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Mandatory Review

Case # NLJ 94-46e

Document # 1h, Tuesday, February 20, 1968

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1.3(a)(4)

TEXT OF CIA REPORT [REDACTED]

1.3(a)(4)

SUBJECT: Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Tactics and Strategy for the Tet General Offensive

The following information was received from interrogation of a Viet Cong prisoner [REDACTED]

He was captured [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] in Danang.

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Summary: According to Ho Phuoc, political officer of Viet Cong Quang Da-Danang Special Zone, General Nguyen Chi Thanh was recalled to Hanoi because of the failure of his strategy in South Vietnam. General Vo Nguyen Giap revised the new strategy, which was to be carried out in three phases, with the ultimate aim of forcing the Government of Vietnam to accept a coalition government with the National Liberation Front. Phase 1 called for a general offensive against the cities. If this failed, Viet Cong troops during Phase 2 would besiege the cities and, at the same time, lure U. S. troops into the Khe Sanh area. Phase 3, which was expected to coincide with the establishment of a coalition government, would involve a decisive battle in the Kontum-Pleiku or Saigon area. In support of this new strategy, the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong planned to increase activities in southern Laos to permit the infiltration into South Vietnam of most Regular North Vietnamese Army units. The latter would try to avoid pitched battles with U. S. troops and, instead, to confine them in their bases. End Summary.

During 1967, the Viet Cong acted as though they were weakening in order to mislead the Government of Vietnam and its allies. In reality, men and weapons were moved in South Vietnam in considerable quantity. The Viet Cong anticipated that the U.S. would increase its strength in South Vietnam during the summer of 1968 and they wanted to increase their own strength first. The Viet Cong also planned to put the greatest possible pressure on the U.S. during 1968, the year of the U.S. Presidential elections.

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[REDACTED]

Ho Phuoc, political officer with field grade rank of the Quang Da-Danang Special Zone and a member of Viet Cong Military Region 5 Committee, told [REDACTED] 1.3(a)(4)

[REDACTED] that General Nguyen Chi Thanh had been recalled to North Vietnam because of the failure of his strategy, Phuoc quoted General Vo Nguyen Giap as having said that the South Vietnamese battlefield had to be reconsidered because Thanh had made a mistake in applying the strategy of occupying rural areas, establishing organization in those areas and trying to hold on to them. This had resulted in Viet Cong troops being eliminated by Government of Vietnam troops and B-52 bombers. [REDACTED] delegations from Communist China, North Korea and Cuba had visited the South Vietnamese battlefields and, upon returning to North Vietnam, had reported unfavorably on the situation in South Vietnam. [REDACTED] he learned during November 1967 from Colonel Vo Thu, alias Ngoc, Chief of the Quang Da-Danang Special Zone, that Giap had also said there had to be an acid test prior to negotiations. 1.3(a)(4)

[REDACTED] the following factors were taken into consideration in planning the new strategy for South Vietnam. 1.3(a)(4)

A. Coordination between Allied and Government of Vietnam troops was loose and Allied troops only tried to protect their own bases. The wanton killings by Korean troops had caused the people to lose confidence in the Allied troops.

B. Government of Vietnam troops were widely scattered because of their use in the rural reconstruction program and could, therefore, easily be separated and destroyed. The U. S. would support Government of Vietnam troops only with air and artillery, not with infantry troops.

On the basis of these factors and the failure of Thanh's strategy, the following new three-phase strategy was formulated:

A. Phase I: Attacks on, and protection of, rural areas would be limited. At an opportune time, a general offensive against South Vietnamese cities would be launched. Except in important cities like Saigon and Hue, only one half of available forces, namely, the local combat

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experienced units, would be committed. This general offensive would cause the Government of Vietnam troops to pull back to protect the cities, leaving the rural areas to the Viet Cong. Thus the Viet Cong would achieve a complete victory in the rural areas without the necessity of fighting there.

B. Phase 2: If the general offensive should fail, Viet Cong troops would retreat and surround the cities and villages to create an intense and serious situation and to exhaust the economy. At the same time, the Viet Cong would use decoy tactics to lure as many U. S. troops as possible into the Khe Sanh area, thus reducing U. S. strength in other areas.

C. Phase 3: Because of the pressures generated by Phase 2, the Government of Vietnam would probably agree to accept a coalition government with the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. Simultaneously with the demand for a coalition government, North Vietnam would launch a decisive battle with a view to providing political support to the Front element in such a Government. This battle would occur in either the Kontum-Pleiku area or the area around Saigon. 1.3(a)(4)

[REDACTED] during indoctrination lectures given in November-December 1967, Colonel Thu said that the Saigon battle area (i. e., Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Phuoc Tuy, Bien Hoa, Tay Ninh and Gia Dinh provinces) would be an important battlefield because of the proximity of the supply route from Cambodia. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Thu went on to say that if the B3 Front were chosen, the Viet Cong would fight only in Kontum and Pleiku provinces because of the strong U. S. /Government of Vietnam forces in those areas and because the North Vietnamese High Command could easily support that area across the Laotian/Vietnamese border.) 1.3(a)(4)

[REDACTED] in order to carry out the new strategy, it was planned that all activities in the southern part of Laos would be increased so that most regular North Vietnamese Army units other than coastal defense units, anti-aircraft units and units guarding important installations, could infiltrate into South Vietnam. All forces would be used to attack U. S. troops and to lure them to the Khe Sanh area and away from the decisive battle areas. [REDACTED] although in the past, Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army troops had fought against U. S. troops, the new surprise strategy required them to avoid such combat and to try only to besiege and hold U. S. troops in defensive positions at their bases. 1.3(a)(4)

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According to [REDACTED] Ho Phuoc [REDACTED] the U.S. Government had requested the Government of Vietnam to accept a coalition government with the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam but that the Government of Vietnam had refused. The U.S., Phuoc said, wants to bring the war to an honorable end in 1968. It also wants to resolve the problem of the almost 1,000 pilots captured by North Vietnam. Both the U.S. and North Vietnam, Phuoc continued, realize that neither side can win the war and they, therefore, both want a coalition government as a means of ending the conflict.

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