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MCO

MEMORANDUM

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

The Situation in Vietnam

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15 February 1968

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HIGHLIGHTS

The military situation remains quiet throughout South Vietnam, although there continue to be indications of possible offensive enemy moves in the Demilitarized Zone and against several major cities. Meanwhile, Hanoi continues to pressure the US for a bombing halt.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: The military situation in South Vietnam is summarized (Paras. 1-2) Sporadic artillery, rocket, and mortar fire was directed at the Khe Sanh strongpoint as enemy military units maneuvered throughout the area (Paras. 3-4). The Communists have opened Route 9 through Laos to the South Vietnam border, and heavy traffic has been noted moving eastward (Paras. 5-6). Two regiments of the North Vietnamese 324B Division are moving closer to Quang Tri city, possible signaling the beginning of large-scale offensives in the coastal area of southeastern Quang Tri Province (Paras. 7-14). Allied forces are concentrating heavy bombing and firepower on the stubborn pocket of Communist resistance in the Citadel as Hue city officials face problems of refugees, looting, and lack of administrative and security forces (Paras. 15-17). There are indications that the Viet Cong 9th Division may be moving men and supplies toward Saigon and further plans of the North Vietnamese 7th Division have been revealed in a captured document (Paras. 18-21). Viet Cong forces are taking steps to assert their control in a number of rural areas in the delta (Paras. 22-25).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Vice President Ky intends either to recommend the dissolution of the emergency task force or to resign as its chairman (Paras. 1-2). Foreign Minister Do takes a gloomy view of the situation (Para. 3). Militant Buddhist Thich Thien Minh has allegedly called for "mutual concessions" by both sides in the war (Paras. 4-5).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: The two regiments of the North Vietnamese Army 316th Division may be leaving the country (Paras. 1-4). A new type of rocket may be en route to Communist forces in northern South Vietnam. (Paras. 5-10)

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

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi is stepping up the pressure for a bombing halt and for moving the war to a "fight-talk" stage (Paras. 1-5). AFP correspondents in Hanoi have taken note of North Vietnam's current negotiation tactics (Paras. 6-7). Hanoi has denied that the US sent an envoy to North Vietnam (Para. 8). Viet Cong spokesmen continue to publicize their plans for a future coalition government (Paras. 9-13).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. There is more evidence that the Communists intend to mount sustained military operations in the Khe Sanh area. [redacted] they have opened Route 9 in Laos as far as the Vietnam border. While the military situation in the overall Khe Sanh/Demilitarized Zone area remained relatively quiet on 15 February, major elements of North Vietnam's 324 "B" Division continued their ominous encroachment upon Quang Tri city.

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2. No significant new Communist initiatives were reported on 15 February in II, III, or IV Corps. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Viet Cong 9th Division may be moving personnel and supplies toward Saigon.

Khe Sanh

3. The US Marine combat base at Khe Sanh came under sporadic artillery, rocket, and mortar fire on 15 February, but no significant North Vietnamese ground assaults were reported.

4. The communications of North Vietnamese artillery units in the Khe Sanh area reflect intensive reconnaissance of allied activity, target coordinates, and requests for artillery bombardment results. [redacted]

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[redacted] indicate that some 55 targets have been surveyed for possible registration fire.

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5. [REDACTED]

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the Communists, for the first time since 1965, have succeeded in reopening Laotian Route 9 all the way to the Quang Tri Province border. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a serviceable route with evidence of medium to heavy usage as far eastward as Ban Houei Sane, the abandoned Laotian Army outpost just southwest of the Communist-occupied Lang Vei Special Forces camp.

6. The opening of this segment of Route 9 will facilitate the resupply and reinforcement of North Vietnamese Army forces in the Khe Sanh area. It could also expedite the introduction of tanks and other armored vehicles--such as those employed at Lang Vei on 6 February--throughout the Khe Sanh area.

Quang Tri City

7. There is continued evidence [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] that at least two regiments of the North Vietnam's 324 "B" Division are deploying to positions near Quang Tri city.

8. On 13 February, the headquarters element and two subordinate battalions of North Vietnam's 803rd Regiment were located less than seven miles north of Quang Tri city. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] at least one of the battalions would continue to move south to the immediate area of Quang Tri city.

9. Since 31 January, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] North Vietnam's 812th Regiment have reflected sharply intensified reconnaissance activities in the Quang Tri city area and southward to Phuong Dien. Although the bulk of the regiment is believed to be deployed in Base Area 101 southwest of Quang Tri city, a terminal serving its headquarters element was identified on 13 February some eight miles northeast of the capital city.

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10. The accelerated reconnaissance activity by the 812th Regiment, the possible relocation of its headquarters element, and the southward deployment of the 803rd Regiment, all portend renewed enemy offensive activity in the vicinity of Quang Tri city. In addition to the provincial capital itself, probable targets include the nearby urban areas of Phuong Dien, Hai Lang, and La Vang, as well as allied installations.

11. There were earlier indications that elements of the 324 "B" Division's remaining subordinate--the 90th Regiment--had joined the 803rd Regiment in a move southward toward Quang Tri city. Although this relocation has not been confirmed, the commitment of the 90th Regiment to this area would increase the over-all threat.

12. Morale in Quang Tri city continues to deteriorate [REDACTED]. In addition to the widespread fear of renewed enemy attacks, many residents are concerned over the situation in Hue, where the members of many families have been stuck since the Tet holidays. Most of the news reaching Quang Tri is badly distorted by Viet Cong propaganda claims; reportedly there are no radiobroadcasts available except Radio Hanoi and Radio Peking. The Vietnamese Information Service has given out very little news thus far during the crisis.

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13. The recent visit of two senior South Vietnamese military officers, I Corps Commander Lam and 1st Division Commander Truong, to Quang Tri city, reportedly did little to boost the morale and confidence of local provincial authorities. Although both officers advocated a "cautious aggressiveness" on the part of South Vietnamese forces, this was offset by Lam's request to US officials for a special airlift of his family out of the provincial capital. The province chief had earlier made a similar request. Both requests were granted.

14. Both Lam and Truong authorized the issue of weapons to all provincial officials, and the two specifically told the sector staff to expect indiscriminate shelling and rocketing of Quang Tri city along with enemy air and armor attacks.

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Hue

15. A stubborn force of Communist troops dug in at the Citadel continued again on 15 February to resist US and South Vietnamese efforts to drive them out. The allied effort has been increased with the use of 750-pound bombs and concentrated fire from US naval guns and land-based artillery.

16. Allied forces attempting to restore order to the city have been confronted with several major problems. At least 24,000 refugees are clogging the limited facilities at the university and at locations elsewhere. Looting within the city is also continuing. The Communist forces reportedly did little looting and even failed to take advantage of opportunities to seize documents and equipment in the early days of the fighting.

17. There is also a bad shortage of South Vietnamese administrative personnel to renew government operations. Apparently, many were killed in the fighting, and the political allegiance of others is reportedly questionable. US forces have been asked to provide security for the city, and a small force will probably augment South Vietnamese defense forces until the over-all situation has improved.

Saigon and III Corps

18. Three Communists captured during the past few days about ten miles north of Saigon state that they are members of the 9th Viet Cong Division and that they have been moving supplies south. [redacted]

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[redacted] the movement of men and supplies southward in Binh Duong Province in recent days. If the 9th Division is receiving supplies from the north, a second or follow-up attack on Saigon, reported by numerous prisoners, becomes more likely.

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20. Allied operations on the outskirts of Saigon have undoubtedly upset some of the enemy's plans for this area. US and South Vietnamese forces have reported sharp battles with elements of all three regiments of the 9th Division to the north and west of the capital during the past several days. In new skirmishes from two to 25 miles north of Saigon, eight Americans were killed on 14-15 February and nearly 70 wounded. Over 300 Viet Cong were claimed killed, mostly by artillery and air strikes.

21. Farther west in III Corps, there are continuing indications that the North Vietnamese 7th Division is being employed to harass allied positions on Saigon's outer periphery. A notebook captured recently in northern Binh Duong Province reveals that certain elements of the 7th Division have been ordered to break down into "highly mobile" small units and attack US 1st Division forces. An entry dated 16 January suggests that cadre in the division were told that they were to participate in a phase of combat operations which would last from five to six months.

IV Corps

22. Scattered reports are now coming in on the situation in the countryside in the Mekong Delta. Although it is too early for an over-all judgment about security conditions, it is clear that the Viet Cong have taken active steps to assert their control in a number of rural areas.

23. [redacted] for example, that one district in Sa Dec Province is "entirely controlled" by the Communists, with the exception of the district town and a handful of outposts. The South Vietnamese Army units in the province appear to be dug-in in defensive positions and unwilling to initiate offensive operations. Similar conditions appear to exist in several other provinces.

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24. In Vinh Long, continuing enemy mortar attacks on the provincial capital and allied bombing runs on the outskirts of the city have kept provincial officials off balance and prevented a quick reassertion of government authority. In Phong Dinh Province, the Viet Cong have reportedly stepped up recruitment in the countryside in the wake of their attacks on the cities. Reports from South Vietnamese officials indicate that the Viet Cong in two districts of the province are attempting to recruit or force arms on all males between 15 and 40 years of age.

25. In several other provinces there have been scattered reports of Communist attempts to set up new political and administrative organizations, but the extent of this effort is not known.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Vice President Ky intends either to recommend that the emergency task force be dissolved or to resign as its chairman. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] he would advise President Thieu to disband the task force because 1) it has accomplished its short-term objectives of establishing basic policies and procedures for relief work and should therefore turn its work over to the ministries directly concerned; 2) its work is hampered now, and will be more and more in the future, because it has no legal status and therefore no means of assuring that its plans are carried out; and 3) most important, Ky is coming under increasing criticism for allegedly attempting to augment his personal power through his task force chairmanship. Ky himself told an American observer that he intends to resign as chairman for much the same reasons, but did not mention dissolution of the task force.

2. Ky's comments [REDACTED] however, indicate that he is willing, and quite prepared, to assume greater power as long as Thieu specifically delegates it to him and makes it clear to all concerned that Ky is being given the power, not usurping it. Ky is concerned with the government's sluggish approach to current problems and believes that something must be done to give the government more effective leadership. He apparently believes that he can contribute something but does not want to take any unconstitutional steps to increase his own power. He does not believe that now is the time for any radical changes in the government.

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Tran Van Do's Views

3. Foreign Minister Do is taking a gloomy view of the current situation. He recently told a foreign observer that the Viet Cong offensive had demonstrated the Communists will retain the initiative as long as the allies' objectives and methods remain limited. He believes that the Viet Cong will attack again, but probably with less intensity. He foresees increased use of terrorist actions which the Communists are capable of launching anywhere anytime. Do claimed that, although the Viet Cong did not succeed in generating a great deal of popular support, they have instilled more fear in the people than ever before. He believes that the lack of a popular uprising will not deter the Communists from continuing their attempts to destroy the government by exposing its fragility and creating conditions of uncertainty and despair.

Thich Thien Minh Interview

4. A Japanese newspaper, claiming an exclusive interview with militant Buddhist Thich Thien Minh, reported on 14 February that Minh had called for "mutual concessions by the United States and its opponent in the war." The article did not provide elaboration on these "concessions." Minh was also quoted as saying that "many South Vietnamese intellectuals and farmers" are siding with the National Liberation Front, even though they are not Communists, because they are dissatisfied with the Saigon government.

5. Minh's statements, if quoted correctly, could indicate that the militants may launch a new "peace offensive" calling for immediate negotiations to end the war. The statements are particularly notable because the militant hierarchy has specifically refrained from issuing any formal denunciation of the Viet Cong Tet offensive. Other important groups have denounced the attacks.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

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1. Recent anomalies [redacted]

[redacted] of the 316th North Vietnamese Army Division may indicate that one or both of the two regiments, currently subordinate to it, may be leaving the country. [redacted]

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3. There are indications that yet another regiment from this division may have moved to the Demilitarized Zone area early this year. Analysis of North Vietnamese Army postal addresses and deliveries indicate a battalion-level subordinate of the 316th may have been in southern North Vietnam in December. In addition, [redacted]

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[redacted] referred to a North Vietnamese who was wounded during an attack on Cam Lo near the Demilitarized Zone. [redacted] the soldier was from the 98th Regiment, a subordinate of the 316th Division.

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4. The movement of major elements of the 324B Division south to the Quang Tri city area has left a void in northeastern Quang Tri Province which might be partially filled by the 98th Regiment.

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New Communist Rocket?

5. A new type of rocket may be en route to Communist forces in northern South Vietnam, [REDACTED]

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6. On 13 February an unidentified North Vietnamese rear services unit reported that ammunition of an unknown type would be sent to entities tentatively identified as the 559th Transportation Group, an infiltration headquarters located west of Khe Sanh in Laos, and to enemy units in the vicinity of the Demilitarized Zone. The rounds were designated "D74," and the combined weight of one round and its shipping case was said to be about 162 pounds.

7. Neither the designator nor the weight of this ammunition corresponds directly with any mortar, artillery, or rocket rounds known to be produced by any Communist state. The use of the letter designator, however, suggests that the type of weapon involved is a rocket. If so, it may be a heavier rocket than any currently employed by enemy units in South Vietnam.

8. The Communist rocket which comes closest to the weight of the weapon described [REDACTED] is the Soviet 115-mm. round. This weapon is estimated to weigh about 125 pounds and in a shipping case could come close to the 162-pound figure mentioned in the report.

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9. The 115-mm. rocket is a relatively new Soviet weapon which is fired from a multiple launcher mounted on a truck. It is the first Russian artillery rocket which is spin-stabilized, and this feature makes it perhaps the most accurate weapon of this type in the Soviet inventory. The truck which carries the 115-mm. launcher is lighter than the Soviet PT-76 tank which has already been employed near Khe Sanh and could be deployed from Laos to strike allied positions in the western Demilitarized Zone area.

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10. Another possibility would be some modification of the 122-mm. rocket which is widely used in South Vietnam. MACV has reported that on 11 February the Bien Hoa Air Base was attacked by 122-mm. rocket fire from distances exceeding the known capabilities of this weapon. It was deduced that the Communists might be employing some type of "booster" to extend its range. It is possible that a booster would raise the combined weight of this 102-pound rocket round and its shipping case to the 162-pound figure mentioned [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. In the wake of the Tet offensive, Hanoi is stepping up pressure for a bombing halt and for moving the war to a "fight-talk" stage.

2. In addition to earlier efforts to publicize its more "forthcoming" position on talks with the US, Hanoi apparently has taken a wide-ranging series of diplomatic moves to increase international pressure on the US to end the bombing and to begin negotiations. The North Vietnamese say they will respond to a bombing halt by beginning talks, but they remain adamant in refusing any prior gesture of restraint.

3. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the Vietnamese Communists are ready to modify their long-standing terms for a settlement of the war. The evidence strongly suggests that they expect post-bombing talks to be used chiefly to increase pressures on the US to compromise, and that the fighting in the South would continue. These are tactics party leaders have long said they would use at some stage in the struggle.

4. Hanoi has been in touch with a number of Western governments recently to push its case and to underscore its readiness to talk if the US stops the bombings. The Italian Foreign Ministry announced on 14 February that North Vietnamese representatives had contacted Rome early this month with such a message. [redacted]

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[redacted] The Swiss Government announced on 15 February that its ambassador in Peking was en route to Hanoi to offer his country's good offices for a peaceful settlement. Although press reports say this was entirely a Swiss initiative, Hanoi doubtless chose the time by giving permission for the visit.

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5. North Vietnam doubtless has taken similar initiatives with other non-Communist countries. Indian officials were approached in both Hanoi and New Delhi earlier this month with the message that North Vietnam "sincerely wants to start negotiations." UN Secretary General Thant, who met with the North Vietnamese mission chief in Paris on 14 February, probably received the same kind of response to his peace overtures.

French Press Report from Hanoi

6. AFP correspondents in Hanoi took note of North Vietnam's current tactics on 14 February. If their story was not actually inspired by the North Vietnamese, they probably approved of its contents. The story says that the Communists are trying to demonstrate simultaneously their military strength and their desire for a peaceful settlement. The story claims the Communists are "very satisfied" with the results of the offensive in the South, but the Communists stress that the offensive is not over yet. The story implies that new attacks are likely if the US fails to stop the bombing and begin negotiations.

7. The story stresses the moves made by Hanoi to make its position more forthcoming and to meet US conditions for prompt and meaningful discussions. It concludes, however, that Hanoi does not intend to compromise on its demand for an unconditional bombing halt. If Washington insists on any form of reciprocity, even the "modified" version of President Johnson's San Antonio formula, the war will continue.

Hanoi Denies US Sent Envoy

8. Another AFP press item broadcast by Paris on 15 February says that an "informed North Vietnamese source" in Hanoi has "categorically denied" reports that the US sent a special envoy to North Vietnam to explore prospects for peace. The story notes that Canadian ICC Commissioner Ormond Dier had been in Hanoi recently, but that he was not acting for the US.

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Viet Cong Plans for Coalition Government

9. Viet Cong spokesmen continue to publicize to selected audiences their plans for a future coalition government. Radio Havana on 15 February quoted Nguyen Van Tien, the Liberation Front representative in Hanoi, as saying that the "future coalition government" which the Front was proposing was to be composed "of people who contributed to the liberation of the South by participating in the revolutionary struggle," i.e., those who cooperated with the Liberation Front.

10. Although the circumstances under which Tien made his remarks are unclear, the broadcast said he was denying Western press speculation that the Front hoped to be invited to form a coalition with the South Vietnamese Government. The Front's coalition, said Tien, would be one in which the Liberation Front would be "the nucleus with other revolutionary forces" and one in which the Front would have the "initiative."

11. Earlier last week, Nguyen Van Hieu, the Front representative in Phnom Penh, discussed Front plans for a coalition government in much the same terms with selected pro-Communist journalists and neutral ambassadors in the Cambodian capital. Neither spokesman indicated any sense of urgency. They implied that it would evolve gradually after discussions with various new revolutionary alliances which the Communists claim are springing up all over South Vietnam in the wake of the Tet offensive.

12. At home, the Front continues to try to promote such groups and to make them appear believable and impressive. A new organization in the northern province of Thua Thien was announced on Liberation radio on 15 February. The broadcast said that the previously announced "peace alliance" in this area had met with other "revolutionary forces," described only as representatives of "uprising committees of three districts in the city of Hue and six of the rural districts of Thua Thien, to form a "provisional revolutionary administration" committee for the Thua-

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Thien-Hue area. The new committee was to assume several quasi-governmental responsibilities, but its main purpose appears to be to keep the South Vietnamese Government off balance.

13. The announcement surfaced two new personalities in the new provincial committee. Le Van Hoa, the already announced chairman of the peace alliance in the area, turned up as the new committee's chairman. His two deputies, however, are not known to have been affiliated with the Communist or other radical organizations in this area before. They are Madame Nguyen Dinh Chi, a former school principal in Hue, and Hoang Le, a labor organizer.

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