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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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Information as of 1200
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HIGHLIGHTS

There has been an easing of enemy pressure around cities and towns in some areas, but new fighting has broken out in the delta.

I. Military Developments in South Vietnam:
Fighting continues in areas near Saigon and in the Mekong Delta (Paras. 1-3). The situation in the four corps areas is summarized (Paras. 4-15).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Internal bickering and red tape appears to be hampering the efficient operation of the task force set up to handle civilian problems (Paras. 1-3). The militant Buddhists have sent Ambassador Bunker an insulting letter accusing the US of firing indiscriminantly on the An Quang Pagoda (Paras. 4-6).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
The North Vietnamese moved their IL-28 bombers from Phuc Yen Airfield to Gia Lam Airfield and orbit them near the DRV/Chinese border to avoid damage from US air strikes (Para. 1). Additional transport aircraft have been detected making flights to Vinh and could have gone on into South Vietnam (Para. 2).

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

V. Communist Political Developments: Liberation Front officials abroad continue to maximize their publicity opportunities. The Front man in Phnom Penh discusses a possible coalition government (Paras. 1-3). In Djakarta, Communist spokesmen emphasize the political successes of the Tet offensive (Paras. 4-5). The Front man in Hanoi endorses Trinh's will-talk offer (Para. 6). Foreign Communist support (Para. 7).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. There has been an easing of enemy pressure around cities and towns in some areas of the country during the weekend, although the delta has been the scene of new attacks. Elements of the Communist forces concentrated south of Da Nang appear to be withdrawing to the southwest, but indications of imminent enemy activity near Dak To continue. The situation at Khe Sanh, Hue, and Da Lat has undergone no significant change in the past 48 hours.

2. There are persistent low-level reports of Viet Cong intentions to launch "large-scale attacks" against Saigon some time before 13 February. Some of these reports allege that elements of the Viet Cong 5th and 9th divisions or the NVA 7th Division--located north of the capital within striking distance--will be engaged in or support such attacks.

3. Bien Hoa Air Base was the target of a 122-mm. rocket attack on the night of 10 February, in which one American was killed, 60 wounded, and 22 aircraft were destroyed or damaged. The same evening, a US battalion had a sharp engagement with a Communist force near Tan Son Nhut Air Base which resulted in 165 enemy killed. A fire started by Communist rockets in that area resulted in the explosion of a bunker containing 2,000 rounds of 105-mm. ammunition. In the delta the Communists attacked the capitals of Bac Lieu and Kien Giang provinces. The threat of new activity in Kien Phong and Phong Dinh provinces has increased.

I Corps

4. Khe Sanh received sporadic mortar attacks throughout 10 February and a heavy mortar and rocket barrage around noon on 11 February, but shelling had become sporadic by early afternoon. The Lao battalion in the area is being evacuated to Da Nang, and preparations are being made to ferry it back to Laos.

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5. [REDACTED] has reflected the shipment of large quantities of heavy caliber ammunition--up to 152-mm.--to points just north of the DMZ within the past week. [REDACTED] 18 truckloads of 130-mm. ammunition were being delivered on 8 February. There are also indications in [REDACTED] that at least one battalion of the North Vietnamese 813th Regiment is making attack preparations in coastal Quang Tri Province. Messages of 11 February suggest that the 1st Battalion of the regiment may be preparing to cross the Cua Viet River into Trieu Phong District, where other enemy units have been active.

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6. In Hue, newly reinforced South Vietnamese troops are continuing their efforts to dislodge enemy forces from the citadel area. The Communists still hold the Imperial Palace, a portion along the citadel's southwest wall, and a section immediately east of the citadel. Snipers are still prevalent throughout the city. South of the Perfume River, where US Marines had gained control earlier, widespread looting is becoming a major problem.

II Corps

7. There have been no major changes in the situation throughout II Corps, despite a continued threat to the Dak To area. In Da Lat the Communists still control a hamlet on the western outskirts of the city. In Darlac Province, elements of the NVA 33rd Regiment are still believed to be located about 20 kilometers south-east of Ban Me Thuot.

Saigon and III Corps

8. In addition to the major skirmish north-north-west of Saigon and the harassment at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, sporadic small-scale fire fights persisted in the Cholon section of the capital where ARVN troops are still engaged in clearing efforts.

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9. Preliminary interrogation of a field commander and political officer from a Viet Cong unit which participated in the recent attacks on Saigon has revealed additional information on enemy plans and deployments in the capital area. According to the prisoners, the main mission of their two-company strike force was to seize and hold Saigon-Cholon's Chi Hoa prison, regardless of the cost. They were absolutely forbidden to retreat and were told they would be executed if they did. The attack on the prison failed. The field commander maintained that a total of 30 battalions were in or near Saigon, with one to two divisions in reserve and artillery units "to come later." The political officer claimed that there were some 25 battalions in the Saigon area, that the "maximum utilization" of artillery units was programmed for the "second phase of attack," and that "Divisions 5, 7, and 9" were reserve forces to provide support.

10. [REDACTED], major elements of the Viet Cong 5th and 9th Light Infantry divisions and the NVA 7th Division continue to be located within striking distance of the capital.

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IV Corps

11. Communist actions in the delta during the past few days have emphasized continued attacks by fire against provincial and district towns, interspersed with ground assaults against lightly defended rural outposts. Although the over-all intensity of ground attacks has declined sharply, several Viet Cong units in IV Corps remain deployed in close proximity to heavily populated areas.

12. A Viet Cong force which on 10 February attacked Bac Lieu city remains within the town. Some of the attackers have attempted to exfiltrate, using women and children as shields. Thirty-three persons were killed or wounded and a large portion of the city has been destroyed by fire.

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13. Rach Gia, the capital of Kien Giang Province, came under B-40 rocket attack during the early morning hours of 11 February. The 30-minute bombardment resulted in 19 friendly casualties and total destruction to the CORDS building. There apparently was no follow-up ground attack and the city is now reported quiet.

14. An estimated 500-man Viet Cong force has reportedly surrounded Cao Lanh, the capital of Kien Phong Province. This strike force, supported by some 400 laborers, has constructed bunker complexes 1,000 to 1,500 meters from the city proper. Due to eroding security in the rural areas, all Revolutionary Development teams in Kien Phong have been withdrawn from their hamlets and pulled into the capital or district towns.

15. The Headquarters of Military Region (MR) 3, a major Viet Cong command authority, has made an unprecedented move. On 8 February, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] command authority in southern Phong Dinh Province, marking the first time since July 1963 that Headquarters, MR 3 had been identified outside its normal operating area--some 50 miles to the southwest. The relocation of this headquarters into Phong Dinh Province, coupled with the recent identification of three Viet Cong main force battalions in the immediate area of Can Tho, may portend renewed enemy offensive activity in and around the provincial capital.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The task force established to cope with the massive problems arising in the aftermath of the Viet Cong Tet offensive is apparently running into serious difficulty because of internal bickering and bureaucratic red tape, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In frustration, General Nguyen Duc Thang, Vice President Ky's deputy on the task force, declared on 9 February that he was resigning. He has failed to appear for subsequent meetings.

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2. [REDACTED] many of the cabinet members on the task force, most notably the ministers of health and refugees, have been unable or unwilling to work together and insist on following normal ministerial procedures. The result is that needed services are not being provided for the people in a timely and efficient manner.

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3. Vice President Ky, [REDACTED] is being urged to use his influence to have the constitution amended so that he could be appointed prime minister. Several Lower House deputies, some senators, Ky's own advisers, and General Thang have all reportedly approached Ky with the proposition. Ky has apparently put them all off, at least so far. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] that he is doing his best to improve Prime Minister Loc's image and to include him in the task force's plans and activities.

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Militant Buddhists Attack Alleged US Actions

4. The militant Buddhists of An Quang Pagoda have sent Ambassador Bunker an insulting letter accusing the US of attacking the pagoda "both militarily and politically." The letter, signed by the An Quang director, Thich Thien Hoa, charged that the US was careless in defending Saigon, attacked the population indiscriminately and fired on the pagoda even though there were no Communists inside.

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5. The Americans were charged also with slandering the Buddhist church by broadcasting over Voice of America that the Viet Cong were in the pagoda. The letter concluded with a "request" that the ambassador order a halt to the "calumny" and with a charge that the US alone is responsible for the deteriorating relations between the Americans and the Buddhist church.

6. The An Quang Pagoda suffered little damage during the 1 February attack to rout the Viet Cong force entrenched there. No American troops joined in the attack, except possibly as advisers to the Vietnamese Rangers who carried it out. The militant Buddhists have stood out thus far as the one significant group which has not denounced the Viet Cong attacks and has not voiced a modicum of support for the government.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. In an effort to protect their IL-28 bombers from US bombing raids, the North Vietnamese moved the planes on 9 February from Phuc Yen to Hanoi/Gia Lam. This airfield is Hanoi's international air terminal and has not yet been struck. On at least four occasions since their transfer to Gia Lam the IL-28s left the field and circled in airspace over the North Vietnamese/Chinese border while US strike aircraft were in the Hanoi area.

2. [redacted] indicates that at least four transport aircraft completed a Hanoi to Vinh flight during the late afternoon of 11 February. The purpose of the flights is not yet known, but the aircraft could have continued on into northern South Vietnam.

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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. Liberation Front officials abroad are continuing to make every effort to be seen and heard. Twice last week, Nguyen Van Hieu, the Front's representative in Phnom Penh and one of its most authoritative spokesmen on foreign affairs, discussed Viet Cong plans for a coalition government. Radio propaganda and prisoners captured in the Tet offensive have indicated that the Front intends to establish unilaterally a coalition government in opposition to Saigon. Nguyen Van Hieu, however, is the first responsible Front official to comment publicly on this issue. In an apparent effort to drum up some international support for such a government (if it should ever be established), Hieu gave a press conference on 8 February, and on the 9th reportedly held a special briefing for neutral diplomats in the Cambodian capital.

2. According to Wilfred Burchette, who publicized the press conference, Hieu said that the Front planned to establish a coalition government to replace the South Vietnamese Government after consultation with "other revolutionary forces." According to a Burmese diplomat who attended the briefing on 9 February, Hieu told his diplomatic colleagues virtually the same thing. The Front intended to convene a national conference of the "peace and democracy forces for the purpose of forming a provisional government" and would hold negotiations with the US for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of US troops. Hieu also told the diplomats that the Front would seek "recognition and respect for the territorial integrity of Vietnam from the world and especially from Cambodia, Laos, India, Burma, Ceylon, Pakistan, and Japan."

3. At home, the Communists are taking the same line on a possible coalition government and are continuing to pump up the "democratic and peace alliances."

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The Front central committee issued a statement on 9 February, and the Tri-Thien-Hue Liberation Front issued a similar statement on the 5th, offering to hold discussions with the new peace alliances "to work out the best solution for getting the US out of Vietnam and restoring peace." Both statements dramatize the intent of the new peace alliances to "set up a government of the people."

4. Communist officials in Djakarta also discussed Viet Cong intentions on several occasions in recent days in private forums. Prior to the Tet offensive in late January, the head of the Front office told Indonesian Government officials that he had attended a Front central committee meeting last summer and had come away with renewed confidence and optimism on the war. In a rare admission of past difficulties, the official admitted that US forces had had some success in the past two "dry seasons" (the winters of 65-66 and 66-67). He boasted that Communist units now had new weaponry and much greater experience and the US would not do so well this year. The Viet Cong intended to strike "several blows" this year, he said.

5. In two conversations in early February (after the opening of the Tet offensive), lower ranking officials of both the Front mission and the North Vietnamese Embassy denied current press speculation that Khe Sanh was to be a second Dien Bien Phu. There would be no large-scale attack on Khe Sanh "now," they said. When asked what could be considered a decisive battle in the current military campaign, the two officials pointed to the fight at Tan Son Nhut Airfield. They boasted that communications between the field and Saigon were broken and that international civil traffic had been disrupted. The Front man claimed that the Communists intended a "long fight against this base." Both officials emphasized the political significance of the Tet attacks. They said that one of the major objectives of the first phase of the fighting was to increase

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the Front's political support and that this aim was as important as any military results. In these post-Tet conversations, [REDACTED]

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Front Endorses Trinh Statement

6. In Hanoi this weekend, the Front spokesman issued an unequivocal endorsement of the recent North Vietnamese offer to talk with the US in exchange for a bombing cessation. Front propaganda in general has avoided comment on this issue, but on 9 February Front representative Nguyen Van Tien, in an interview with a Hungarian journalist, said the Front "entirely agrees with (the North Vietnamese foreign minister's) statement and fully supports its contents." The Front representative also used the interview to boast that "revolutionary forces" controlled three out of eight districts in Saigon. The Viet Cong, he said, intended to mobilize the young people of towns and villages and arm them to help defeat any possible American "counterattack."

Foreign Communist Support

7. In Moscow and Prague, the Front representatives were received by prominent Communist party leaders amid much publicity. The Soviets, in addition, issued a special Tass statement supporting the Viet Cong offensive and the North Vietnamese offer to talk. They are also staging mass rallies.

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