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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

[Redacted]

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21 February 1968

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

Increased Hanoi interest in the fighting in Saigon and central III Corps is indicated [redacted]. A prisoner captured in Da Nang details Communist plans for additional attacks in this area.

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
The military situation throughout most of South Vietnam was generally quiet on 20-21 February, but sharp fighting continued near Saigon and in the Hue Citadel (Paras. 1-3). The North Vietnamese high command in Hanoi appears to be taking an active role in controlling the offensive in the Saigon area (Paras. 4-9). New information has been received on enemy plans in the Da Nang area (Paras. 10-16). Communist road construction from the A Chau Valley toward Hue has been stepped up (Paras. 17-21).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Three outspoken opponents of the government and ten other unidentified individuals have been taken into police custody (Paras. 1-2). Reaction to the Tet offensive in Ben Tre has been mixed (Paras. 3-5).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
North Vietnamese IL-28 bombers stay in Hanoi area except during US air strikes (Para. 1).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: A prominent Communist military commander in South Vietnam is now with the North Vietnamese Ministry of Defense (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The military situation in most of South Vietnam was quiet on 20-21 February. Sharp skirmishes were reported in the Saigon area, however, as Communist forces continue their harassment there. Although authorities have declared the provincial capitals of Phan Thiet and Da Lat secure, there is growing evidence that enemy troops have been mixing with the population and infiltrating back into both cities.

2. No major new Communist action has occurred in III or IV Corps, but there have been several small-scale mortar attacks on urban areas and continuing attempts by the Viet Cong to interdict vital roads leading to Saigon from the delta provinces.

Situation in Hue Improving

3. US Marines are reported to have launched a new drive against the Communist force entrenched in a small area of the Citadel. Improved weather conditions have allowed close air support. Results of the current round of fighting have not yet been received. Supply convoys are moving more freely into Hue from Phu Bai and some stores and market areas are reopening. Repairs to the city's disrupted facilities are in progress. The Thua Thien Province chief, who also serves as mayor of the city, has assumed direct control over many reconstruction tasks.

Hanoi Control Over Saigon Area Offensive

4. Enemy communications activity over the past several weeks reflects the greatly increased emphasis which the Communists are placing on their military operations in the Saigon area. The North Vietnamese Army high command in Hanoi now appears to be taking a more direct role in controlling these operations.

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5. Documents captured in late 1967 indicated that Military Region 4--the Communists headquarters in the Saigon area--had been reorganized and given expanded authority over the countryside surrounding the capital. During the same period the headquarters is believed to have established regular communications schedules with the Viet Cong 9th and North Vietnamese 7th divisions, which at that time were in their normal operating areas along the Cambodian border.

6. Early this year the headquarters tried to contact the Viet Cong 5th Division northwest of Saigon. Finally, a radio station believed to serve the headquarters has been noted in almost daily contact with Hanoi but no communications were noted between it and the Viet Cong high command (COSVN) between October of last year and 10 February 1968.

7. The changes suggest that Hanoi may have assumed greater control over the current offensive in the Saigon area and central III Corps and may be charting military strategy in this area. The extent to which this development has reduced the authority of COSVN is not clear.

Current Deployments

8. The enemy's 7th, 9th, and 5th divisions are currently spread in an arc from the northwest to the northeast of Saigon. Elements of these units could resume attacks against US bases in central III Corps or against Saigon itself with little warning. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the enemy is particularly interested in the large US base at Bien Hoa and in Xuan Loc, the capital of Long Khanh Province.

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9. The most recent actions in the Saigon area include a reported outbreak of fighting on 21 February near the Phu Tho race track on the western outskirts and at a point five miles northeast of the capital. Over 120 Communists were reported killed in the latter action. US losses were put at 15 killed and four missing. Press reports say that four US helicopters were shot down.

Communist Operations in the Da Nang Area

10. Detailed information on the organization and plans of the Communist military and political apparatus responsible for operations in the Da Nang - Hoi An area has been gleaned from the interrogation of the relatively high-ranking North Vietnamese military official captured in Da Nang on 5 February.

11. The captive, who claimed the rank of Captain along with membership on the "Military Committee" of the Viet Cong Da Nang Second Precinct, stated that the Communists during November and December 1967 established the so-called "Quang Da - Da Nang Special Zone" to take charge of all military and political activities in the Da Nang - Hoi An area.

12. According to the prisoner, the creation of the "Quang Da - Da Nang Special Zone" was in direct response to the "large and modern character" of South Vietnamese and allied forces in the area, including the extensive installations in Da Nang municipality. Considered fully developed by January 1968, the special zone is reportedly composed of 11 districts.

13. The "Quang Da - Da Nang Special Zone" reportedly has both a headquarters base command staff, located at Que Son Mountain in Duy Xuyen district--and a mobile staff of approximately 20 officers who operate in the districts of Duy Xuyen, Dai Loc, and Go Noi. One special mobile company, composed of some 40 personnel between the ages of 16 and 17, has allegedly been deployed within Da Nang city for the "general offensive." The company's special mission includes the destruction of POL facilities and power stations, the assassination or kidnaping of allied intelligence personnel, and the occupation of the Da Nang weapons depot.

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14. The captive further claimed that he was to have assumed command of the Da Nang city "Combined Operational Section" which would proselyte both South Vietnamese military and civilian personnel within the municipality.

15. Among the major forces cited by the prisoner as available for commitment to the general offensive against the Da Nang - Hoi An area were the 31st Regiment/341st North Vietnamese Army Division, two "rocket" regiments (probably the 68th and 368 "B" Artillery Regiments), two Viet Cong sapper battalions, and two provincial mobile battalions. Should the Communists conduct a major ground offensive in this area, all three regiments of the 2nd Division probably would be available as reinforcements.

16. The possibility of significant enemy attacks in the Da Nang - Hoi An area, raised by the prisoner, is supported to some extent by [redacted] indications of offensive readiness by enemy troops in the area.

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Enemy Road Building in Thua Thien Province

17. Communist road construction eastward from the A Chau Valley area of western Thua Thien has been proceeding with increased intensity lately, with the enemy apparently trying to get in a better position to conduct sustained offensive operations in South Vietnam's two northernmost provinces.

18. [redacted] extensive road construction, with at least four miles of new road completed, in an easterly direction from

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the A Shau Valley. This new road may well link with a road to the coastal lowlands and to the city of Hue.

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[redacted] construction of a supply route from the valley to Hue is "nearing completion."

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[redacted] a North Vietnamese battalion was to try to send artillery down the road on the night of 25 February, possibly pulled by motor vehicles.

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[redacted] all three airfields in the A Shau Valley are unusable. [redacted] the enemy has constructed bunkers on one of the runways, using steel runway planking to help build the bunkers and side roads. The use of sections of the runways for construction purposes suggests that the Communists do not intend to use the airfields to land aircraft; however, they could be used as drop zones for supplies or men.

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Further Infiltration

20. During the past week, analysis [redacted] [redacted] has revealed another significant move of North Vietnamese regulars to South Vietnam is under way. Radio terminals in Laos associated with North Vietnamese infiltration activities are again active. One terminal has been pinpointed just 12 miles due west of the A Shau Valley, and appears to be following the route taken by the North Vietnamese 31st Regiment when it moved through the valley into central Thua Thien Province late in 1967.

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21. It is becoming increasingly clear that current Communist plans call for attempts to sustain and increase military pressure in the northern coastal areas, possibly including the city of Hue. Many Communist prisoners and documents have claimed that an all-out drive to liberate Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces is in the offing. The present posture of the enemy's forces, as well as the improved resupply capabilities via both western Quang Tri Province and the A Shau Valley would help considerably.

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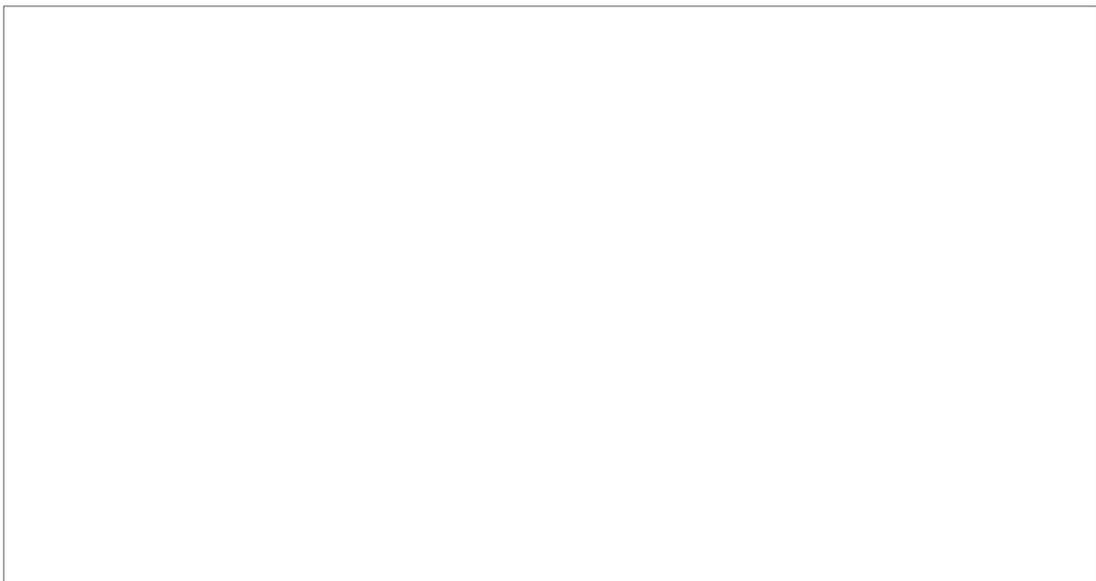
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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The National Police took militant Buddhist Thich Tri Quang and oppositionists Truong Dinh Dzu and Au Truong Thanh into custody on 20 February. According to a senior Vietnamese security official, the cabinet decided on that day to "invite" 20 persons, including these three men, to accept "protective custody" because the police allegedly had information that they were to be kidnaped by the Viet Cong and forced to support a coalition government. Thirteen of the 20 are now in custody, according to this official, but he did not name the others.



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Situation in Ben Tre

3. [redacted] in Ben Tre, Kien Hoa Province, [redacted] the Tet attack has reduced the people's confidence in the government's ability to protect them. Even strong government supporters have been affected. Many of the refugees are critical of the Viet Cong for violating Tet and for having wrought such destruction. There is also some criticism of the US and for its strong counter-measures.

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4. The South Vietnamese Army acquitted itself well during the attack, [redacted] but its image has been hurt because of a subsequent penchant for looting. Opinion apparently varies as to the performance of the province chief, Lt. Colonel Huynh Van Du, during the attack, but in general he seems to have done a creditable job. Other provincial officials, however, have proved ineffective in providing relief services for the people, leaving the brunt of the work to religious organizations, volunteer groups, and American officials.

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5. There are approximately 18,000 refugees in Ben Tre. As many as half of these probably will soon be able to return to their homes. Some 2,500 structures were destroyed in Ben Tre, about 30 percent of the city. Prices and availability of food posed problems just after the attack, but food is now plentiful and prices are expected to go down, since food normally sold to Saigon is now being sold locally.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. The North Vietnamese IL-28 bombers which returned from China on 18 February are confining their activity to evading US aircraft. It is not clear [redacted] whether the IL-28s are based at Phuc Yen or Hanoi/Gia Lam airfields, but the threat of US air strikes apparently caused IL-28 flights from the Hanoi area toward the China border on 19 and 21 February.

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2. The two North Vietnamese fighter aircraft noted conducting unusual, low-level test flights on 15 February have been identified as MIG-17s on the basis of further analysis [redacted]

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[redacted] The high speeds at which the flights were conducted, the seeming unfamiliarity with the aircraft on the part of the pilots and North Vietnam's apparent new interest in offensive air operations had prompted speculation that a new ground attack aircraft, such as the SU-7, could be involved.

3. [redacted] indicates, however, that the aircraft flew at speeds within the range of the MIG-17 and that they were flown by known MIG-17 pilots. No mention was made of braking parachutes which high-performance aircraft like the MIG-21 or SU-7 normally use when landing. The sighting by US pilots of an unidentified type of supersonic jet interceptor south of Hanoi on 9 February, however, is still unexplained.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. A North Vietnamese broadcast indicates that a major general with a long background in South Vietnamese military affairs has been promoted to a Defense Ministry job in Hanoi, presumably after giving up his former responsibilities in the South.
2. The broadcast says that Major General Nguyen Don, identified as a vice minister of national defense and an alternate member of the central committee, is in Moscow heading up a North Vietnamese delegation to the celebration of Soviet Army day. Don has been identified for years by prisoners and captured documents as a leading figure in the Viet Cong military command structure in South Vietnam. In the early 1960s he became commander of Viet Cong Military Region 5 which covers most of the northern half of South Vietnam. One prisoner captured a year ago claimed that Don had been demoted to deputy commander of the region in mid-1966, but there is no confirmation. Information on his activities in the past year or so is lacking.
3. General Don's move to the Defense Ministry may be a routine personnel shift for a man with many years of active duty in the South. His trip to Moscow and his new position indicate he is in good standing, and it seems likely that he will continue to play an important role in his new job. It is possible that he was shifted to the Defense Ministry in order to give the Hanoi high command the benefit of his specialized knowledge of the situation in the northern half of South Vietnam, an area where the Communists now seem to be focusing.

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