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16 February 1968

**MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Philip C. Habib
Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian
and Pacific Affairs
Department of State**

SUBJECT : [redacted] Political Appraisal

3.3(h)(2)

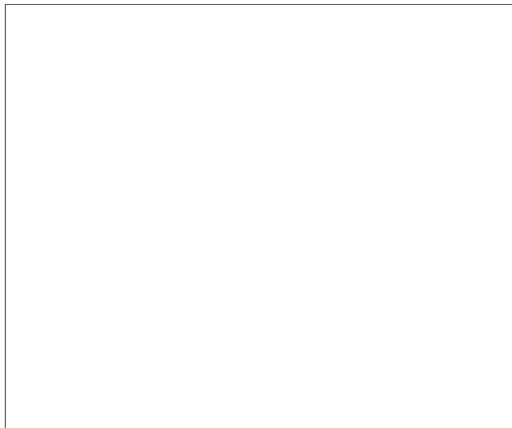
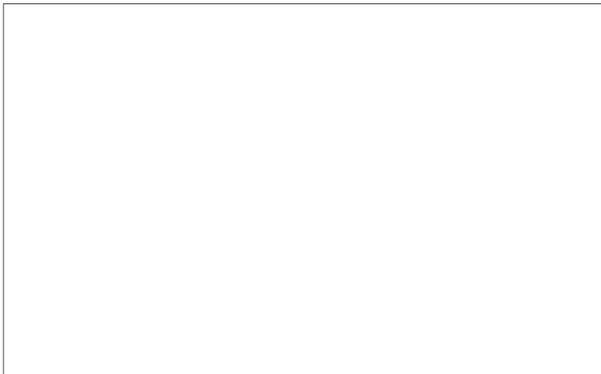
**Attached for your information is a political appraisal and
analysis [redacted] we
discussed at our 16 February meeting.**

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3.5(c)

**George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs**

Attachment



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3.3(h)(2)

1. There appears to be fairly widespread appreciation in political circles in Saigon that a unique and promising moment is at hand in the wake of the Viet Cong's Tet offensive. Amid the devastation and hardship, a spirit of new resolution to resist the Communist apparatus is abroad. It is coupled with a discernible, if still faint pulsation toward unity among many persons and groups heretofore keener on competition for power and publicity than coherence in the national interest.

2. This is not to suggest that the unifying elements are stronger than the persisting dividers, but they are newly in evidence. If imaginatively and aggressively nourished, while at the same time accommodating to the aggravating realities of this body politic, the promise of the moment can be at least partially realized. In assessing this prospect and in our anxiety for progress in political Vietnam, we would point out that the South Vietnamese people and their government have undergone a traumatic experience of sorts during the past two weeks. They have been affected, changed in some ways, but not transformed. The following paragraphs will perhaps illustrate.

3. There are three separate (or at least separable), concentric circles of action being played out in the arena of what may be called the popularization or, as we prefer, the politicalization of the reaction to the Viet Cong's Tet offensive:

a. The mobilization of non-governmental organizational energies in support of the relief and recovery program.

b. The formation of a broad, representative national political front specifically dedicated to fight the Viet Cong and to support the GVN in this particular endeavor.

c. The organization of the population, primarily in the cities but hopefully also in the towns, for purposes of control, information, early warning, self-defense including some system of arming the citizens.

4. As of 1800 hours in Saigon on 15 February, the situation in each of the above circles is as described below:

5. Relief support:

a. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Refugees has sent a message of thanks to 37 organizations assisting in the emergency

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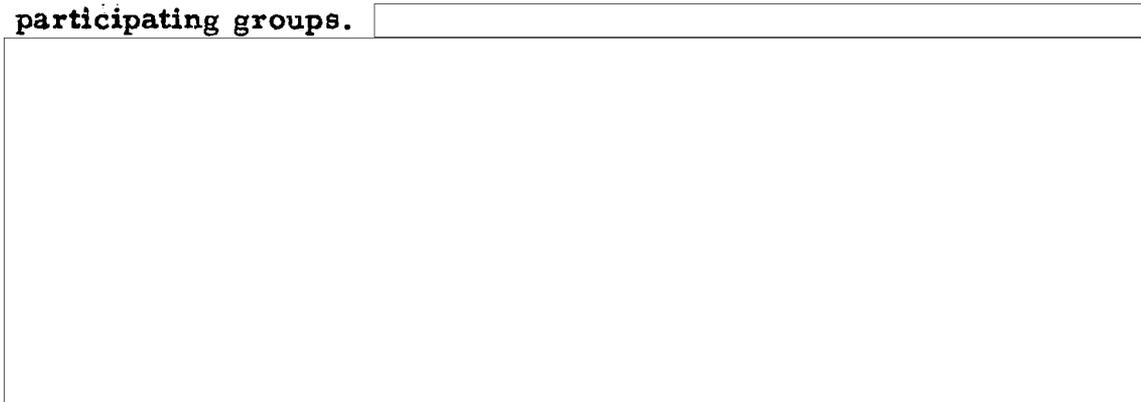
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effort of relief and recovery. We have direct knowledge of the activities of organizations in the labor, youth and religious sectors. There is little question that considerable activity ensues.

b. There is also no doubt that the GVN failed to exploit the political and psychological potential inherent in the strong impulse to cooperate which manifested itself in the days immediately after the assault. Offers to help were deflected or initially ignored. A common and structured effort by the popular groups was not organized.

c. On the other hand, many statements have been issued and given radio and press publicity here. Groups which are active have undoubtedly derived satisfaction from their participation and have been given GVN supplies of one kind or another.

d. President Nguyen Van Thieu stated his intention to call in individual political and religious leaders, obtain assurances of cooperation and eventually convene a "congress of notables." No action has been taken by Thieu to form either a council or a congress. Although the most dramatic moment for such a convocation has passed, it is not too late for action in this area based on the participating groups.



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6. A political front:

a. Pre-Tet political development was momentarily suspended. Neither the Upper or Lower House have had time or mental energy for new bloc building (or bloc demolition). Nguyen Van Huong's cadre-contacting was necessarily halted pending a return to greater normalcy.

b. New initiatives are tied to the crisis and the resultant anti-Viet Cong momentum. One behind-the-scenes catalyst is Dang Duc Khoi, Ky's Special Assistant. The core element of this effort (the

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seriousness of which is not yet clear) appears to be the farmer-worker-soldier group of Tran Van Don with Catholic and Buddhist additions. Khoi hopes for a militant youth appendage (District Eight) and a smattering of relatively unattached (or unlabelled) Assembly figures. Ky has purposely been cool to Khoi's effort, giving it only mild and implicit blessing, but making clear that he does not want his name used in any way. He insists that identification with any political organizational move at this time will feed the developing rumors of his exploitation of the current crisis for personal political ends.

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7. Self-defense organizations:

a. Responsibility for self-defense organizations appears to be in Ministry of Interior hands. The issues concerning plans for organizing self-defense groups have been: who will organize the people, for what tasks, where will this be done, and most important in the minds of some, who will be armed, when, and how. The plan which the Ministry allegedly has drafted appears to be a reasonable one and includes many functions for inter-family, block-by-block city organizations with arms distributed selectively after screening and training.

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