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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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16 February 1968

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Information as of 1600
16 February 1968
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HIGHLIGHTS

Scattered fighting and shelling continues in I Corps and low-level reports continue to point to another round of attacks. Enemy tanks have been observed in the eastern part of the Demilitarized Zone for the first time.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Enemy tanks were reported in the Demilitarized Zone north of Con Thien on 16 February. Sharp skirmishes have taken place in several parts of the I Corps area during the past few days, and enemy attacks in the Quang Tri city area may come soon (Paras. 1-8).

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(Paras. 9-12). National Police Director Loan warns that the Communists may be planning another wave of attacks (Paras. 13-14). Two allied airfields in Phong Dinh Province in the delta were shelled on 16 February (Paras. 15-16).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Captured documents underline a Communist intent to engage in a long-range campaign to build their strength in the cities (Paras. 1-5). Progress is slow in opening roads to bring food supplies into Saigon, although stocks are adequate and prices are falling (Paras. 6-7).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:

There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:

There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The first high-level Communist analysis of the Tet offensive was published in the North Vietnamese Army daily on 11 February (Paras. 1-5). Routine Communist propaganda begins to emphasize the need for a long-term struggle (Paras. 6-8). The Poles are stepping up political support for the Liberation Front (Para. 9)

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. North Vietnamese forces have intensified their shelling of allied strongpoints from Khe Sanh eastward along the Demilitarized Zone to the South China Sea. They have also brought in armor, first employed against Lang Vei on 6 February, to the Con Thien area. Meanwhile, at least two regiments of North Vietnam's 324 "B" Division are continuing battlefield preparations near Quang Tri city. Elsewhere in the northern provinces, the battle for Hue entered its 19th day on 16 February with enemy forces still ensconced within the walls of the Citadel.

2. Most urban areas of II and III Corps remained under firm allied control on 16 February. New attacks against Nha Trang Airfield and a district town near Tay Ninh city, however, may portend renewed major attacks against the capitals of Khanh Hoa and Tay Ninh provinces.

3. Although enemy pressure on the Saigon area has eased considerably, police director Loan has warned that a second wave of Communist attacks involving the northern provinces and Saigon may come as early as 18 February.

4. With the exception of renewed attacks against two airfields in Phong Dinh Province and sporadic fighting on the outskirts of Can Tho city, the over-all military situation in IV Corps was quiet on 16 February. Allied sweep forces continued to press a series of operations designed to deflect reported Viet Cong plans for further widespread attacks against heavily populated urban areas in the delta.

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I Corps

5. Three enemy tanks were observed in the Demilitarized Zone approximately five miles north-east of Con Thien on 16 February. At last report, US Marine tanks were preparing to fire on the enemy tanks and air strikes had been requested. There has been no word on the results. The North Vietnamese would most likely employ the light, amphibious PT-76-type tanks in the Con Thien area. These were used successfully by the Communists in their attack on the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp. The amphibious capability of these tanks would enable them to cross the Ben Hai River.

6. North Vietnamese gunners continue to shell allied positions along the length of the Demilitarized Zone. The base at Khe Sanh was hit by 14 heavy rockets and over 100 mortar rounds on 15-16 February. Two Marines were killed and 28 wounded. Other outposts in northern Quang Tri Province reported nearly 100 rounds of incoming mortar and artillery fire.

7. Allied forces continue to press operations in the Citadel area of Hue. Heavy air strikes and naval gunfire are supporting the attack. Enemy resistance has been stiff. US Marines and infantrymen have also reported numerous small-scale but bloody actions down the length of I Corps during the past few days. On 14 February 12 US troops were killed and over 100 wounded in an ambush five miles west of Camp Carroll. Sharp skirmishes have also been reported southwest of Quang Tri city, on the outskirts of Hue, and south of Da Nang along the Quang Nam - Quang Tin border.

Enemy Threat in Quang Tri City Area

8. [REDACTED] the North Vietnamese may be preparing large-scale coordinated attacks in the Quang Tri city area. Extremely detailed reconnaissance reports and other offensive preparations have been noted for some days [REDACTED] by the 812th Regiment. It now appears almost certain that the 803rd Regiment has crossed the Cua Viet River and joined the 812th east of Quang Tri city. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] attacks may come within the next few days.

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II Corps

9. Early on 16 February the Nha Trang Airfield was hit by 14 rounds from 82-mm. mortars. The barrage resulted in no allied casualties and only minor damage.

10. An unconfirmed report made available by South Vietnamese police officials [REDACTED] [REDACTED] claims that Viet Cong main force and guerrilla units are positioned several miles west of the provincial capital city of Nha Trang. These forces are reportedly awaiting orders for a new large-scale attack on the city to be staged in conjunction with massive mortar attacks on military and administrative headquarters in and near the city.

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11. This report is similar to a flurry of others suggesting that renewed enemy attacks on major urban areas may be imminent. Many of these low-level reports are undoubtedly intended to alarm the populace and confuse the cities' defenders. Nevertheless, the potential threat of further attacks poses a serious problem to the key military and civil targets throughout the country.

III Corps

12. In Tay Ninh Province, an estimated force of 300 to 400 attacked the Phu Khuang district town early on 16 February. A sector headquarters, two South Vietnamese outposts, and a training center were the targets of the attack which lasted for more than four hours and included more than 50 rounds of B-40 rocket fire. Preliminary reports show 21 South Vietnamese wounded and two Communists killed and eight weapons captured.

Saigon

13. Although the Saigon area has seen a sharp decline in enemy pressure during the past few days, National Police Director General Loan warned on 16 February that a second wave of Communist attacks involving Khe Sanh, the Demilitarized Zone area, Quang Tri city, Hue, and Saigon could break as early as 18 February. Loan reportedly based his warning on information derived from the interrogation of prisoners, some of whom were recently apprehended while en route from neighboring Long An Province to Saigon.

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14. Loan further estimated that it would require three months to restore the security situation in Saigon to its pre-Tet level. In view of this, he strongly argued that three South Vietnamese battalions, in addition to his police units, should be permanently based inside the capital to share responsibility for the city's security.

IV Corps

15. Phong Dinh Province, some 100 miles southwest of Saigon, was the focal point of the most significant Communist military activity reported in the delta on 16 February. The allied airfields at Binh Thuy and Can Tho were shelled by enemy mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle fire for the fourth and fifth times, respectively, since the Communist Tet offensive began on 29 January. Allied casualties and aircraft damage resulting from the attacks were minimal. Both airfields remain operational.

16. Meanwhile, allied forces [REDACTED] [REDACTED] reported several heavy clashes on 15 February three miles southwest of Can Tho, which resulted in 54 Viet Cong killed.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAMCommunist Plans for Action in the Cities

1. Recently available texts of captured documents confirm that the Communists have a long-term plan to build up their strength in the cities. It thus seems likely that the Viet Cong will follow the recent Tet offensive with continuing political and military pressure against the urban areas.

2. Documents discussing a step-up in activities in the cities have appeared frequently over the past years; late last summer, however, they began to increase gradually in number, apparently as the Communists began preparations for their offensive against urban centers. Long aware of their neglect of this area, they acknowledged that: "in many cities and towns, (party) committee cadre have not given proper attention to...carrying out the revolution's policy." But..."cities, in particular, are the enemy's last sanctuaries and should be destroyed at any cost.... We must designate weak areas and cities and strongly develop our guerrilla warfare to strike regularly in those places."

3. Detailed instructions for Viet Cong agents being sent into the cities were captured near Saigon last June. Methods for infiltrating and exploiting labor unions and other organizations were spelled out. An indoctrination lesson captured in I Corps in December called for "more emphasis on cities and towns to develop political struggle movement and armed actions therein." A Viet Cong directive of 20 November called for city units in Pleiku Province to use secret guerrilla cells to "prepare the battlefield" inside the city and create favorable conditions there to "bring troops inside for operations," presumably with the Tet offensive in mind.

4. Assuming that some urban centers would be liberated, a directive of 16 November probably issued from Military Region 5 Headquarters instructs Viet Cong units on how to behave. The civilian

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population and private property were to be protected. Looting and drinking were prohibited. South Vietnamese military personnel and civilian officials, presumably excepting "traitors and tyrants," were to be propagandized, but not ill-treated.

5. The Communists in their Tet offensive failed to enlist widespread popular support, but their directives suggest a longer term effort to get at the population in cities and towns.

Economic Conditions

6. Food prices in Saigon fell approximately six percent by 14 February, but they remain 60-65 percent above the pre-Tet level. According to the US Embassy, shipments of some foods are slowly beginning to arrive in the capital, but other foods are becoming more scarce. The road situation does not appear to have improved appreciably. A boatload of shrimp arrived from Nha Trang on the 14th and one or more trucks of fish were delivered, probably from Vung Tau. A convoy of foodstuffs was also reported to have arrived in Saigon from the Mekong Delta, but it never reached the markets, apparently because all of it went to the government and other priority consumers. Pork and poultry are in particularly short supply in the city because of insecure road conditions and a lack of proper feed.

7. Route 4, the principal land artery to the delta, has been passable between My Tho and Saigon for some time, but police and army checkpoints hinder the movement of food supplies. As of 14 February, trucks carrying food were being required to unload outside Saigon. The supplies were then loaded onto much smaller commercial vehicles. Route 15 to Vung Tau is open, but travel is recommended only in convoy.

8. Reports from the delta point to widely varying economic conditions. Commercial activity in My Tho and Can Tho is near normal, but Vinh Long city reported on 13 February that the market was closed and commercial activity was almost at a standstill. Similarly in Ben Tre, where the marketplace was completely destroyed and numerous shops and small industries severely damaged, almost no economic activity has been reported.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

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4. Another interesting aspect of Binh's article is the polemical language he uses. The use of such language usually indicates disputes among the hierarchy itself or jibes by the Vietnamese Communists at foreign Communist powers. In Binh's article, the jibes appear to be aimed at Peking and Chinese military doctrine, although the possibility of internal disagreement among the North Vietnamese leadership itself cannot be ruled out. There are two polemic references in the article. The first characterizes the attack on the cities as a wholly new and brilliant strategy which the "southern leadership" was able to devise because they are not "bound by outmoded experiences."

5. The second reference to the same issue says, "the facts emerging during the past few days have clearly proved that the view held by the southern revolution is extremely clear-sighted.... The war is not like any war in history." Both references could clearly be considered insulting to the Chinese, but they could also refer to disagreements within the the Vietnamese Communist leadership.

6. Communiqués from several of the Viet Cong regional commands reviewing the military situation since the Tet offensive are also beginning to take the line that the "victories" achieved in the past two weeks lay the groundwork for a more intensive period of fighting ahead.

7. Communiqués from the Communist commands in the highlands and in the delta claimed the "victories" recorded in the offensive produced "favorable conditions" for an advance toward "still greater victories." An editorial in the Hanoi party daily broadcast on 16 February followed the same line. It claimed that the recent fighting had "smashed the enemy's grip on the countryside and loosened allied control in the urban areas." These successes, it claimed, have tipped the balance of forces in favor of the Communists and created favorable conditions for their "advancing toward total victory."

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8. While promising new and greater victories, current Communist propaganda is also pointing out that such successes will be costly. The Liberation Radio, in analyzing the "successful struggle" in Saigon in a 14 February broadcast, pointed out that "no fierce difficulties, hardships, or sacrifices" can slacken the surging thrust of the people of the capital city. Other statements using the well-worn Communist theme that the greater its defeat the more fiercely the US will struggle have warned of increased difficulties, but guarantee that perseverance will bring victory.

Polish Support for the Viet Cong

9. Liberation Front representative in Warsaw, Tran Van Tu, met with Polish Premier Cyrankiewicz on 16 February, according to a Polish announcement cited by Reuters. No details of the meeting were made public. Warsaw radio made a similarly uninformative announcement on 15 February that Tran Van Tu had met with Foreign Minister Rapacki three days earlier.

10. The Polish press in the last two weeks has given front page treatment to the "heroic" Viet Cong offensive, and almost daily meetings of Front representatives with various Polish groups have been dutifully reported. It is possible that Tu's progress up the ladder of Polish officialdom is in line with this propaganda, and that it may lead to an enhancement of the Front's status in Warsaw.

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