MARCH THREAT ASSESSMENT
(As of 10 April 1975)

1. (S) In MISTA Number Four for the month of July 1973, Defense Attache Office Saigon reported the following Assessment of the implications of the Cease-Fire Agreement:

A. The Cease-Fire, in effect, has given the Communist the following advantages:

   (1) "Imposed controls on U.S. military assistance to the GVN. (There are no such controls on Communist Bloc assistance to SVN nor on North Vietnamese assistance to PRG.)"

   (2) "Imposed limits on the U.S. military presence in SVN."

   (3) "Enabled the Communists to reinforce and resupply forces in SVN uninhibited by allied air, land or sea operations."

   (4) "Enabled the GVN to move in SVN new weapon systems, specifically air defense weapons, artillery and armor, free of allied counter action."

   (5) "Enabled the North Vietnamese Army to construct large open logistical support bases, training camps and specialist schools, to improve and extend LOC's, pipelines and telecommunications facilities."

B. "In conclusion, in SVN, the Communists are rapidly developing their strongest military position in the history of the war."

2. (S) These conditions permitted the North Vietnamese Army to launch a general offensive in March 1975 that has left the GVN on the brink of defeat. The North Vietnamese Army is marshalling its forces for the coup de grace while the GVN is assembling and rebuilding its forces to defend
what remains of the nation. Two critical strategic errors led to a collapse of RVNAF in the northern two regions. The first was the withdrawal of the Airborne Division from MR-1 and the second was the precipitate execution of the order to withdraw from Kontum and Pleiku Provinces. The first led to a series of withdrawals from MR-1 that quickly degenerated into a rout, with the government losing most of its troops and equipment. The withdrawal from the highlands also led quickly to the collapse of remaining government strongholds.

3. (S) The NVA is now deploying its forces, augmented by several reserve divisions from NVN, into positions from which it can either choke off the capital or directly assault it.

4. (S) The GVN is reconstituting the remains of units extracted from MR-1 and MR-2 to bolster defenses of the capital area. There is little likelihood that the NVA will allow the GVN the time required to complete this task. A near-term collapse of the GVN is a distinct possibility. Only immediate U.S. military assistance in the form of funds for all types of equipment and supplies, and U.S. air support in SVN, can reverse this estimate.

5. (C) This MLSTA covers recent developments in each of the following areas leading up to the current situation and what they portend for the future of the GVN:

NVN
- Political
- Recruitment
- Logistics
- Infiltration
- Strategic Reserve

SVN
- MR-1
- MR-2
- PGD "Ten Point Policy"
- MR-3
- MR-4

Outlook
6. (U) Since the start of the current offensive, Hanoi and "PRO" propaganda has focused on justifying and
euphemizing the onslaught of NVA units. Unable to call
current activity a general offensive because of its
"respect" for the Paris Agreement, Hanoi is painting a
picture of Communist "counterattacks", "punishing
attacks", and "popular uprisings". Propagandists have
found it difficult to explain the massive exodus of population
from the areas of "popular uprising" and are reduced to
claiming that local residents are forced to leave by
fleeing ARVN troops, who use them as shields.

7. (U) At the same time, the PRO is endeavoring to en-
tice more of the population to remain in liberated areas
by promulgating liberal policies for those who cooperate
and remain.

8. (S) Through March, the North Vietnamese continued
what appears to be the most intensive recruitment campaign
ever noted. Civilian government employees were being
screamed for induction, and physical standards for re-
cruitment were lowered. To absorb large numbers of
recruits and keep pace with the high rate of infiltration,
many ARVN training units adopted a new 20-day training
cycle which enables the ARVN to recruit, train and dispatch
troops in approximately one month.

9. (S) During March and April, available evidence
indicates that NVA logistics activity continued at a very
high level, as large amounts of military supplies, in-
cluding armor and artillery, were noted moving south.
Large numbers of trailers at Dong Ha and numerous convoys
moving south were noted. It is apparent that the NVA is
making an all out effort to supply its troops in the south.

10. (S) Infiltration of replacement personnel to the ARVN
has continued at a very high level and is expected to re-
main high through April. Since mid-November, at least
76,000 combat replacements have arrived in ARVN and reliable
information leads us to believe that some 16,000 additional
combat replacements can be added to that figure, for a
total of some 92,000.
12. (S) Since the beginning of the year, Hanoi has deployed five of its seven strategic reserve divisions in NVN to SVN, in addition to the 96th Division from South Laos. The NVA 316th Division moved south between mid-January and mid-February. A prisoner interrogation report suggests the division took part in attacks on Ban Me Thuot in mid-March. Its present location is unknown.

13. (S) The NVA 341st Division may have backed up attacking local forces in northern MR-1 in early March; however, by late March, the division was confirmed by FW reports as having moved into Binh Long and Long Khanh Provinces in MR-3.

14. (S) Three of the four divisions subordinate to the NVA 1st Corps - the 320th, 338th and 312th - have deployed south from their Thanh Hoa Province Garrison areas. All three divisions are probably in or near northern NVN. Their ultimate destinations are unknown; however, we believe that the 338th Division will remain in the northern areas of NVN, since it has had no recent combat experience. The 330th and 312th Divisions probably will move to the COSVN area.

15. (S) Because of the southward move of these divisions, we expect the Headquarters, 1st Corps, to do likewise, possibly to former MR-1.

16. (S) The remaining division subordinate to the 1st Corps, the 36th, is believed to remain in its normal garrison area near Hanoi; however, based on the deployment of other 1st Corps Divisions and possibly the Corps Headquarters itself to SVN, the 36th is expected to deploy south in the near future.

17. (S) In short, during the past three months, Hanoi has moved some 48,000 troops into SVN in integral unit movements alone, in addition to the air defense elements and the probable 92,000 infiltrated in combat replacement groups for a grand total of over 140,000.
17. (S) Military activity in MR-1 during the past month resulted in the loss of each of the five provinces in rapid succession between 19 and 30 March. NVA preparation for the offensive began much earlier, as units began to stockpile supplies, shift into attack positions and perform maintenance on military equipment.

18. (S) During late January, heavy truck traffic was noted on Route 9, probably carrying supplies destined for NVA units throughout the country. New road construction was noted throughout MR-1 as the NVA improved its lines of communications and endeavored to move closer to SVN positions.

19. (S) After losing the high ground overlooking Route 1 south of Hue during January to successful SVN counter-attacks, the NVA began to move units into the area during early to mid February. The 29th Regiment, previously detailed to the 304th NVA Division in Quang Nam, returned to the 324th Division, while the 325th Division shifted southward from Quang Tri Province to Thua Thien. Additional artillery, most notably the 164th Brigade, was also brought into southern Thua Thien by late February.

20. (S) In Quang Tri, local force units from Quang Tri Province and Quang Binh Province, SVN, replaced the 325th Division on the front line. It is believed that elements of the 341st and 166th NVA Divisions, which later deployed to MR's 2 and 3, respectively, were brought into MR-1 initially and may have served in a reserve role at that time.

21. (S) In southern MR-1, 2nd NVA Division forces moved from the Duc Duc area of Quang Nam Province to the Hai Duc/Tien Phuoc area of Quang Tin. In Quang Ngai, elements of the 52nd Brigade deployed out of Quang Ngai, initially to Binh Dinh in MR-2, but were later forced to return to Quang Ngai because of SVN spoiling operations there. By late February/early March, however, elements of the Brigade re-deployed to Quang Tin to support the 2nd NVA Division.
22. (S) Attack preparations were also noted in photography of late January, as NVA armor units rolled out vehicles in increasing numbers, probably for major maintenance. New armor units and artillery positions and maintenance areas were detected during this time. Activity remained at a low level during late February and early March. Numerous AEC's and ground attacks began on the evening of 8 March.

23. (S) The catalyst that led to the fall of MR-1 occurred on 12 March when President Thieu ordered the withdrawal of the Airborne Division from the Da Nang area. At the same time, the President ordered the Corps Commander, LTG Truong, to give top priority to the defense of Da Nang. General Truong ordered the three Marine Brigades near Hue to move Da Nang to fill the void left by the departure of the Airborne Division.

24. (S) On 19 March, Communist elements, taking advantage of the weakened RVNAF defenses and civilian panic, attacked across the ceasefire line in Quang Tri Province and near Hue. Territorial forces offered little resistance and fell back, conceding Quang Tri.

25. (S) To the south, along the highground overlooking Quy Loi District, units of the Rangers and 1st ARVN Division, supported by a Marine Brigade, held against initial attacks by the 324B Division. When the 325th NVA Division was also committed to the attacks on the 21st, ARVN initially delayed this unit in heavy fighting near Quy Loi District town; however, by the evening of 21/22 March, QL-1 had been cut and RVNAF units were too spread out to launch an effective counterattack. The Marines retreated to the Hai Van Pass, while most of the Rangers and 1st ARVN Division elements continued to defend west of the road cut.
22. (S) Attack preparations were also noted in photography of late January, as NVA armor units rolled out vehicles in increasing numbers, probably for major maintenance. New armor parks and artillery positions and maintenance areas were detected during this time. Activity remained at a low level during late February and early March. Numerous ABF's and ground attacks began on the evening of 8 March.

23. (S) Catalyst that led to the fall of MR-1 occurred on 12 March when President Thieu ordered the withdrawal of the Airborne Division from the Danang area. At the same time, the President ordered the Corps Commander, LTG Truong, to give top priority to the defense of Danang. General Truong ordered the three Marine Brigades near Hue to move Danang to fill the void left by the departure of the Airborne Division.

24. (S) On 19 March, Communist elements, taking advantage of the weakened RVNAP defenses and civilian panic attacked across the ceasefire line in Quang Tri Province and near Hue. Territorial forces offered little resistance and fell back, conceding Quang Tri.

25. (S) To the south, along the highground overlooking G-1 in Phu Loc District, units of the Rangers and Ist ARVN Division, supported by a Marine Brigade, held against initial attacks by the 324th NVA Division. When the 325th NVA Division was also committed to the attacks on the 32th ARVN initially delayed this unit in heavy fighting near Phu Loc District town; however, by the evening of 21/22 March, G-1 had been cut and RVNAP units were too spread out to launch an effective counterattack. The Marines retreated to the Hai Van Pass, while most of the Rangers and Ist ARVN Division elements continued to defend west of the road cut. General Truong elected to evacuate remaining GVN forces overland and one Marine Brigade by sea; however, continued pressure during the evacuation by two NVA Divisions resulted in the disorganization and eventual rout of most of the units, with the exception of the Marines.
26. (S) GVN efforts to establish a new defense north of Hue failed, and, by 24 March, the decision was made to abandon Hue. With thousands of refugees clogging QL-1 between Hue and Danang, General Truong elected to evacuate remaining forces along a coastal area toward Danang. Because of pressure from two NVA Divisions, the evacuation effort soon became disorganized and large amounts of equipment were abandoned.

27. (S) Meanwhile, the situation in southern MR-1 was also rapidly deteriorating. NVA 2nd Division elements overran the district capitals of Hau Duc and Tien Phuoc in Quang Tin Province by 11 March and were pressuring the province capital at Tam Ky. ARVN attempts to reinforce the area failed and, by 24 March, both Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces had been lost, leaving Danang isolated.

28. (C) The massive influx of civilian refugees into Danang caused law and order in the city to disappear quickly. In the meantime, attempts to establish defense perimeters around the city met with no success. By 30 March, Danang fell.

29. (S) In the debacle, the ARVN 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions were destroyed together with territorial and Ranger forces. RVNAF managed to extract some 16,000 troops, including 4,500 Marines from MR-1, but large amounts of equipment were left behind.

30. (S) The disastrous chain of events resulted directly from the ill-advised withdrawal of the Airborne Division. Subsequent efforts to adjust defenses in the region destroyed confidence and morale throughout RVNAF and caused an uncontrollable panic among the populace. This, in turn, led to total collapse from within, providing the Communists a stunning, cheap victory.

31. (S) In MR-2, the Communist general offensive also resulted in the complete collapse of RVNAP. Heightened infiltration levels, upgrading of units, the introduction of new divisions and reorganization of the Communist command and control structure all presaged the offensive.
32. (S) Seasonal infiltration to the B-3 Front began on 15 December 1974 and dramatically increased during January and February 1975, allowing Communist forces to build up to near full TO&E strength. Continued infiltration during March and April will allow the NVA to replace at least half of its losses incurred during the March offensive.

33. (S) In January, the Headquarters and two regiments of the 968th Division moved into the Duc Go area of Pleiku Province from South Laos, while one regiment deployed to the north of Kontum City. The 968th, which has not engaged in combat for nearly two years, probably has not been involved directly in the current offensive. This unit did, however, replace the 10th and 320th Divisions in Kontum and Pleiku, thus allowing these divisions to deploy southward for major attacks.

34. (S) In mid-February, the B-3 Front was further reinforced with the introduction of the probably 316th Division from NVN to the Ban Me Thout area. Information on this unit was reported only by one prisoner in mid-March during attacks on Ban Me Thout. In MR-5, the 3d NVA Division was also augmented by the creation of a new artillery regiment prior to the offensive.

35. (S) All-source intelligence since December clearly indicated that an offensive was in the offing. Most assessments, however, focused upon the traditional threat areas of Kontum, Pleiku and Binh Dinh Provinces. ARVN commanders formulated plans based upon these indicators.

36. (S) On 28 February, NVA forces launched a series of heavy AEP's and light probes north of Kontum City and west and southwest of Pleiku City. This was the first significant Communist activity in the highlands in over a month. During the early hours of 4 March, Communist forces damaged or destroyed at least eight bridges and culverts along QL-19 in Le Trung District, Pleiku Province and Binh Thanh District, Binh Dinh Province. The 95B Regiment and elements of the 3rd NVA Division moved southward undetected to interdict the road. RVNAF reacted to these developments, but never re-opened the road.

37. (C) Beginning on 5 March, however, a rapidly-paced series of attacks occurred in Khanh Hoa, Phu Bon, Quang Duc and Darlac Provinces. During this period, QL-21 was interdicted in western Khanh Hoa, QL-14 was interdicted in the Tri-Province border area of Pleiku/Darla/C Phu Bon, Thuan Man District town in Phu Bon was overrun, as were Duc Lap District town and the Dak Song Crossroads in Quang Duc. By this time all province capitals in the northern highlands were isolated.
38. (S) During late February, three regiments of the 10th Division moved undetected to Daklac and northern Quang Duc. The 320th Division moved to the Pleiku-Daklac/Phu Bon border, a move reported in late February by a rallier but not confirmed until after the offensive began. The possible 316th Division moved to Daklac undetected.

39. (S) During the early hours of 10 March, NVA 10th and 316th Division forces, supported by two artillery regiments, one local force battalion and armor, attacked Phuoc An Tho to and rapidly overran the city. II Corps initially reinforced with the Headquarters and two remaining battalions of the 53rd Regt/23rd Division, two battalions of the 21st Ranger Group, and two AF battalions. GVN forces continued to maintain pockets of resistance around the city and at Ban Me Thuot East Airfield. On 14 March, II Corps initially reinforced with the 45th Regiment and the Headquarters and one battalion of the 45th Regt/23rd Division. A command post was established at Phuoc An District Town, and a counteroffensive was launched toward Ban Me Thuot on 15 March. GVN attacks failed and, by 18 March, Phuoc An was overrun. The rout and eventual defeat of the 23rd Division followed.

40. (S) The weekend of 15-16 March proved to be the turning point in MA-2. Following the failure of the 23rd Division, a precipitate, unplanned and improperly executed evacuation of all forces in Kontum and Pleiku began on 16 March. The exodus down long-abandoned DTL-78 resulted in the decimation of six ranger groups, the remaining two battalions of the 44th Regt/23rd Division, all territorial forces in Kontum, Pleiku and Phu Bon, and the loss of virtually all GVN armor and artillery in those areas. Lack of command and control and general panic led to ARVN units fighting among themselves and atrocities against the civilian populace. Final destruction of the convoy was carried out by the 320th NVA Division, which continuously attacked along the column from 18-24 March from Phu Thien District in Phu Bon Province to Cung Son District in western Phu Yen Province.
41. (S) The tragedy of the disastrous evacuation of the highlands and generally poor leadership shown by ARVN commanders led to complete lack of confidence and a state of panic throughout the region. Subsequently, NVA forces had only to appear with limited armor assets and GVN resistance melted.

42. (S) During the week of 22-28 March, the western districts of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Khanh Hoa Provinces fell, the remainder of Quang Duc Province was abandoned, and Dalat City was largely evacuated. Later, Lam Dong Province was abandoned, although no credible NVA threat had been presented. By 1 April, Lam Dong and Tuyen Duc Provinces were added to 7th NVA Division elements.

43. (S) In Binh Dinh Province, the abandonment of the northern districts began on 28 March, and ARVN forces pulled back to Phu My. Fierce fighting continued between 3rd NVA and 22nd ARVN Division forces in Binh Khe District. On 31 March, Communist forces attacked and overran Phu Cat Air Force Base. By 1 April, the 41st and 42nd Regts/22nd ARVN Division had fought through Communist enclaves to establish an enclave at Qui Nhon City. Remnants of the two regiments and the 22nd Division Headquarters, the only units in II Corps to maintain unit integrity through 25 days of intensive combat, were withdrawn by sea from Qui Nhon on 1-2 April.

44. (S) By 1 April, RVNAF resistance in Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa Provinces had virtually melted away, despite a good performance by the recently introduced 3rd Airborne Brigade. NVA banks were in Tuy Hoa City, Duc My Training Center, and Minh Hoa District Town. Also on 1 April, II Corps Headquarters abandoned Nha Trang City.

45. (S) To the south, marines and other forces, as well as civilian refugees, evacuated from Cam Ranh Bay between 1-5 April. Phan Rang Air Base was evacuated by VNAF on 2 April, although no NVA threat was in
evidence. Since then, Phan Rang has been reopened on a limited basis, and the 2nd Airborne Brigade has moved in to reinforce. Currently, Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan Provinces remain under GVN control. NVA forces apparently have not occupied the central coast in force. Essentially, a vacuum exists in the Nha Trang and Cam Ranh areas. Thousands of disorganized RVNAP and civilian refugees are reported moving north and south along QL-1.

46. (S) The remaining land area of MR-2 is under MR-3 control. It is not anticipated that any effective GVN counter-offensive will be initiated to retake lost territory.

47. (U) With the conquest of most of the provinces in GVN MR's 1 and 2, the FRC on 1 April issued a "Ten-point Policy Toward the Newly-Liberated Area", which is summarized below:

a. Dismantle the GVN political and military machinery. Integrate GVN civil servants into FRC apparatus. Abolish all political parties and factions.

b. Guarantee "democratic liberties", including religious freedom.

c. Promote ethnic and social equality.

d. Guarantee normal economic activity and maintain public order and security. Harsh reaction to sabotage or counter-revolutionary activity.

e. FRC will manage all property.

f. Economic, industrial, communication, and public utility activities will continue to operate on a normal basis. Employment guaranteed. Social services extended.

g. Restore and develop agricultural production, fisheries, salt production, forestry. Continue operation of plantations.