

Merry-Go-Round**A Secret Study
Sizing Up Saigon****Jack Anderson**

GOVERNMENT strategists in 1969 delivered a unanimous warning to incoming President Nixon that South Vietnam's armed forces would be no match for North Vietnamese-Viet Cong forces "in the foreseeable future," that the pacification program showed no promise of "complete success" for "several years," and that the Saigon government might not "survive a peaceful competition with the (Communists) for political power in South Vietnam."

This gloomy outlook, contained in a secret, two-inch-thick review known as National Security Study Memorandum 1, has changed only in degree during the past three years.

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THE PRESIDENT'S response has been to do his best to bolster Saigon while extricating the United States from the tragic Vietnam War. He has been determined, however, to end the American involvement with dignity. In his private conversations, he has repeated that he won't let the United States be "pushed around," "degraded" or "humiliated."

This was the reason he struck back with such fury from the air after the North Vietnamese assault across the demilitarized zone.

The secret 1969 study, known simply as NSSM-1 inside the White House, was compiled by foreign policy czar Henry Kissinger. He sent eight pages of pointed, penetrating questions to all the government

agencies involved in the war effort.

Here are highlights from the exhaustive study:

All the experts agreed that the South Vietnamese armed forces, "in the foreseeable future," couldn't fight off the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese "without U.S. combat support in the form of air, helicopters, artillery, logistics and some ground forces."

The toughest estimate, surprisingly, came from the Defense Secretary's office, which predicted bluntly: "It is unlikely that the (South Vietnamese), as presently organized and led, will ever constitute an effective political or military counter to the Viet Cong."

Nevertheless, the majority view was that Saigon was making "reasonable progress" toward building a force "able to hold its own against an internal VC threat."

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SOUTH VIETNAMESE politics, according to the study, were plagued with "pragmatism, expediency, war weariness, a desire to remain unaligned and end up on the winning side," compounded by "family loyalty, corruption, social immobility and clandestine activities."

No U.S. agency would forecast a "victory" over the Communists, but the military still stressed "the need for continued U.S. support." The Defense secretariat and State Department believed that "only a compromise is possible."