

OPINION
• PRIORITY 2

Ministry Review

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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Intelligence Information Cable

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GROUP 1
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DIST 7 FEBRUARY 1968

COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI 5 FEBRUARY 1968

SUBJECT INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR REACTIONS IN THE PROVINCES TO THE VIET CONG TET OFFENSIVE

ACQ VIETNAM, SAIGO (6 FEBRUARY 1968) [REDACTED]

SOURCE THIS IS A COMPILATION OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECT PREPARED BY CAS RESEARCH UNIT IN THE FIELD. IT IS NOT FULLY EVALUATED INTELLIGENCE.

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SUMMARY: MORE CONDITIONED TO VIOLENCE THAN THE PEOPLE OF

SAIGON,,, THE RESIDENTS OF SOME PROVINCIAL CITIES KNEW THAT THE VIET CONG (VC) COULD ATTACK, BUT NOT HOLD, THEIR CITIES. THERE WAS SOME CONDEMNATION OF "OVERREACTION" BY THE ALLIED FORCE, AND THE VC ARE MORE RESPECTED AND FEARED BY THE POPULACE FOR THE NATION-WIDE STRENGTH OF THE RECENT ATTACKS. BUT ALL OF THIS WAS OVERSHADOWED BY A POLARIZATION OF VIEWS THAT MAKE THE "MIDDLE OF THE ROAD" UNTENABLE AND STRONG SUPPORT NECESSARY FOR EITHER THE VC OR THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN). THE INITIAL POPULAR FEELING

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IS ANTI-VC AND PRO-GVN. END SUMMARY.

1. AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR REACTION IN PROVINCIAL CITIES (LITTLE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AS YET ON REACTIONS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE) INDICATES THAT IT PARALLELS THAT IN SAIGON. (AN ASSESSMENT OF SAIGON ATTITUDES IS AVAILABLE [REDACTED] THERE ARE, HOWEVER, TWO EXCEPTIONS. FIRST, THE PEOPLE IN PROVINCIAL CITIES HAVE SEEN THE WAR CLOSE UP FOR A LONG TIME AND WERE PERHAPS LESS AWED BY HOSTILITIES IN THEIR OWN AREA. THEY KNEW THE VIET CONG (VC) COULD ATTACK THEIR CITIES BUT WERE CONFIDENT THAT THE VC COULD NOT HOLD THE CITIES. HOWEVER, THEY WERE IMPRESSED BY THE COUNTRY-WIDE NATURE OF THE ACTION. SECOND, THERE WAS GREAT DESTRUCTION IN SOME PROVINCIAL CITIES; AND WHILE THIS GENERALLY RESULTED IN INCREASED CONDEMNATION OF THE VIET CONG IT ALSO RESULTED IN CONDEMNATION OF "OVER REACTION" BY ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN) AND U.S. MILITARY. THIS FEELING WAS ESPECIALLY BITTER WHEN THE REACTION WAS ACCOMPANIED BY LOOTING BY ARVN TROOPS, AS WAS REPORTED IN SEVERAL IV CORPS CITIES.

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2. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) AUTHORITIES IN DEALING WITH SUBSEQUENT PROBLEMS, REFUGEES AND FOOD PRIMARILY, MAY WELL BE CRUCIAL IN FUTURE POPULAR REACTION TO THE GVN. HOWEVER,

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INITIALLY AT LEAST, ANY RECRIMINATIONS SEEM OVERSHADOWED BY THE POLARIZATION WHICH MADE THE "MIDDLE OF THE ROAD" UNTENABLE. IN DALAT THE POPULATION IS NOW REPORTED "100 PERCENT" BEHIND THE GVN. IN DANANG IT IS FELT THAT THE ATTACK LESSENERED THE REDINESS OF THE POPULACE TO MAKE TROUBLE FOR THE GVN, AND BUDDHIST MONKS THERE ACTUALLY COMPLAINED THAT THE POLICE WERE NOT GETTING OUT TO THEIR PAGODAS FAST ENOUGH WHEN THEY CALLED. IN MOC HOA, KIEN TUAONG PROVINCE, IT IS FELT THAT THE ONLY ALTERNATIVES NOW ARE TO BE SOLIDLY AGAINST THE VC OR AGAINST THE GVN. UNIVERSALLY, THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, THE PEOPLE DID NOT SUPPORT THE VC.

3. INFORMATION COVERING THE PERIOD UP TO 2400 HOURS 5 FEBRUARY INDICATES THAT THE MORALE SITUATION IS IMPROVING IN SOME AREAS. SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS, AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS, BOTH BUDDHIST AND CATHOLIC, HAVE TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN SOME AREAS AND REFUGEES ARE BEING CARED FOR. AN EXCEPTION IS QUANG TRI, WHERE THE MORALE IN THE CITY IS DESCRIBED AS "NOT GOOD", WITH SOME PROMINENT OFFICIALS ATTEMPTING TO GET THEIR FAMILIES OUT. POLICE ARE STILL NOT FUNCTIONING IN PHAN THIET, ALTHOUGH SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS ARE. IN PHAN RANG THE POLICE ARE REPORTED TO BE DOING AN OUTSTANDING JOB. IN QUI NHON,



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WHERE THE ENEMY PLAN WAS TO CAPTURE THE PROVINCE CHIEF AND MAKE HIM BROADCAST AN APPEAL TO SUPPORT THE COALITION GOVERNMENT, THERE WAS NO COOPERATION WITH THE VC BY GVN AUTHORITIES OR BY THE PEOPLE, AND THE ENEMY PLAN FAILED. ANTI-VC FEELING IN QUI NHON HAS "INCREASED CONSIDERABLY." IN VINH LONG, WHERE 50 PERCENT OF THE CITY WAS DESTROYED, THERE HAS BEEN A SHIFT IN POPULAR ATTITUDE TOWARD INCREASED BLAME FOR THE VC AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE GVN AND U.S. ACTION. IN CAN THO THE ADVENT OF U.S. TROOPS INTO PROVINCE CITIES IS REPORTED TO BE SPARKING THE MORALE OF THE GVN FORCES AND IMPROVING THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.

4. THE VC MAY HAVE WON A POLITICAL VICTORY. THEY ARE MORE RESPECTED AND MORE FEARED BY THE VERY PEOPLE WHO ARE NOW SO INCENSED AGAINST AND DISGUSTED WITH THEM. IN CHAU DOC IT IS THE "GENERAL OPINION" THAT THE VC HURT THE GVN MORE THAN THE GVN HURT THE VC. PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AROUND CA MAU BELIEVE THE VC PROPAGANDA THAT THE VC HAVE WON A GREAT VICTORY. IN DANANG IT IS THE "GENERAL CONSENSUS" THAT THE VC WON A POLITICAL VICTORY IN PROVING THAT THEY HAD SUFFICIENT FORCES FOR A COUNTRY-WIDE ATTACK; EVEN THOUGH IT IS ADMITTED THAT THE ATTACK ENDED WITH A MILITARY VICTORY FOR THE U.S. AND GVN.

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5. AS IN SAIGON, THE GRATEST SUCCESS MAY HAVE BEEN IN FANNING THE FLAMES OF THE PARANOIA WHICH ALWAYS UNDERLINES VIETNAMESE POLITICAL THINKING. THERE ARE APPARENTLY WIDE-SPREAD AND ELABORATE RUMORS IN DANANG TO EXPLAIN WHY THIS ATTACK WAS "PERMITTED". ACCORDING TO THESE RUMORS, THE U.S. PERMITTED, EVEN IF IT DID NOT COLLUDE WITH, THE VC TO BRING THIS PRESSURE ON THE GVN IN PREPARATION FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT AND/OR THE CEDING OF THE TWO NORTHERN PROVINCES (A PERENNIAL RUMOR). (COMMENT: THE VC MAY FEEL THAT THEY CAN FAN THESE FLAMES FURTHER IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS TO COME. NEGOTIATIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TET OFFENSIVE MIGHT BE WIDELY INTERPRETED AS AN ADMISSION OF A VC VICTORY, AND THERE SEEMS TO BE, IN SOME PROVINCIAL CITIES, AN INCREASED DESIRE TO SEE EVEN MORE VIGOROUS ACTION AGAINST THE VC AT THIS TIME. THE PRESSURES FOR PEACE, NOT NOW EVIDENT, MAY EMERGE LATER. THE ABOVE POPULAR REACTION IS BASED UPON A VERY LIMITED SAMPLING.)

5. FIELD DISSEM: STATE USMACV 7TH AIR FORCE DIR/JUSPAO (MR. ZORTHIAN ONLY) CINCPAC PACFLT ARPAC PACAF

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