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VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF
O/DCI

DATE: 9 Feb 68

TO: The Director

FROM: GACarver, Jr.

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

The attached outlines this office's views on the current situation in Vietnam and our expectations in the near-term future. If our colleagues in other offices concur, we believe this memorandum, after coordination, should be issued as an Agency paper. Since some of the events we anticipate (renewed enemy attacks) are likely to occur at any time, we would like to work with our colleagues to get some version of this piece published as quickly as possible.

G. A. Carver, Jr.
George A. Carver, Jr.

Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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9 February 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Current VC Campaign

Recent enemy activity must be reviewed with framework of over-all aims of winter-spring campaign -- to break will of U.S. to continue the war and create conditions favorable for a settlement on Communist terms. In this context, winter phase of campaign (Oct - Jan) was intended to set stage for "decisive" period of war during spring phase. The winter phase was characterized by major operations in outlying areas (Dak To, Loc Ninh) to engage U.S. mobile forces, coupled with attack on US-GVN bases and administrative centers and intensive guerrilla pressure against the pacification program. It also included preparation for a major (conventional) warfare campaign of climactic character in Khe Sanh and general DMZ area. These activities were accompanied by political and subversive actions preparatory to a general uprising in urban areas.

The Tet offensive represents the beginning of the spring phase -- which our adversaries seem to regard as the decisive stage of the war. There is abundant evidence to demonstrate that this phase aims at a general offensive combined with a "general uprising" through which the VC hope to inflict major defeats on U.S. forces, disintegrate the Vietnamese forces, and collapse the GVN. The Communists believe success in these efforts will create irresistible

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international and domestic pressures on the U.S. to negotiate, on Communist terms, probably by mid-1968.

The evidence on the immediate objectives of the Tet campaign is less complete, and thus subject to varying interpretations. Some reports suggest the Communists hoped for immediate success on one throw of the dice -- to instigate a full general uprising and seizure of power in all areas simultaneously. If this is correct, their ability to sustain their effort only in portions of a few cities and the heavy losses they have suffered could be construed as marking a colossal failure, the magnitude of which might stun the Communist leadership and deal it a psychological and material blow from which it may never recover.

On the other hand, other reports, a careful reading of the basic documents pertaining to the winter-spring campaign, and analysis of the pattern of recent operations, suggest that the Tet offensive may have been intended merely as the spectacular initial onslaught of a sustained offensive with the "general uprising" as an ultimate, rather than the immediate goal. This interpretation seems the more plausible for a number of reasons.

First, it seems highly unlikely that the Communists really expected, in committing only about half their forces, to seize and hold indefinitely a significant number of the major urban areas in the face of US-ARVN mobility and firepower. The limited selection of targets actually struck in each city, the oft-indicated short duration of the attack (3, 5, or 7 days), and the general absence of follow-through or withdrawal plans, all suggest the aim of the initial onslaught was to

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achieve maximum psychological impact. The Communists made some preparations for the contingency of success, but these generally do not seem to have reflected the thoroughness one would have expected if they were confident of complete victory.

They have, however, created conditions which are not altogether unfavorable for the attainment of the basic objectives of their winter-spring campaign. They have dealt a severe psychological blow to the urban population -- much of which had sought sanctuary in the cities from the terrors of the war in the provinces. While it is true that the urban populace did not rise against the GVN, neither did it rush to the GVN's defense. The Communist attacks have resulted in widespread devastation and imposed vast new economic and social burdens on an already overtaxed GVN administration. They have also inflicted significant damage on US and ARVN military installations and materiel, and tied allied military forces down in an effort to restore security to urban areas, to some degree at the expense of protecting pacified areas. These limited accomplishments may have represented the minimum objectives of the Tet offensive.

There are numerous indications that the Communists intend to continue their pressure in many areas, probably in concert with major operations in the Khe Sanh - DMZ region. In that sector, North Vietnamese units comprising two divisions are probing outposts of the Khe Sanh base camp while extending their entrenchments in siege-like action. Another two divisions appear to be preparing for action against U.S. positions in the [central] and eastern DMZ area.

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In the coastal plain, strong Communist forces -- two or three regiments -- remain in the districts surrounding Quang Tri city, and U.S. officials expect further attacks there. Another regiment or two are in the vicinity of Hue, and may attempt to reinforce those units still contesting allied control for that city. In Quang Nam province, the North Vietnamese 2d Division, reinforced by the 31st Regiment of the 341st Division and possibly the 4th Regiment, has moved into the area between Hoi An and Danang, and may attempt strong attacks against either or both of these cities. Communist local forces reportedly remain close to the cities of Tam Ky and Quang Ngai.

In II Corps, all three regiments of the North Vietnamese 1st Division are now located near Dak To, and major action appears imminent. Reports from Darlac province indicate that the North Vietnamese 33d Regiment is being reinforced by the 95 B Regiment from Pleiku and that new attacks are expected. In the central coastal provinces, Qui Nhon and Nha Trang anticipate mortar attacks, but no major ground assaults. Two or three battalions are reported west of Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen province, however, and new attacks are expected.

In III Corps, the 7th Division apparently remains in northern Binh Duong province with the mission of maintaining pressure on bases of the U.S. 1st and 25th Divisions. The status of the 9th Division is not clear; major elements have been reported in the area north of Saigon, but there are indications that others are located further north in Binh Long province. The 5th Division, which attacked Bien Hoa, has disengaged and may have withdrawn temporarily to regroup.

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In IV Corps, Viet Cong concentrations continue to be reported in the immediate vicinity of several province capitals, maintaining limited pressure through sporadic mortar attacks.

A number of reports from various parts of South Vietnam indicate that new attacks will occur in the period between 9 and 15 February; the most frequently mentioned date is the 10th. Such attacks could be mounted in any of the areas mentioned above, and at least some probably will materialize. These actions would be intended to further disrupt allied control in the cities, to demonstrate the ability for repeated attacks, and thus to further intimidate the populace and thus contribute to the ultimate goal of a general uprising.

One ominous aspect of the current posture of the enemy military forces is their apparent implantation in the immediate vicinities of the district towns and province capitals. This pattern, consistently reported in most parts of the country, suggests that the Communists have moved into and asserted authority over the rural populace in formerly pacified areas. The current flow of refugees into district and provincial capitals may be further evidence of this; the refugees could be fleeing their homes for fear of allied air attacks on the Communist forces occupying their hamlets.

Several documents have suggested that the winter-spring campaign entailed the creation of new guerrilla forces. A number of recent reports indicate that the Viet Cong are organizing and arming new guerrilla elements, both in the cities and in adjacent hamlets. Since Communist plans for the general uprising must have provided for arming additional guerrilla and militia elements, these reports are plausible. Some reports have suggested that these newly

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organized guerrillas will be used in renewed attacks on the cities. The fragmentary nature of available information precludes a firm estimate of the numbers that may be involved, but it is conceivable that they may be sufficient to offset, at least in part, the heavy losses incurred by the Viet Cong in their recent attacks. While the quality of such elements would be low, they could be used as replacements for the depleted main and local force units.

There are indications that the intensified offensive in South Vietnam may be coupled with some form of air action by the North Vietnamese Air Force, by ground attacks in Laos, and possibly by terrorist attacks on U.S. bases in Thailand. Recent unusual flight activity by North Vietnamese MIG-21's, and AN-2's, and the movement of IL-28's from China back into the Hanoi area could be indicative of preparations for some new form of hostile air action. Reports from Laos indicate impending Communist attacks against government installations in the north (e. g. Site 85) and south (e. g. Saravane). Some reports say Saravane is to be attacked on the 10th or 12th -- a timeframe coinciding with the indicated new wave of attacks in South Vietnam. Reports from Thailand reflect rumors of impending terrorist action against U.S. air bases. While the Communists have not previously reflected the interest in, or the capability for such far-flung coordinated actions, an attempt in this direction would not be inconsistent with the general concept of distracting attention from the main theater of operations and exercising all available capabilities in order to decisively alter the situation in the Communists' favor.

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In sum, the evidence now available does not permit a very confident assessment of immediate Communist objectives, the extent to which their minimum tactical objectives (political as well as military) have been frustrated, the impact on Communist planning and capabilities of the losses the Communists have incurred to date, or the full impact of post Tet events on the GVN's military and political position. The evidence available, however, strongly suggests that there will be renewed and probably repeated Communist attacks on some urban centers, that there will be strong Communist military pressure in the Khe Sanh DMZ area, and that the Communists will probably attempt to cycle these actions in a mutually complementary fashion. Furthermore, the evidence available, plus the record of recent events, strongly indicate that the Communists have decided to commit a major portion of their assets in a virtually "all out" endeavor to bring the war to an early conclusion by creating a political climate conducive to settlement on Communist terms. Whatever may be the degree of success achieved, in Communist terms, in the initial phase of this endeavor, the total effort inevitably involves a great element of risk. If the effort succeeds, Communist expectations of early political "victory" could prove well founded. If the effort fails, the entire Communist apparatus may be dealt a mortal blow. Thus, we think it not too stark to say that the outcome of the Vietnam struggle will probably be decided by the events of the next few weeks.

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