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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

MCO

The Situation in Vietnam

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9 February 1968

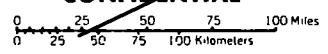
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SOUTH VIETNAM

9 FEBRUARY

CONFIDENTIAL



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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. There have been no new Communist initiatives, and the lull continues throughout the country. Enemy attacks in urban areas have subsided and allied forces throughout the country are having some success in reducing the remaining enemy pockets in the cities. Tension remains high in many areas, however, and the Communists are attempting to fan the fears they have created.

New Phase of Attacks May Be Nearing

2. There are a number of indications, that the Communists may be preparing for a new phase of attacks, possibly to coincide with a major thrust in the Khe Sanh/northern Quang Tri area.

3. North Vietnamese forces along the Demilitarized Zone from Khe Sanh to Gio Linh continue to maneuver. Some [redacted] refer to specific attack plans in the eastern portion. [redacted] 3.3(h)(2)
[redacted] a major concentration of enemy forces just south of Da Nang and around Dak To in the central highlands. [redacted] B-3 Front elements in the highlands have recently referred to the "upcoming phase" and to "D-Day plus four," a date which may be imminent. 3.3(h)(2)

4. Elements of the North Vietnamese 7th and Viet Cong 5th and 9th divisions are operating some distance from their normal base areas and are in a position to strike key US installations in central III Corps or to serve as a reserve force against Saigon. Signal intelligence has also located a cluster of unidentified units near Saigon and another concentration near My Tho in the delta.

5. A number of enemy prisoners and documents captured since late fall indicated that the "winter-spring" offensive would have a second phase lasting through March. Several prisoners taken in the recent fighting have claimed that there would be follow-up attacks. Heavy communications traffic between Hanoi and major commands in the South, similar to that preceding the 30 January attacks, has persisted. Many of the units now massing have not yet been generally committed.

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6. Except in the northern Quang Tri area, the Communists are probably not in a position to repeat the scope of their Tet effort. They may well conclude that the losses suffered so far outweigh the advantages of pressing a second phase. Nevertheless, it would appear to serve both their political and military objectives to keep up pressure, at least on selected military bases and cities, and to strike before allied forces have sufficient time to disrupt their offensive plans.

I Corps

7. Following the heavy bombardment and ground assault on the Khe Sanh combat base and its defensive perimeter early on 8 February, the base received sporadic mortar fire through 9 February. West of the base, Special Forces elements withdrew from the Lang Vei area, leaving it completely to the enemy.

8. Steps are being taken to clear the refugees of the Lang Vei fight from the area. The refugees include Laotians, Vietnamese, and mountain tribesmen as well as Vietnamese and Laotian troops. Some of the Laotians are being evacuated by air to Da Nang, according to late reports.

9. There have been new reports of movements of North Vietnamese tanks on the western portion of Route 9. US air strikes were directed against the vehicles.

10. [redacted] around the Khe Sanh area seem to reflect growing morale problems in some of the units there. According to [redacted] 17 men deserted their units on 5 February, bringing the total number of deserters to 73. The period of time and the units involved were not disclosed. Included in this total, however, were platoon commanders and five radio operators, who took along 11 radios. [redacted] stated that the "battalion was understrength."

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11. Heavy B-52 strikes throughout the area may have contributed to the hardships already imposed by the difficult living conditions, food problems, and the prolonged combat status of these troops.

12. In Hue, moderate to heavy enemy resistance continues. Communist forces still hold portions of the citadel. South of the Perfume River, US Marines reported that movement was easier on the 9th. South of Hue, a US convoy was ambushed on 7 February. Eleven of the 15 vehicles were damaged or destroyed. Enemy losses totaled 34 dead against 20 Americans killed and 39 wounded during a three-and-a-half hour battle.

13. In the coastal flatlands of Quang Nam Province immediately south of Da Nang, a US - South Vietnamese combined action platoon was attacked by an estimated 200 to 300 enemy troops on 8 February. Four US Army companies and one US Marine company joined the battle in the afternoon. By nightfall the enemy had withdrawn leaving behind 152 bodies. American losses in the firefight totaled 15 killed and 63 wounded.

14. There appears to be a growing enemy threat to Da Nang. During the past week there has been a clustering of North Vietnamese units in the area west and south of the base, between Da Nang and Hoi An. The entire North Vietnamese 2nd Division and the 31st Regiment and the 368B Artillery Regiment have been noted massing here for what may be a large-scale attack on the huge US air base and/or the city of Da Nang.

15. [redacted]

[redacted] has established a forward command post in Phu Bai to take charge of allied forces in northern I Corps.

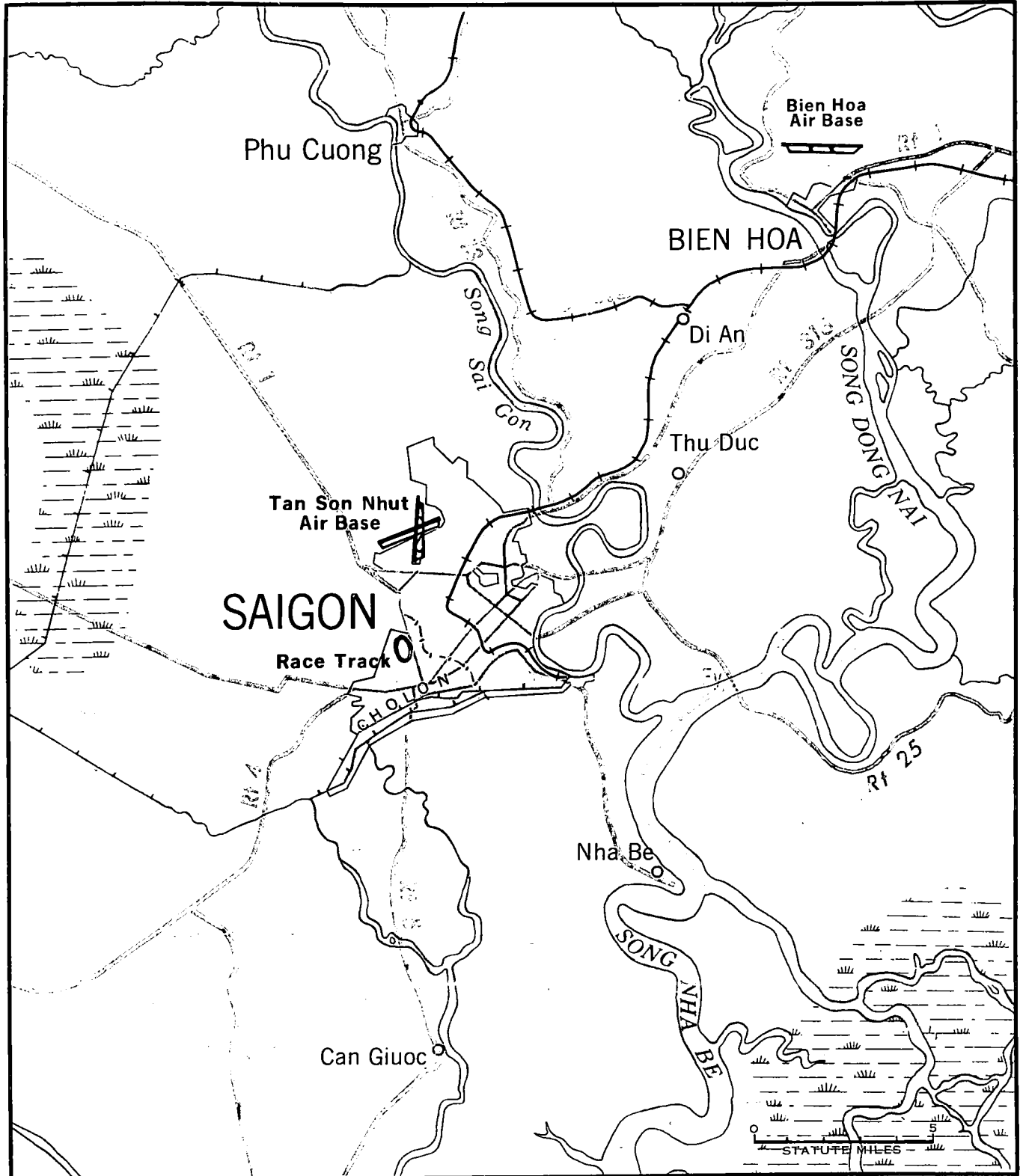
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Saigon and III Corps

20. The Communist threat in Saigon remains serious. Sharp fighting continues, particularly in the southwestern part of the city near the Cholon race track. The government force--South Vietnamese rangers, Marines, paratroopers, and National Police--has been augmented by elements of the US 199th Light Infantry Brigade. The Communists appear to be trying to break out of the encirclement. Widespread fires were reported in the Cholon area and also in a warehouse complex near the Saigon port where some of the Viet Cong withdrew during the night. Some fires were said to have been set by the Viet Cong to cover their escape; others probably were caused by heavy small-arms and rocket fire from both sides.

21. The Viet Cong are apparently trying to establish strongpoints within the populated suburbs just to the north of Saigon. American troops have made sweeps on all sides of the capital to head off Communist reinforcements. North of the city, US forces have reported moderate to heavy contact with possible elements of the Viet Cong 9th Division's 271st Regiment. The Viet Cong 9th Division, north of Saigon, constitutes the major threat to the area.

22. A possible indication of renewed attacks in the Saigon area was contained in an [redacted]

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[redacted] an unidentified unit had been considering the "additional task of attacks." In a possibly related development, [redacted]

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23. Elsewhere in III Corps, except for a light mortar attack early on 9 February against Bien Hoa Air Base, no major enemy activity has been reported. There are reports, however, that Communist forces are arming and training montagnard tribesmen in Binh Long Province, in the area near Loc Ninh and An Loc. The tribesmen are being told that they are to be formed into a "people's militia" to support the "popular groundswell" calling for the liberation of Binh Long by the Communists.

IV Corps

24. In the delta, South Vietnamese Army troops reported killing 131 Viet Cong and capturing 72 weapons in a battle yesterday 115 miles southwest of Saigon in Kien Giang Province. Government forces lost 21 killed and 71 wounded. Elsewhere in IV Corps, new large-scale attacks were reported, although there were incidents of light mortar and small-arms fire in several provinces.

25. The situation is tense, however, and the people fear new attacks on a number of cities. In the capital of Bac Lieu Province, for example, there are rumors among the local population that the town will be the target of a Viet Cong ground attack by 15 February. In the Kien Giang provincial capital, there is uneasiness because of heavy Communist pressure on the outlying district towns.

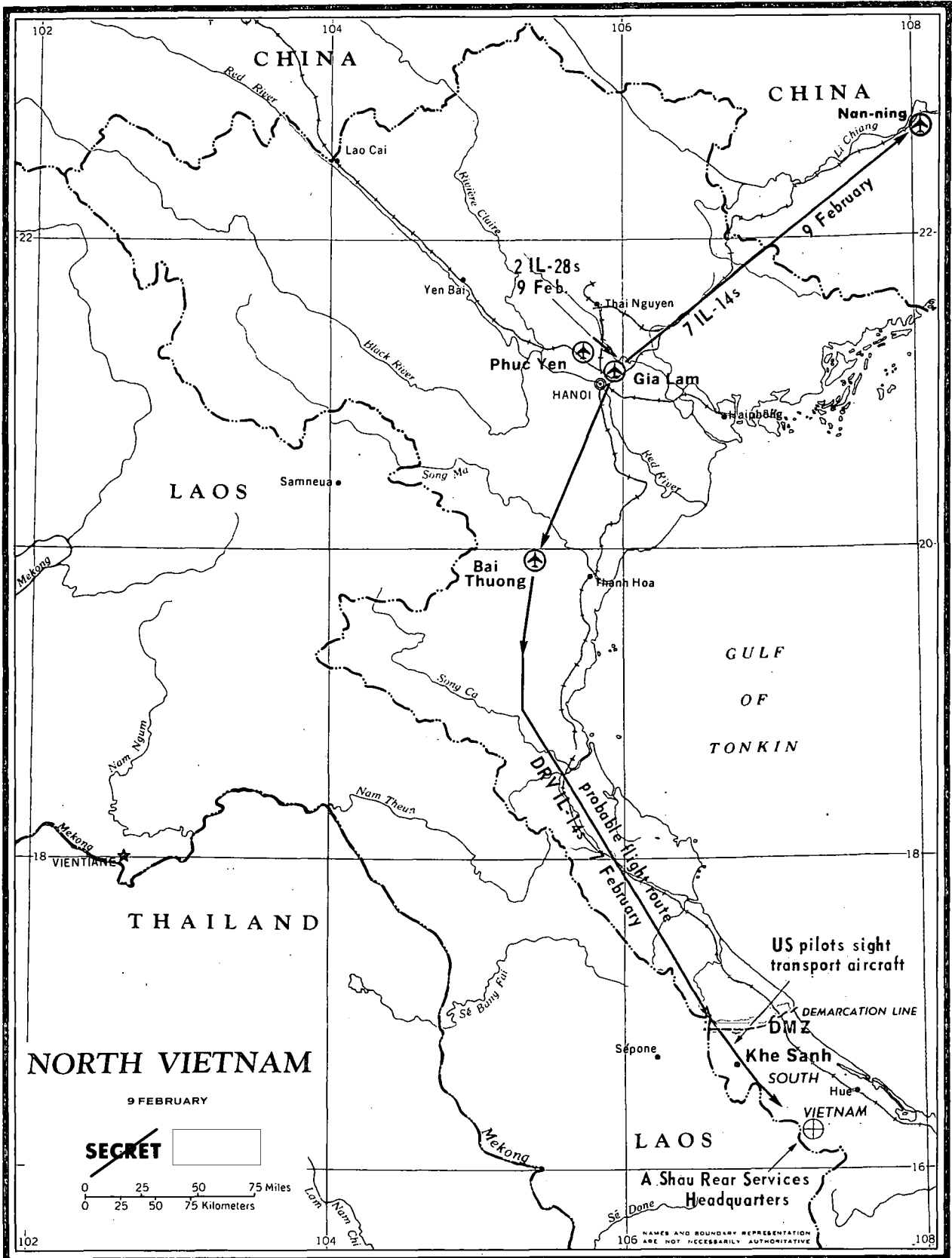
26. Since the first attacks of the Tet offensive, there have been widespread reports from the delta indicating that the Communists are deliberately trying to maintain tension in population centers. The Viet Cong have threatened new attacks in many areas and have attempted to intimidate people by saying that they will retaliate against those who helped the government during the recent fighting.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. [redacted] two of the three IL-28s known to be in North Vietnam flew from Phuc Yen to Gia Lam during the afternoon of 9 February. [redacted] one IL-28 was damaged when US aircraft struck Phuc Yen on 8 February, and it is likely that the other two were transferred to Gia Lam for safekeeping. Gia Lam is Hanoi's international civil air terminal and is the only major airfield which has remained free from US air attacks.

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2. [redacted] the IL-14s which arrived from China on 6 February and which have been involved in missions to the area of the Demilitarized Zone have returned to Nan-ning. Their brief stay and highly unusual behavior while in North Vietnam suggests that they were involved in a project which called for urgent air delivery of priority cargo in support of the Communist offensive in the vicinity of Khe Sanh.

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3. [redacted] these planes probably succeeded in parachuting some supplies into the A Shau Valley area. On the 7 February flight the aircraft took off from Gia Lam, passed over Bai Thuong and crossed the Demilitarized Zone in the vicinity of the Laos border. As the IL-14s flew south they were sighted near Khe Sanh by USAF fighter pilots who described them as "unmarked, silver, twin-engine, C-47 type transports."

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4. The precise location of the IL-14s' objective is not known, but it may have been the probable position of the North Vietnamese Army rear services headquarters in the A Shau Valley. [redacted]

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[redacted] references to "dropping" and eliminates previous reports of "striking" and "bombing." This evidence, coupled with the operational characteristics of the IL-14 and the brief period the planes spent near A Shau, suggests that the planes were involved in a paradrop mission.

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5. Not all of the IL-14s were successful in completing their mission on 7 February, which may explain the flight of two additional IL-14s below the Zone on the following day. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] at least two planes could not find the probable drop zone because of bad weather. A third IL-14 was hit by ground fire from a Communist unit near Lang Vei. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a fire was started in its left engine. This aircraft made an emergency landing at Bai Thuong where it rendezvoused with an LI-2 transport which carried "four airplane mechanics" from Gia Lam.

6. The cargo delivered to the A Shau Valley area by the IL-14s is not known. The relatively small capacity of the IL-14 and the limited number of missions flown suggests that it must have been of limited volume and high importance. Repeated bombardment of Communist positions around Khe Sanh by B-52s apparently has deprived several units--including the Khe Sanh Area Front--of key equipment and personnel. It is possible that the IL-14s were involved in replenishing essential items such as communications gear or specially trained individuals.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi is using diplomatic as well as propaganda channels to convince free world leaders that it "sincerely wants to start negotiations once the bombing of North Vietnam has stopped." This statement was made to officials of the Indian Foreign Ministry by the North Vietnamese consul general in New Delhi in a special call at the ministry on 6 February. In Hanoi, the Indian representative apparently was called to the Foreign Ministry recently and given the same message.

2. The Indians also report that Kosygin on his recent visit to New Delhi told Mrs. Gandhi that if the bombings were stopped the North Vietnamese would move more rapidly than anyone expected toward an acceptable settlement.

3. The North Vietnamese consul general in New Delhi probably used his conversations with UN Secretary General Thant on 8 February to convey the same version of Hanoi's intentions.

Defense Minister Giap Speaks

4. Hanoi seems to have gone out of its way to highlight the obscure occasion of North Korean Army Day. The attention may have been partly a gesture of support for the Pueblo captors and an expression of thanks for North Korean aid to the Vietnamese Communists.

5. North Vietnamese Defense Minister Giap was the center of attention as he played his first ceremonial role in public for some months. Nothing he said provided any solid clues to Hanoi's intentions toward the war. Giap told a reception audience in Hanoi on 8 February that the Communist offensive in South Vietnam had created a "new situation" favorable for continuing the fight until "final victory." He took a similar line in a message to the North Koreans. He said the Vietnam conflict was entering a "fierce phase." He made no suggestion there would be any early end to the fighting.

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