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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Intelligence Information Cable

PRIORITY

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DIST 3 FEBRUARY 1968

COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI 3 FEBRUARY 1968

SUBJECT WINTER-SPRING CAMPAIGN ON THE FOURTH DAY OF TET OFFENSIVE

ACQ VIETNAM, SAIGON (3 FEBRUARY 1968)

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SOURCE

[Redacted Source Information]

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SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH THE SITUATION IN ALL FOUR CORPS AREAS WAS RELATIVELY QUIET ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THE VIET CONG (VC) TET OFFENSIVE, LARGE VC UNITS STILL REMAIN UNCOMMITTED AND THE VC COULD THUS RESUME LARGE-SCALE ACTION IF THEY SHOULD CHOOSE TO DO SO. PRISONER INTERROGATIONS SUGGEST THAT THE TET OFFENSIVE WAS A GO-FOR-BROKE OPERATION, WITH THE VC HOPING FOR VICTORY BUT FEW EXPECTING ONE. THE VC HAVE WON CERTAIN SUCCESSES--DESTRUCTION OF LARGE PARTS OF MANY CITIES, DISRUPTION OF NORMAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION, HORDES OF NEW REFUGEES, ETC. ON THE OTHER HAND THEY HAVE LOST EXTREMELY LARGE NUMBERS OF PERSONNEL AND NOWHERE HAS THE POPULACE RISEN UP TO JOIN THEM AS THEY EXPECTED OR, AT LEAST, AS THE VC

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LEADERS PROMISED THEIR MEN WOULD BE THE CASE. THE VC VERY PROBABLY WILL SOON LAUNCH HIS LONG-HERALDED OFFENSIVE NEAR THE DMZ BUT IT IS STILL PROBLEMATIC IF THEY WILL COMMIT OTHER REMAINING UNITS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO A RESUMPTION OF THE ATTACKS OF THE LAST FOUR DAYS. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH NOTHING LIKE A FINAL ASSESSMENT CAN YET BE MADE, SOMETHING TANGIBLE IS EMERGING IN THE QUIET AND EXHAUSTION WHICH, MOMENTARILY PERHAPS, HAVE REPLACED THE HECTIC ACTIVITY OF THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF THE TET OFFENSIVE. RELATIVE QUIET AND CONTROL HAVE BEEN RESTORED IN I, II, AND III CORPS AND THE SITUATION IS IMPROVING DESPITE RENEWED ENEMY ATTACKS IN IV CORPS. ON THE OTHER HAND, MAJOR ENEMY UNITS REMAIN UNCOMMITTED IN I, II, AND III CORPS; ACTION ON A SCALE SIMILAR TO THAT OF THE PAST THREE DAYS COULD RESUME IF THE ENEMY SO CHOSE: THE VC 9TH DIVISION COULD BE PUT INTO ACTION AGAINST THE SAIGON AREA; AND THE KHE SANH BOMB REMAINS UNEXPLODED.

2. THE KEY FACTOR IS, OF COURSE, ENEMY INTENTIONS. PRISONER INTERROGATIONS ARE BEGINNING TO COME IN AND RADIO HANOI AND LIBERATION RADIO CONTINUE THEIR MASSIVE BROADSIDES CLAIMING VICTORY AND REPEATING THE CALL FOR NEGOTIATIONS ON THE BASIS OF THE APPEALS OF SUCH PHANTOM ORGANIZATIONS AS THE "FRONT OF NATIONAL, DEMOCRATIC,

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AND PEACE ALLIANCE" OF HUE CITY. (TAKEN TOGETHER, THIS EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE ENEMY WENT FOR BROKE -- AND, SO FAR, HAS FAILED.) ALTHOUGH THE ENEMY STILL HAS UNCOMMITTED FORCES AND COULD GO FOR BROKE AGAIN IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT HE HAS SUFFERED GREAT LOSSES (12,704 KIA AND OVER 3,000 DETAINEES FROM 29 JANUARY TO 3 FEBRUARY), THAT HE CANNOT AGAIN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE TET HOLIDAY, AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) HAS NOT CRACKED AS HE APPARENTLY EXPECTED IT WOULD. ALTHOUGH THERE MAY HAVE BEEN SOME INDECISIVENESS AMONG TOP CIVILIAN LEADERS, ALTHOUGH THIEU SPOKE TO THE NATION SOMEWHAT LATE, ALTHOUGH SOME INTELLECTUALS WITHOUT A POLITICAL FOLLOWING MAY BE SPEAKING OF THE NEED FOR NEGOTIATIONS, THE FACT REMAINS THAT ARVN AND LOCAL SVN FORCES, INCLUDING RD CADRES, HAVE ACQUITTED THEMSELVES WELL.

3. VIET CONG (VC) EXPECTATIONS, AND SOME CLUE TO FUTURE INTENTIONS, CAN BE GLEANED FROM PRISONER INTERROGATIONS SUCH AS THE FOLLOWING. A PRISONER CAPTURED IN SAIGON SAID HE SURRENDERED AFTER FIGHTING NIGHT AND DAY, BEING PROMISED SUPPORT WHICH DID NOT COME, AND BEING REFUSED PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW. A PRISONER INVOLVED IN THE ATTACK ON THE U.S. EMBASSY HAS STATED THAT THE VC WERE TOLD TO HOLD THE EMBASSY AGAINST COUNTER-ATTACKS UNTIL VC REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVED

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ON 31 JANUARY. PRISONERS IN KONTUM AND PLEIKU STATE THAT THE ORDER WAS TO TAKE THE PROVINCE CAPITALS AND HOLD THEM FOR SEVEN DAYS. THE VC DEPUTY CHIEF FOR SECURITY IN AN GIANG PROVINCE, CAPTURED 31 JANUARY, STATES THAT WORD ON THE TET OFFENSIVE WAS GIVEN TWO WEEKS IN ADVANCE AT PROVINCE-LEVEL BRIEFINGS LASTING THREE DAYS AT WHICH IT WAS STATED THAT THE ATTACK WAS TO CREATE CONDITIONS WHICH WOULD BRING THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO NEGOTIATE IN ORDER TO PROCEED TO PEACE. THEY WERE TOLD THAT THE TIME WAS RIPE FOR AN UPRISING. IT WAS THE OPINION OF THIS PRISONER THAT THE VC WERE COMMITTING EVERYTHING IN A GO-FOR-BROKE ATTACK AND THAT WHILE MOST HOPED, FEW EXPECTED SUCCESS. NO PLANS FOR RETREAT WERE MADE LEST THIS HURT THE MORALE OF THE TROOPS. THERE WAS NO SAND TABLING OF THE OPERATION. AND THE LACK OF POPULAR SUPPORT IS, IN THIS PRISONER'S OPINION, HAVING A BAD EFFECT ON MORALE. A PRISONER IN PLEIKU HAD BEEN TOLD "TAKE PLEIKU OR DO NOT RETURN." NORTH VIETNAMESE (NVA) PRISONERS IN NHA TRANG STATE THAT THEY WERE TOLD THEY COULD TAKE NHA TRANG BECAUSE OF THE VC ORGANIZATION IN THE CITY. THE NVA OFFICERS DID NOT BELIEVE THIS BUT WENT ON WITH THE ATTACK IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THE NATION-WIDE EFFORT AND MAKE SUCCESS POSSIBLE ELSEWHERE. ONE MAN IN QUANG NAM "RALLIED" BECAUSE HE WAS THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF HIS PLATOON. A 15-YEAR OLD PRISONER IN CAN THO

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REPORTS THAT HE WAS PRESSED INTO SERVICE ONE MONTH AGO, WAS TOLD TO INFILTRATE CAN THO TO CELEBRATE TET, AND ONLY AFTER THEY WERE IN THE CITY WERE THE VC REASSEMBLED, ISSUED WEAPONS, AND TOLD OF THE ATTACK. VC RETREATING FROM SAIGON WERE REPORTED TO BE DEMORALIZED BUT UNDER COMPLETE CONTROL OF THEIR LEADERS.

4. UNDER THE HEADING OF VC SUCCESSES ONE CAN LIST SUCH FACTS AS THE DESTRUCTION OF LARGE PORTIONS OF HUE, BEN TRE, MY THO, AND OTHER CITIES. PEOPLE CAUGHT BETWEEN THE VC AND THE GVN FORCES, WHO HAVE BEEN HARD HIT IN MANY CASES, WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION TO THE CHARGES OF INDISCRIMINATE FIRING, ARE BITTER AGAINST BOTH SIDES. RUMORS HAVE BEEN FLYING -- AT FIRST RUMORS OF A COUP (KY ACTING AGAINST THIEU, BEACUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF THIEU FROM THE CAPITAL AT THE TIME OF THE ATTACK), RUMORS OF COALITION GOVERNMENT (INCLUDING U.S. SUPPORT FOR THIS GOVERNMENT AGAINST THE GVN, RUMORS FED BY LIBERATION RADIO PROPAGANDA), AND RUMORS OF DRASTIC SHAKE UP IN THE GVN AFTER ORDER IS REESTABLISHED. PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SURPRISED AT THE VC STRENGTH AND DISMAYED THAT THE GVN AND THE U.S. COULD LET SUCH A THING HAPPEN. THERE IS GENERAL FEAR THOUGH LITTLE PANIC. A FULL ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR ATTITUDES HAS NOT BEEN UNDERTAKEN, HOWEVER.

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5. BUT AGAINST THESE VC "SUCCESSSES" THE CARDINAL FACT REMAINS THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGN OF POPULAR INCLINATION TO SUPPORT THE VC. SO FAR, THE VC GOAL OF POLITICAL CHAOS HAS NOT BEEN ACHIEVED. THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, THE DESTRUCTION, AND THE CURTAILMENT OF DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES, HOWEVER, MAY FEED THE FLAMES OF SUCH CHAOS IF THE SITUATION PERSISTS OR, MORE FEASIBLY, IS REPEATED BY A RENEWAL OF ATTACKS.

6. WHILE THE ENEMY WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY SOON LAUNCH HIS LONG-HERALDED OFFENSIVE NEAR THE DMZ IT IS STILL PROBLEMATICAL WHETHER HE WILL COMMIT HIS REMAINING UNITS IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY IN FURTHER ALL-OUT ATTACKS. IN THE CASE OF THE REINFORCEMENTS PROMISED THE VC TROOPS ATTACKING SAIGON, IT APPEARS THAT THIS WAS CONDITIONAL UPON GREATER INITIAL SUCCESS THAN WAS ACTUALLY ACHIEVED AND ON A MUCH GREATER POLITICAL RESPONSIVENESS BY THE LOCAL POPULATION THAN HAS SO FAR BEEN EVIDENCED. THE VC MAY CHOOSE TO CUT THEIR LOSSES AT THIS STAGE AND REVERT TO THEIR TRADITIONAL HARASSING TACTICS WHILE ATTEMPTING ONCE AGAIN TO IMPROVE THEIR POLITICAL BASE IN THE CITIES.

7. ON THE OTHER HAND THE VC HAVE ALREADY MADE SUCH HEAVY

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PSYCHOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS OFFENSIVE AMONG  
THEIR OWN FORCES THAT THEY COULD BE LOATH TO ACCEPT THE EXISTING  
SITUATION BEFORE MAKING ONE MORE ALL OUT SMASH AT SAIGON.

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