

MEMORANDUM

2284

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

URGENT INFORMATIONSECRET

April 11, 1975



MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM: WILLIAM L. STEARMAN *WLS*

SUBJECT: Communist Plans to Attack Saigon and
Implications for Evacuation Plan

An attack against Saigon could be imminent, and Hanoi may now be weighing its final decision. Over the past year Hanoi has increased its military actions, step by step, carefully watching for U. S. reaction at each level before escalating to the next higher action. (First they overran one district; then six districts; then six more; then one province; then another province; then whole corps areas.) The last decision they have left is whether or not to attack Saigon. Inhibiting such an attack is essential to our evacuation plans. An attack on Saigon can probably only be inhibited by: (1) threat of armed confrontation with the U. S. ; (2) the promise of a political settlement satisfactory to Hanoi.

Five separate intelligence reports have been received in the past week indicating that the NVA does intend to attack Saigon some time in the near future. Two of the reports, both from reliable CIA sources, give April 15 as the starting date for these attacks. Other reports indicate attacks on the capital will occur at a later date.

An April 9 assessment of the situation by the CIA Station Chief in Saigon concludes that Hanoi now appears to be aiming at maximizing pressure in GVN MR-3 in preparation for a "resolution of the situation" by June 1975. However, he adds that it could be possible for the NVA to modify their tactics and include attacks on Saigon even before that.

More recent intelligence reports indicate that pressure against the provinces west and southwest of Saigon is building rapidly, and a major battlefield may develop close to Saigon. Early this week, major parts of the North Vietnamese 5th Division abruptly pulled back from the

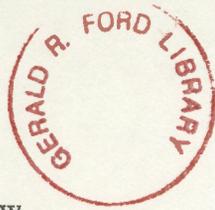
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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines, CIA Review 100

By KSH, NARA, Date 2/9/00



Moc Hoa area (50 miles west of Saigon). The South Vietnamese now believe that most of this division, and parts of the 3rd Division, are moving into the western districts of both Hau Nghia and Long An Provinces (which lie immediately west and south of Saigon).

The Communists may be trying to force Saigon's defenders to concentrate east and west of the capital. This could weaken the government's defenses to the north where the North Vietnamese 9th Division is deployed. The rapidity of these Communist moves suggests that Hanoi has decided to try to use its forces now in place to inflict serious damage on Saigon's forces without waiting for additional Communist divisions to join the battle.

An even more ominous development was noted on April 5: 25 tanks and three AAA pieces moving south were photographed in the triborder area of South Vietnam. These are believed to be part of an armored regiment with 90 tanks and some SAM missiles.

Furthermore, on April 9 and 10, the headquarters of the 312th NVA Division was detected moving through the Laos panhandle toward the triborder area. The movement of the 312th, the tanks, AAA, artillery and SAM's along the Laos corridor indicates that the NVA 1st corps, including its supporting arms, is probably destined for southern South Vietnam.

If these NVA forces actually deploy to MR-3 and join in an attack in Saigon (they could arrive in about one week), the odds are strongly against ARVN's ability to cope with these combined forces.

Given the current fragility of civilian and military morale and the apparent absence of leadership in Saigon, such an attack could quickly panic Saigon and collapse its defenses -- especially if the ARVN and GVN have become demoralized by failure of the Congress to provide military aid by April 19. In this situation, NVA forces might be able to walk into town and take over.

This worst case, but entirely possible, scenario would render the evacuation of most Americans close to impossible and would rule out any chance of extricating the most endangered Vietnamese whom we wish to evacuate.

While intelligence reports indicate the NVA have already decided to attack Saigon, there is some tenuous evidence that they are reluctant to do so, while we still have a large presence there.

Several recent Communist public announcements have said that there is no need for U. S. military forces to assist in evacuating Americans because all those "illegal advisors" can leave the country now without any difficulty.

This may be an invitation for us to leave safely now. It also may reflect Hanoi's hesitation about attacking Saigon while large numbers of Americans still remain there.

We may, therefore, have one last chance to influence this decision and perhaps prevent a military capture of Saigon.

