representative in contact with Moscow to discuss frankly and fully with Soviet leaders our intentions and our desire to find common ground to work with them rather than come into conflict. We would reiterate that US objectives are limited but at the same time we have a firm determination to achieve them. [sentence deleted during declassification] We would press the Soviets to avoid any deeper involvement. We would emphasize that continuation of the military phase can only be harmful to the Communist cause and urge the Soviets to step in (perhaps with British Co-Chairman) to move the situation away from war and toward a peaceful settlement.

2. *United Nations.* As a prelude to expansion of the military effort, we should consider once more putting before the UN the Vietnam question for

discussion with the Chicoms and North Vietnamese present. They will almost surely refuse to attend and will provide us with a better position for expanding military action; but if they accept we will have the prospect of negotiations without having stopped our bombing.

3. *Other international forums.* In all international forums and contacts, public and private, continue to demonstrate to the world who is responsible for the trouble in Vietnam and persuade them that our course of supporting the South, including bombings, must be accepted and if possible supported. Whenever we can provide further demonstrations of Communist intransigence and refusal to treat reasonably on this question, this will strengthen our case.

4. *Geneva Conference.* US should propose a Geneva Conference of all world powers (including France) with the subject, "Peace in Southeast Asia."

5. *NLF and DRV.* GVN—and US after consultation with the GVN—should initiate contacts with the Liberation Front and North Vietnam, making clear a readiness to discuss ways and means of achieving settlement in Vietnam.

6. *Chicoms.* If there is any sign of Chinese willingness to begin discussions, US should contact the Chinese to set forth US position including our limited objective and the dangers to China of continuation of the war, and should press the Chinese to bring the aggression against the South to an end.

7. *UK, Canada, India, France, U Thant.* Consult individually with the British, Canadians, U Thant, Indians, French and possibly other neutrals to enlist them in taking peace initiatives bilaterally, multilaterally or through international organizations however best calculated to bring about the participation of Communist Governments.

8. *Other initiatives.* In connection with paras 1-7 above, US and GVN would make it clear they stand ready to take any reasonable action which does not endanger their military posture which might improve the chances of success of any peace initiatives. This could include a bombing "pause." It could include an explicit restatement of US intention of withdrawing from South Vietnam at the appropriate time, a South Vietnamese announcement of responsible treatment of NLF-VC personnel who remain in the South, emphasis on implementation of President's April 7 offer for economic development in South East Asia, etc.

B. *Initiatives inside South Vietnam.* Take steps to induce VC defections and to increase support for the Ky government—among other steps, these:

1. *Economic program.* Sharply expand program of economic aid in South Vietnam—including a major construction program, junk building, increased rice and pig output, improved distribution and marketing procedures.

2. *Chu Hoi program.* Improve and expand Chu Hoi program—with a good man in charge on the US side, and bounties, amnesties, work and educational opportunities, and other inducements.

### III. *Evaluation of the above program.*

A. *Domestic US reaction.* Even though casualties will increase and the war will continue for some time, the United States public will support this course of action because it is a combined military-political program designed and likely to bring about a favorable solution to the Vietnam problem.

#### B. *Communist reaction to the expanded programs.*

1. *Soviet.* The Soviets can be expected to continue to contribute materiel and advisors to the North Vietnamese. Increased US bombing of Vietnam, including targets in Hanoi and Haiphong, SAM sites and airfields, and mining of North Vietnamese harbors, might oblige the Soviet Union to enter the contest more actively with volunteers and aircraft. This might result in minor encounters between US and Soviet personnel.

2. *China.* So long as no US or GVN troops invade North Vietnam and so long as no US or GVN aircraft attack Chinese territory, the Chinese probably will not send regular ground forces or aircraft into the war. However, the possibility of a more active Soviet involvement in North Vietnam might precipitate a Chinese introduction of land forces, probably dubbed volunteers, to preclude the Soviets' taking a pre-eminent position in North Vietnam.

3. *North Vietnam.* North Vietnam will not move towards the negotiating table until the tide begins to turn in the south. When that happens, they may seek to counter it by sending large numbers of men into South Vietnam.

4. *Viet Cong.* The VC, especially if they continue to take high losses, can be expected to depend increasingly upon the PAVN forces as the war moves into a more conventional phase; but they may find ways of continuing almost indefinitely their present intensive military, guerrilla and terror activities, particularly if reinforced with some regular PAVN units. A key question on the military side is whether POL, ammunition and cadres can be cut off and if they are cut off whether this really renders the Viet Cong impotent. A key question on the political side is whether any arrangement acceptable to us would be acceptable to the VC.

#### C. *Estimate of success.*

1. *Militarily.* The success of the above program from a military point of view turns on whether the increased effort stems the tide in the South; that in turn depends on two things—on whether the South Vietnamese hold their own in terms of numbers and fighting spirit, and on whether the US forces



can be effective in a quick-reaction reserve role, a role in which they have not been tested. The number of US troops is too small to make a significant difference in the traditional 10-1 government-guerrilla formula, but it is not too small to make a significant difference in the kind of war which seems to be evolving in Vietnam—a "Third Stage" or conventional war in which it is easier to identify, locate and attack the enemy. (South Vietnam has 141 battalions as compared with an estimated equivalent number of VC battalions. The 44 US/3d country battalions mentioned above are the equivalent of 100 South Vietnamese battalions.)

2. *Politically.* It is frequently alleged that such a large expansion of US military personnel, their expanded military role (which would put them in close contact and offer some degree of control over South Vietnamese citizens), and the inevitable expansion of US voice in the operation of the GVN economy and facilities, command and government services will be unpopular; it is said that they could lead to the rejection of the government which supported this American presence, to an irresistible pressure for expulsion of the Americans, and to the greatly increased saleability of Communist propaganda. Whether these allegations are true, we do not know.

The political initiatives are likely to be successful in the early stages only to demonstrate US good faith; they will pay off toward an actual settlement only after the tide begins to turn (unless we lower our sights substantially). The tide almost certainly cannot begin to turn in less than a few months, and may not for a year or more; the war is one of attrition and will be a long one. Since troops once committed as a practical matter cannot be removed, since US casualties will rise, since we should take call-up actions to support the additional forces in Vietnam, the test of endurance may be as much in the United States as in Vietnam.

3. *Generally (CIA estimate).* Over the longer term we doubt if the Communists are likely to change their basic strategy in Vietnam (i.e., aggressive and steadily mounting insurgency) unless and until two conditions prevail: (1) they are forced to accept a situation in the war in the South which offers them no prospect of an early victory and no grounds for hope that they can simply outlast the US and (2) North Vietnam itself is under continuing and increasingly damaging punitive attack. So long as the Communists think they scent the possibility of an early victory (which is probably now the case), we believe that they will persevere and accept extremely severe damage to the North. Conversely, if North Vietnam itself is not hurting, Hanoi's doctrinaire leaders will probably be ready to carry on the Southern struggle almost indefinitely. If, however, both of the conditions outlined above should be brought to pass, we believe Hanoi probably would, at least for a period of time, alter its basic strategy and course of action in South Vietnam.

Hanoi might do so in several ways. Going for a conference as a political way of gaining a respite from attack would be one. Alternatively it might reduce the level of insurgent activity in the hopes that this would

force the US to stop its punishment of the North but not prevent the US and GVN from remaining subject to wearying harassment in the South. Or, Hanoi might order the VC to suspend operations in the hopes that in a period of temporary tranquility, domestic and international opinion would force the US to disengage without destroying the VC apparatus or the roots of VC strength. Finally, Hanoi might decide that the US/GVN will to fight could still be broken and the tide of war turned back again in favor of the VC by launching a massive PAVN assault on the South. This is a less likely option in the circumstances we have posited, but still a contingency for which the US must be prepared.

Robert S. McNamara