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SUPPLEMENT 1 TO
B62 COMINT TECHNICAL REPORT 33-67
VC-Ø73
26 JULY 1968

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26 JULY 1968

SIGINT INDICATORS OF COMMUNIST TET OFFENSIVE, 1968

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SIGINT INDICATORS OF
COMMUNIST TET OFFENSIVE, 1968

I. INTRODUCTION

This report supplements B62 CTR 33-67, dated 1 November 1967, "SIGINT Indicators of Impending Attack" and contains a listing of indicators observed in South Vietnam prior to the TET offensive.

The TET offensive has been chosen as the subject of a separate compilation since it is generally considered to be the first coordinated offensive of this magnitude in South Vietnam. Information contained herein should provide assistance in rapidly detecting, evaluating, and reporting indicators of similar actions in the future since it increases the availability of documented indicators.

This report treats the same broad indicators as outlined in the basic CTR; however, in this compilation the indicators have been categorized somewhat differently for purposes of simplicity and clarity, since the number of individual indicators and volume of occurrences prior to TET was unprecedented.

II. GENERAL

The indicators in this listing are the same as those which might be expected in any military radio communications prior to the initiation of wide-spread hostilities.

The appearance of a single indicator certainly does not necessarily mean that a major offensive is imminent. While the appearance of this single indicator may be product reportable, and probably will be in South Vietnam with the prevailing situation, its value as an indicator of a major event must be evaluated in the context of the overall situation. The detection of a known valid indicator or a suspected one should promote the search for others, keeping in mind the current situation, possible collateral indicators, etc. This process will insure that all indicators are properly reported and evaluated. Frequently, the basic problem of SIGINT indicators is not the availability or even the acquisition of the indicator, but rather its recognition, followed by a perceptive evaluation and accurate reporting of the SIGINT fact in its proper intelligence context.

The indicators presented in Section III and documented in the Appendix, encompass only those noted in South Vietnam and contiguous border areas prior to the beginning of the TET offensive on 31 January 1968 (the date generally accepted as the beginning of the coordinated actions). In general, developments occurring in SIGINT subsequent to that date were either repetitive of those noted earlier or "after action" type and situations reports.

Note: For working purposes it is important that all users consider this indicator listing as illustrative and not exhaustive. In any developing situation other indicators may appear, however it is not possible or desirable to attempt to theorize all such possibilities. In such instances a thorough knowledge of the target, the attendant circumstances of the situation, current reporting requirements/techniques, and the ever present judgment factors are paramount.

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III. INDICATORS

The indicators of impending large scale and widespread offensives as noted in communications prior to TET have been categorized on a broad basis as follows:

1. Significant Unit Moves or Concentrations

This indicator occurs when enemy units are deployed, perhaps for long distances, and concentrated in proximity of targets of VC tactical interest. A knowledge of the nature of the target and or its defenses and "usual" enemy force disposition in the general area contributes significantly to the rapid detection of additional enemy forces aligned against the target. In South Vietnam the likely methods of detecting significant unit moves or concentrations are through ARDF or message texts.

2. Tactical Operations Planning

This category of indicators occurs during the planning phase(s) of an impending operation and may provide the most definitive evidence of enemy intentions. Generally such an indicator will be available only through message texts. Such message texts, if noted in a short time span and involving a large number of units, will yield substantial data on enemy intentions.

Planning messages may be available over a several day period, necessitating a continuing review and integration of such data and will require a thorough knowledge of recent intelligence developments, particularly as reflected in SIGINT.

3. Increased Reconnaissance Operations

Information within this category will also be detected through message texts (or perhaps movement of reconnaissance units). Again detection is contingent upon awareness of SIGINT over a period of several days. Some considerations in measuring this as a valid indicator in a given instance are the volume of such reports, the number of units involved, whether a given unit has increased or focused its area of interest, etc. The necessity of detecting and reporting individual messages within this category to insure that all such data is available to SIGINT customer is apparent.

4. Messages Dealing With Troop Indoctrination/Internal Propaganda

These messages are designed to instill confidence in subordinates. Data of this nature is not usually conclusive in itself; however, it is frequently included in planning messages. Use of indoctrination type messages as a valid indicator is dependent on accruing a volume of such messages involving at least several units, preferable over a period of several days.

5. Modification of Command Relationships

Anomalies falling into this category may be manifested in several ways, but they are usually revealed by the addition of units or stations, e.g., various types of forward element activations, unit re-subordinations, or skip echelon working. As noted in the Appendix both of the former examples were noted prior to TET. This category of indicators has particular value in conjunction with those of the "Significant Unit Moves/Concentrations" above.

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SUPPLEMENT 16. Deviations from Established or Predictable Communications Patterns/Norms

Indicators falling into this category probably are more readily detectable by SIGINT analysts since they are a technical type and from a technical view point their effect is pronounced and usually noted promptly. This category, in conjunction with such other indicators as may be present, frequently provide initial clues as to the scope of an impending action in the absence of a substantial number of tactical planning messages. When noted with other indicators, technical type indicators may suggest the scope of intended action when one or more appears on various radio groups serving several units.

The above six categories overlap in some instances; consequently the breakdown is, to a certain degree, arbitrary. Additionally, the indicators could be reflected in various ways in SIGINT, some of which probably were not noted prior to TET. However, the ways in which they were observed are believed representative.

In the Appendix each indicator is listed according to the above categories. The date(s) of appearance as well as the units involved are recorded when possible; the manner in which the indicator was detected and a section devoted to clarifying remarks or gisted textual references are included. This listing is perforce-based almost entirely on reflections noted in Morse communications; however, the same indicators would likely appear on voice entities in one form or another. The manner in which the indicators were detected is abbreviated as follows:

MSG - Message texts, enciphered or plain

ARDF - Airborne Reconnaissance Direction Finding

T/A - Traffic Analysis

C/A - Cryptanalysis

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| <u>INDICATOR</u> | <u>DATE</u> | <u>UNIT(S)</u> | <u>DETECTED BY</u> | <u>REMARKS OR GENERAL CONTENT</u> |
|--|-------------|--|--------------------|---|
| 1. <u>Significant Unit Disposition</u> | | | | |
| a. Long Distance Moves | 24 Jan | MIS, Hqs, NVA 1st DIV | MSG | Unit stated it was beginning a six-day move accompanied by artillery. |
| | 26 Jan | MI Subordinate of NVA 1st DIV | ARDF | Approximate 34 kms move from Cambodia into Western Kontum Province. |
| | 10-12 Jan | Viet Cong 5th DIV Elements | ARDF | 1. Control of group believed to serve Hq, 5th DIV Element located in Phuoc Long-Long Khanh Province area; approximately 50 kms south of 31 Dec'67 position. |
| | " | " | " | 2. Station associated with 88th Regt. relocated 90 kms southwest of Dec'67 location. |
| | " | " | " | 3. Station of 275th Regt. was located 40 kms from 23 Dec'67 position. |
| b. Concentration of Units | 16 Jan | B3 Front Authority and NVA 1st DIV Element | ARDF | Indications of concentration in the Cambodia/Kontum border area. |
| | From Oct'67 | NVA Units as follows: 325C DIV 304 DIV Hqs - Laos Subordinate of DMZ Front | Various | General build-up in Khe Sanh DMZ areas. |
| | Mid-Nov'67 | NVA 6th Regt. Hq, MR TTH Hue Municipal Unit | Various | Concentration in Hue Area. |
| | 29 Jan | MIS, Hq NVA 1st DIV | ARDF | All four subordinates located in Western Kontum Province - Cambodian border areas. |

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| | 30 Jan | 1. All major elements of NVA 2nd DIV | ARDF Generally | |
| | | 2. Hq, MR 5 Forward Tactical Element | | |
| | | 3. Hq, Rear Services Group 44 and three subordinates | | |
| | | 4. The tentative Da Nang Municipal Unit. | | |
| | 31 Jan | B3 Front Elements and unidentified elements | | Three separate groupings in Darlac Province generally around Ban Me Thuot. |
| | | | | 1. Five U/I VC Terminals. |
| | | | | 2. Eight radio terminals associated with B3 Front. |
| | | | | 3. A number of U/I stations associated with B3 Front. |
| 2. | <u>Tactical Operations Planning</u> | | | |
| a. | Planning Messages | | | |
| | 16 Jan | B3 Front Authority | MSG | Discussed a plan for simultaneous attack on Dak To, Pleiku City, western Pleiku Province area and Phu Bon-Darlac Province area. |
| | + 24 Jan | to NVA 1st DIV | | |
| | 24 Jan | B3 Front Authority | MSG | "Guarantee night of 25 January." |
| | 26-27 Jan | MIS, NVA 1st DIV to MI subordinate | MSG | Directive to report plan for implementa- tion immediately and carry out not later than 28 Jan and end it by 2 Feb. |
| | 27 Jan | NVA 1st DIV to Hq B3 Front | MSG | "We crossed rivers and are making combat readiness preparations and are preparing dry provisions so we can move the troops in on 28 Jan." |

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| | 29 Jan | Probable Hq, B3 Front authority to probable Hq, NVA 1st DIV | MSG | Detailed operations plan with troop indoctrination undertones. |
| b. "N-Day" References (Equivalent of D-Day) | Beginning 16 Jan (Numerous) | Probable Hq, NVA B3 Front authority exchange with a NVA 1st DIV element | MSG | Messages were planning in nature, generally and ambitious in scope, e.g., "Liberate Pleiku" and impose certain deadlines, e.g., plan should be ready by 26 Jan at 0600. |
| | 24 Jan | Hq, Group 44 to 368B Arty Regt | MSG | Instructions to use only certain practices in passing N-Day messages. Scope of impending N-Day action suggested by directive to ignore single vehicle, from 0000 hours until "C2" opened fire. |
| | 27 Jan | U/I Group in Quang Nam Province of MR 5 | MSG | Directive to concentrate on N-Day - no longer necessary to strike 51st Regt, (ARVN). Change in previous plans also significant as indicator. |
| | 28 Jan | MI elements of NVA 1st DIV | MSG | Contained instructions to attack ASAP but not later than 30 Jan. |
| c. Weapons Re-Supply | 26 Jan | B3 Front Authority to NVA 1st DIV element | MSG | Evidence of weapons resupply - Type resupply, recoilless rifles, etc, particularly significant when fire-power of weapons mentioned is considered. |
| d. Evidence of Preparations for Prolonged Tactical Field Operations | 29 Jan | MIS, NVA 1st DIV to a subordinate | MSG | In connection with operations plan "Mobilize men to stretch out our supply." |
| 3. <u>Increased Reconnaissance Operations</u> | Frequent, Particularly 19-23 Jan | Particularly MIS and MI Elements of MR 1 | MSG | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased messages dealing with Allied defenses and unit posture. 2. Volume of such reports should be gauged carefully as aid in detecting plans for large scale offensive. |

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| 4. | <u>Messages Dealing with Troop Indoctrination</u> | Several, Example: 28 Jan | Probably between Hq, B3 Front Authority and 1st DIV element operating in western Pleiku Province-Cambodian Border area. | | This message instructed element to fully indoctrinate personnel on combat plan and to be resourceful and stated that situation provided opportunity to mold and test character. |
| | | | | | Such messages may be compared to preliminary pep talks and a general increase involving a substantial number of units may be particularly significant when noted in a short time span. |
| 5. | <u>Modification of Command Relationships Evidenced By:</u> | | | | |
| | a. Activation of Forward Elements | Beginning 31 Dec'67 | Forward Element of NVA 2nd DIV | T/A | 1. Forward element exercised some or complete control over regiments. 2. Associated movements might also be detectable in some cases. |
| | b. Resubordination | 29 Jan | NVA 29th Regt. | T/A | Ceased communications with Hq, 325C DIV and established communications with Hq, DMZ - also relocated to Hue area from Khe Sanh area. |
| 6. | <u>Deviations from Established or Predictable Communications Patterns/Norms</u> | | | | |
| | a. Unusual Liaison Communications | Jan | See Remarks | T/A | Communications noted between U/I Front and Hq, MR 5 and B3 Front. |
| | b. Communications Alert | 27 Jan | Hq, MR 5 Main Force Unit Control (See Remarks) | MSG T/A | Instructions to following units to commence additional schedules on 29 Jan: Hq, NVA 2nd and 3rd DIVs, 2nd DIV Forward Element, 21st Regt., Hq, Rear Services Group 44. |

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| c. Tactical SOI Plan | 30 Jan | Hq, NVA 2nd DIV | T/A | Frequently noted prior to attack. Changed to three set rota from basic system; basic system used on watch net with fixed frequencies. Tactical SOI replaced normal traffic passing links. Simplified procedure (simplex C/SS) using 1-10 Jan C/SS as 10-day rota - RX C/SS used for several days, then TX C/SS. |
| | Jan | Hq, NVA 325C DIV to 3 Regiments | T/A | |
| | 28 Jan | Hq, MR TTH Forward Element to All regimental subordinates | | |
| d. <u>Strict Communications Procedures</u> | 23 Jan | Hq, MR 5 Main Force Unit Control to Hq, 21st Regiment, 2nd DIV | MSG | Directed to follow "Stipulated communications" plans. Internal addresses indicate this message received wide dissemination. |
| e. <u>Re-Activation of Communications Facilities</u> | By 19 Jan | VC 9th DIV | T/A | 1. Renewed activity with three regiments' (communications had been inactive since Nov'67). 2. MI elements of 9th DIV also reappeared with reports on Allied activity. |
| | 23 Jan | U/I Front in contact with Hq, VC 5th and 9th DIVs | T/A | |
| f. <u>Increased Message Volumes</u> | Mid-Jan | MAS COSVN with Hqs. MRs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, and NVA B3 Front | T/A | A good indicator but only in conjunction with others. For a definitive treatment on message volume reporting see B6-218, 202136Z June 1968. |
| g. <u>Increased Use of Low-Grade Crypt Systems</u> | Jan | | C/A MSG Counts | Increased usage was widespread. |
| h. <u>Introduction of Low-Grade Crypt Systems</u> | | | | |

16 Jan

Associated NVA B3 Front,
Pleiku ProvinceEO 3.3(h) (2)
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| 05 Jan | Hq, MR 5 - Hq NVA 2nd DIV |
| 06 Jan | Hq, MR 5 - Hq NVA 2nd DIV |
| 04 Jan | U/I Military Elements, MR 10 |
| 11 Jan | Hq, Group 44, Quang Nam Province |
| 11 Jan | NVA 66th Regt and Subs, Kontum Province |
| 22 Jan | NVA 33rd Regt, Darlac Province |
| 17 Dec '67 | Poss VC 5th DIV Assoc. |
| 16 Jan | VC 274th and 275th Regts. |
| 30 Dec '67 | U/I MR 5, Kontum Province Area |
| 09 Jan | U/I MR 5, Kontum Province Area |
| 16 Jan | Prob Hq, NVA B3 Front Authority and Prob Element of Hq, NVA 1st DIV |
| 19 Dec '67 | U/I MR 5, Pleiku Province Area |
| 14 Jan | U/I Military, Pleiku Province Area |
| 10 Jan | Group 69 (COSVN Artillery Command) |
| 30 Jan | U/I Military, Pleiku Province Area |
| 16 Dec '67 | Hq, Rear Services Group 44 |
| 05 Jan | U/I Military, Binh Long Province area, MR 10 |

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