

Top Secret

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

Top Secret

128

19 February 1968

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Information as of 1600
19 February 1968
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HIGHLIGHTS

No new Communist attacks were reported during the past 24 hours, although enemy forces pose a threat to several urban areas.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
There were no new major Communist attacks reported in South Vietnam on 19 February. Enemy resistance continued in some urban centers, and a flurry of reports and rumors suggested renewed Communist attacks in several parts of the country (Paras. 1-21).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Vice President Ky has not yet acted on his decision to resign as chairman of the Vietnamese task force (Paras. 1-3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
There is further evidence of North Vietnamese preparations for offensive air operations in the southern part of North Vietnam (Paras. 1-3). The possible presence of a new attack aircraft is discussed (Paras. 4-7).

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

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi attacks the San Antonio formula (Paras. 1-2) and singles out fighting in Quang Tri Province as especially significant (Paras. 3-4). Peking again registers its disapproval of third party efforts to get negotiations going (Paras. 5-6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

I Corps

1. Communist military activity decreased on 19 February. Enemy efforts consisted largely of light, sporadic artillery and mortar attacks directed against allied positions strung along the Demilitarized Zone. Ground contacts in northern Quang Tri Province were limited to light skirmishes.

2. In Hue, allied forces reported little progress against firmly entrenched enemy troops. There continue to be indications that the Communists may initiate major new actions in the Hue area possibly reinforcing enemy troops in the city or launching new attacks. [redacted]

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3. If new enemy activity materializes in Hue, it may involve elements of the 812th North Vietnamese Army Regiment. [redacted]

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[redacted] the 812th headquarters and at least four supporting companies were possibly attempting to move southward from the Quang Tri city area to Hue. It appears the deployment of this enemy task force was at least temporarily halted, possibly because of allied forces positioned on the route of movement, [redacted] It is not clear whether the three infantry battalions of the 812th were also to move to the Hue area. [redacted]

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[redacted] suggests the 812th task force may have progressed to a point midway between Hue and Quang Tri city by the 18th.

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4. With the attention of parts of the 812th Regiment apparently focused on Hue, the Communist threat to Quang Tri city has probably decreased slightly.

5. Farther north, it appears elements of the 320th North Vietnamese Division have moved into the Con Thien/Gio Linh area recently vacated by major elements of the 324B Division. A captive from the 48th Regiment of the 320th stated on the 13th his battalion was moving into the Gio Linh area. On 19 February, an unidentified 320th subordinate was located some six miles southwest of Con Thien. Continued Communist pressure on friendly positions in the eastern Demilitarized Zone area can be expected, but this apparent move by elements of the 320th should decrease enemy pressure against Camp Carroll.

II Corps

6. Enemy ground action continued in Phan Thiet during 19 February. By 6:00 p.m. (Vietnam time), Communist forces were in control of the provincial hospital and had surrounded the Binh Thuan Province interrogation center. The enemy force in Phan Thiet has been initially identified as the Viet Cong 840th Main Force battalion, one of the Communist elements involved in the January attack on Phan Thiet.

7. Interrogation of several enemy captives indicates the Communists have made plans for additional attacks against military positions and urban areas in the western highlands. A large-scale rocket attack on Pleiku city is reportedly scheduled for 23 February. Another prisoner indicated the Da Lat military academy is to be attacked. [REDACTED] have asserted that "there will be no let-up in the activities." This appears to refer to actions by elements of the B-3 Front.

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III Corps

8. With the exception of Phuoc Long Province, where an estimated two Communist battalions remain entrenched within the capital city of Song Be, III Corps reported a general easing of enemy pressure on 19 February.

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9. Preliminary interrogation of seven enemy prisoners captured during the initial phase of the 18 February assault against Song Be indicates that the Communists intend to make a determined effort to gain complete control of Phuoc Long Province. The province chief, who is deeply troubled by the deteriorating security situation, believes that the Liberation Front wants to occupy one province along the Cambodian border where it could either establish a coalition government or negotiate from a position of strength. He also feels that the government forces in the northern provinces may increase enemy pressure throughout III Corps.

10. The attack against Song Be, according to the seven captives, was scheduled to last seven days unless it fell sooner. Their specific mission was to destroy South Vietnamese installations in the town. Interrogations indicate the attacking force at Song Be consisted of two battalions from the 52nd Regiment/7th North Vietnamese Division. The prisoners claimed that the two battalions were replacement personnel who had only recently arrived from North Vietnam.

11. [REDACTED] approximately half of the houses in Song Be have been destroyed since the attacks began on 18 February. An estimated 3,000 refugees have reportedly congregated at the north end of the city near the provincial headquarters and the MACV compound.

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The Saigon Area

12. An uneasy calm prevailed over the Saigon area on 19 February, as mortar, rocket, and small arms fire continued within the city proper and near Tan Son Nhut Air Base. No major enemy ground assault against the capital has materialized.

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13. A flurry of unconfirmed rumors and reports suggest, however, an early increase in Communist hostilities against the capital. One report claims an enemy force is planning to cut the main road between Saigon and the US base at Bien Hoa to restrict US reinforcements. The main South Vietnamese Army hospital near Gia Dinh city is reportedly also an enemy target; the enemy would attempt to seize the building and use it as a headquarters to direct an attack against the South Vietnamese Army Joint General Staff headquarters in Saigon. The Viet Cong have also reportedly distributed leaflets in some areas of the capital advising residents to evacuate because of impending attacks purportedly on the night of 19-20 February.

14. In addition, an unevaluated South Vietnamese estimate indicates that the second major phase of the Communist Tet offensive is scheduled to start 20 February and that, in preparation for this, the Viet Cong have infiltrated some 2,000 a day disguised in South Vietnamese uniforms into the outlying districts of Saigon. The estimate concludes that the Communists have the mission of seizing Tan Son Nhut Air Base at any cost.

15. Interrogation of a prisoner, who claims to have been the executive officer of a battalion subordinate to the military affairs section of the Saigon-Cholon forces, provides sketchy information on the organization and preparation for the enemy's general attack phase.

16. According to the prisoner, if the first attack was unsuccessful, the Viet Cong would send armed propaganda cadre into the capital to build a low-level unified base of authority. The first phase also called for "youth and student forces" to replace all sapper groups that were destroyed. They would continue to destroy, assassinate, and create disturbances.

17. In phase two, large Communist forces are to enter Saigon a second time for a general offensive, coordinate with the political elements, and take control of the government. According to Viet Cong headquarters (COSVN) if the first phase does not succeed, the second phase will start in April.

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18. The prisoner also stated that Communist Military Region 4 in the Saigon area had been disbanded and replaced by six sub-regions commanded directly by COSVN's forward headquarters. The eight districts in the capital were reorganized into the Saigon-Cholon committee which included military, political, and rear service elements.

19. The failure of the enemy's initial attack, and the continued presence of main force elements in the general area, together with recently captured documents outlining the Military Region reorganization, lend support to the plan outlined by the captured officer.

IV Corps

20. The latest Communist outburst against widespread urban areas and allied military installations in the delta appears to have slackened on 19 February, although multibattalion Viet Cong forces remain near the beleaguered provincial capital of Vinh Long city. Late reports indicate that South Vietnamese 9th Division forces have regained control of the cathedral and most strongpoints within the city.

21. Reports of Viet Cong plans to continue widespread offensive operations against heavily populated provincial and district towns in IV Corps continue to be received. [REDACTED] the Viet Cong have moved into the second phase of the "general offensive" in order to set up a so-called "revolutionary government" in Can Tho, the capital of Phong Dinh Province. The "general offensive" in Can Tho will allegedly be "fulfilled and completed" in three days beginning 18 February. No major ground attacks have been reported against Can Tho during the latest wave, although nearby airfields and outlying defensive positions have been hard hit by mortar fire.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Vice President Ky has apparently decided either to remain as the Vietnamese task force chairman or to defer his resignation until later. On 16 February task force coordinator General Thang told an American participant in the group that he had recommended to Ky that the task force continue under Prime Minister Loc and that Secretary to the Prime Minister Doan Ba Cang take over Thang's duties. An announcement of this change was to have been made on 17 February. It never came, and Ky presided at all sessions on the 17th and the 18th.

2. Cang, should he take a leading role in the task force, will probably prove effective. Americans on the task force report that he is the committee's "brightest light." He has apparently taken a tough line with slackers on the task force and has been quick to see that orders get carried out.

3. The greatest problems facing relief operations in Saigon and throughout the country are the continuing curfew and its varying applications country-wide. The curfew is restricting travel and the movement of supplies. It is hampering port operations, the work of the government and other essential business. On 17 February, General Thang appealed to Capital Military District Commander Khang, who is in charge of security, for a reasonable relaxation of the curfew restrictions. Khang would not hear of it. Vice President Ky agreed on 18 February to a country-wide 7 p.m. - a.m. curfew but had to refer the matter to Khang and Joint General Staff Chief Vien for a final decision. A favorable verdict is not likely now, in view of the renewed Viet Cong attacks. Refugees as of 18 February totaled 411,000, with 128,000 in Saigon.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is further evidence that North Vietnam is developing a capability to undertake offensive air operations in areas south of the Hanoi-Haiphong region.

2. [redacted]

[redacted] radar stations are being established in southern North Vietnam. This type of radar is important for enemy air controllers if logistic or ground attack missions are to be flown south of the Demilitarized Zone. It would be mandatory for successful North Vietnamese MIG intercepts of US aircraft, such as B-52s bombing near Khe Sanh.

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3. [redacted]

[redacted] in the southern portion of North Vietnam-- Bai Thuong, Vinh and Dong Hoi--indicates that they have been prepared to support at least limited operations by propeller-driven tactical and transport aircraft. Repeated US air strikes on these bases deny their use by jets, [redacted] the enemy can repair runway damage well enough to permit frequent AN-2 and IL-14 flights to these fields.

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New Attack Aircraft?

4. North Vietnam may also be introducing a new aircraft to improve its ground attack capability. On 15 February extremely unusual terminology was employed by North Vietnamese fighter pilots as they conducted high-speed, low-level flights in two unidentified aircraft. The flights could have been tests of newly assembled or repaired aircraft.

5. On the other hand, the nature and explicit detail of the information passed between the pilots and ground controllers suggested that they were dealing with an aircraft with which both were unfamiliar. [redacted]

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6. The low altitude at which the flights were conducted and the range of speeds indicated-- 326 to 543 knots--suggests that a modern ground attack aircraft was involved. Both MIG-17s and MIG-21s can carry out this sort of mission, and it is possible that these aircraft, perhaps with modifications, made the flights. Neither, however, are used extensively in a ground attack role by the Soviet Union, which uses the SU-7. In the light of Hanoi's apparent new interest in offensive air operations, it is possible that SU-7s have been delivered to North Vietnam.

7. [redacted]

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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. The Hanoi party daily on 18 February issued one of the Communists' most direct and lengthy rejections of the San Antonio formula. Calling the formula a "double-dealing trick," the paper promised that Hanoi would reject any "other US moves for reciprocity."

2. The commentary also went back to earlier and tougher language demanding that the US must stop the bombings "definitively and unconditionally." North Vietnam has omitted the word "definitively" in important policy statements in recent months and has used it only infrequently in more routine propaganda commentary. Its reappearance in this article does not appear to represent a stiffening of North Vietnamese demands for a cessation of bombings. On more authoritative levels and through diplomatic channels Hanoi continues to insist only on an "unconditional" cessation.

Communists Single Out Quang Tri Front

3. In another propaganda statement on the military situation in the northern part of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong radio on 18 February described the "Quang Tri Front" as "a giant noose that is tightening around the necks of US troops." The commentary singles out Khe Sanh as a place where the US is worried about a "new Dien Bien Phu - type battle." It draws the most direct parallels between Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh yet noted in Communist propaganda, but it does not limit the Communist threat to that area. The broadcast claims that Communist actions in Quang Tri Province since the opening of the Tet offensive have driven allied forces into "a state of complete encirclement" from the coastal area to the mountains around Khe Sanh.

4. It takes note of one of the principal elements of enemy strategy in saying main force units are being used to disperse and tie down allied troops, while local and guerrilla forces intensify their activities throughout the province. It claims the action so far has created favorable conditions for dealing the US "new decisive blows." It concludes by praising Communist forces and says their activities will be the forerunner to "a new Dien Bien Phu - type of heavy defeat for the enemy."

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Peking on Negotiations

5. Peking has once again repeated its opposition to third-party efforts to obtain a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. A New China News Agency broadcast on 19 February asserted that the recent overseas trip of UN Secretary General Thant as well as Prime Minister Wilson's visit to the US and the Soviet Union were part of the alleged US effort to intensify the "peace talks fraud" in "collusion" with the USSR. The broadcast did not mention widely publicized North Vietnamese contacts with Thant, but it predicted that the Vietnamese would not be fooled by the "trick" and would continue fighting until the US was defeated.

6. The broadcast is part of Peking's increased propaganda commentary on Vietnam. Last week the volume rose to the highest level in three years. The bulk of it is devoted to hailing alleged Communist "victories" in Vietnam. There has been no significant departure from previous Peking positions.

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