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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

WITH THE REVERSAL OF THE FORWARD MOMENTUM WHICH SEEMED TO DEVELOP IN THE LAST HALF OF 1967 AND OF THE HOPES ENGENDERED BY IT, THERE HAS BEEN A NATURAL TENDENCY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE TET ATTACK TO VIEW PESSIMISTICALLY THE "NEW BALANCE OF FORCES" WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE DEVELOPED AS THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) STRUGGLES TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE AND THE VIET CONG (VC) REGROUP AND RESUPPLY IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT ATTACK. THE VC ARE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, THE GVN IS TROUBLED, THE PEOPLE ARE AFRAID, AND THE OPERATIONS MOUNTED BY THE ALLIES HAVE NOT EARSSED THE MEMORY OF THE VC DARING. BUT THE TENDENCY OF THE FREE WORLD PRESS TO LOOK ONLY ON THE DARK SIDE AND THE CAUTION ENGENDERED BY RECENT SURPRISES SHOULD NOT ECLIPSE THE POSITIVE FACTORS IN THE VIETNAMESE EQUATION. THE GVN, THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN), THE VIETNAMESE

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~~SECRET~~PAGE 2 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

PEOPLE, AND THE COMMON CAUSE HAVE PASSED A GREAT TRIAL BY FIRE AND MAY WELL EMERGE WITH A STRONGER TEMPER. THIS SUMMARY IS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT, NOT TO OFFER A BALANCED PICTURE, BUT TO EXAMINE SOME OF THESE POSITIVE FACTORS.

IN THE MILITARY FIELD, MUCH HAS BEEN SAID OVER THE YEARS ABOUT "THEIR LIONS, OUR RABBITS" BUT IT IS HOPED THAT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES AT ALL LEVELS DURING THE TET OFFENSIVE WILL PUT SUCH STATEMENTS TO REST. FORTUNATELY FOR ALL, IN DEFENDING AGAINST THE VC ATTACKS, ARVN PERFORMED COMMENDABLY IN MOST CASES, AND WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS SUCCEEDED IN DEFEATING THE VC IN THE CITIES WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE REGIONAL FORCE/POPULAR FORCE UNITS FREQUENTLY EXCEEDED AMERICAN EXPECTATIONS. MANY UNITS WERE WELL BELOW STRENGTH DUE TO TET LEAVES, BUT WHEN ATTACKED IN STRENGTH, MOST STOOD AND FOUGHT, OFTEN IN THE FACE OF SUPERIOR ENEMY FIREPOWER.

IN QUANG NGAI ON 31 JANUARY THE 4TH ARVN REGIMENT FOUGHT OFF AT LEAST EIGHT ENEMY BATTALIONS SUPPORTED BY TEN LOCAL FORCE COMPANIES, TOTALING 3,500. KILLED IN ACTION: 682VC. THE SAME NIGHT IN TAM KY, THE 6TH ARVN REGIMENT FOUGHT OFF THREE BATTALIONS, EIGHT LOCAL FORCE COMPANIES AND TWO LOCAL FORCE PLATOONS. OF

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~~SECRET~~PAGE 3 SAIGON 0357S ~~SECRET~~

THESE 1,500 VC, 820 WERE KIA. MEANWHILE IN QUANG TRI THE 1ST ARVN REGIMENT TOOK ON TWO ENEMY REGIMENTS OF 3,500 MEN SUPPORTED BY A 122MM ROCKET BATTALION NUMBERING 400. RESULTS: 868 ENEMY KIA. ANOTHER EXAMPLE WAS THE SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE OF RADIO SAIGON BY A SMALL GROUP OF 25-30 MILITARY SECURITY SERVICE (MSS) PERSONNEL ARMED WITH HAND WEAPONS ONLY. ALTHOUGH THEY WERE ASSISTED BY ABOUT 50 ARVN PARATROOPERS WHO WERE, OF COURSE, BETTER ARMED, THE TOTAL FORCE WAS, NEVERTHELESS, OUTNUMBERED BY THE VC BY ABOUT TWO TO ONE. THE DEFENDING FORCES WERE COMMANDED BY AN MSS OFFICER WHO, LIKE THE OTHER MSS MEN, HAD ONLY A PISTOL AT HIS DISPOSAL. THERE WERE ALSO A NUMBER OF CASES OF ARVN COMBAT OFFICERS MAROONED IN SAIGON AND UNABLE TO RETURN TO THEIR UNITS WHO VOLUNTEERED THEIR SERVICES TO COMMANDERS OF UNITS LOCATED IN SAIGON. QUITE A NUMBER OF YOUNG COMBAT OFFICERS WHO FOUND THEMSELVES IN THIS SITUATION REPORTED TO POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL NGUYEN NGOC LOAN AND DID DUTY WITH TACTICAL FORCES OPERATING UNDER LOAN'S COMMAND IN DEFENSE OF THE CITY.

ALSO ON THE CREDIT SIDE OF THE LEDGER, WHILE THERE IS EVIDENCE OF A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL DESERTIONS, THERE WERE NO

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~~SECRET~~PAGE 4 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IN SPITE OF THE ENEMY'S INCREASED PROSELYTING CAMPAIGN DIRECTED AT THE MILITARY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IN ONE INSTANCE, AN ARVN COLONEL ASSIGNED TO THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF, SAIGON WAS APPROACHED BY HIS BROTHER ABOUT ONE MONTH BEFORE TET AND ASKED TO COOPERATE WITH THE VC IN THEIR FUTURE ACTIVITIES. THE BROTHER WHO HAD BEEN SENT FROM NORTH VIETNAM ON THIS EXPRESS MISSION WAS NOT ONLY TURNED DOWN BY THE ARVN COLONEL BUT TURNED INTO THE GVN AUTHORITIES TO BOOT.

INCREASED COOPERATION AND COORDINATION BETWEEN ARVN AND ALLIED FORCES, BORN OF NECESSITY DURING THE TET OFFENSIVE, HAS CONTINUED. IT HAS BEEN NOTED IN THE PAST THAT SEPARATE WARS WERE BEING FIGHT IN SVN; THE ARVN WAR AND THE FREE WORLD FORCES WAR. ARVN COMMANDERS' DESIRE TO MAINTAIN THEIR INTEGRITY OF COMMAND AND EXERT THEIR INDEPENDENCE FREQUENTLY LED TO POORLY PLANNED, COORDINATED, AND EXECUTED OPERATIONS WHILE ALLIED COMMANDERS, OFTEN IN EXASPERATION, LAUNCHED OPERATIONS WITH ONLY THE MOST CURSORY OF COORDINATION WITH THE ARVN. DURING THE WIDESPREAD ATTACKS OF THE TET OFFENSIVE IT BECAME IMMEDIATELY CLEAR THAT ONLY THROUGH CONCERTED EFFORT WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE TO SAVE THE NATION. THIS SPIRIT OF MUTUALITY OF INTEREST HAS CONTINUED

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~~SECRET~~PAGE 5 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

AND IS REFLECTED IN SUCH OPERATIONS AS QUYET THANG (RESOLVED TO WIN).

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, THERE ARE SOME ENCOURAGING SIGNS. MAJOR GENERAL NGUYEN DUC THANG APPEARS TO BE INSTILLING CONSIDERABLE ELAN IN IV CORPS. THE REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT (RD) CADRES ARE ONCE AGAIN BEGINNING TO MOVE BACK INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE, AND THEY ARE DOING SO WITH HIGH MORALE. THEIR WORK IN THE CITIES MADE AN EXCELLENT IMPRESSION AND PERMITTED THE URBAN DWELLERS TO SEE WHAT RD WAS ALL ABOUT - HELPING PEOPLE. THE 1968 GOALS HAVE BEEN MODIFIED, BUT THE PACIFICATION STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION ARE INTACT AND THERE IS INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR, AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF, ORGANIZING SELF DEFENSE IN THE HAMLETS.

THE PEOPLE IN THE CITIES GENERALLY DID NOT VOLUNTEER AID TO THE VC OR RALLY TO THEM DURING THE ATTACKS. INDEED, THE GENERAL PATTERN WAS THAT THE POPULACE AIDED ARVN MANY TIMES WHEN THE VC THREAT WAS GREATEST. SINCE THE ATTACKS, THE PEOPLE HAVE GIVEN INCREASED COOPERATION TO GVN POLICE AND INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS. THE GVN INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS IS INTACT FROM DISTRICT TO NATIONAL LEVELS, AND THE SURFACING OF NUMEROUS VC DURING THE TET OFFENSIVE HAS GIVEN A NEW IMPETUS TO THE INTELLIGENCE EFFORT. POLICE

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			4		9		
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INFO:		FILE. _____ VR. _____					

PAGE 6 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

MORALE IS HIGH, ESPECIALLY IN SAIGON, AND AMONG HIGHER OFFICIALS.

THE TET OFFENSIVE, ALTHOUGH SEVERELY DAMAGING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PRESTIGE, SPURRED ANTI-COMMUNIST AND NON-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS TO COMMON DEFENSE AND COOPERATION. THE GVN REMAINED VIABLE AND, AT LEAST INITIALLY, WAS STRENGTHENED BY THE READY SUPPORT OF POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS. IN THE ORGANIZATION AND DIRECTION OF THE RECOVERY PROGRAM THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH EXHIBITED AN HERETOFORE UNREVEALED CAPACITY TO LEAD AND ORGANIZE, AND THE LEGISLATURE DEMONSTRATED AN ATYPICAL DEGREE OF COOPERATION WITH THE EXECUTIVE. THE PUBLIC CRY FOLLOWING THE TET ATTACKS HAS BEEN FOR STRONG LEADERSHIP BY THE GVN, NOT FOR A DIFFERENT REGIME. FOR EXAMPLE, THE NO-CONFIDENCE PETITION INTRODUCED IN THE LOWER HOUSE WAS REPORTEDLY A WARNING TO THE GVN TO PROVIDE BETTER LEADERSHIP, NOT AN EARNEST EFFORT TO TOPPLE THE GOVERNMENT.

ADDITIONAL IMPETUS HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY THE CONSIDERABLY INCREASED CONCERN IN THE UNITED STATES OVER AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM FOLLOWING THE EVENTS OF THE TET OFFENSIVE. THIS STIMULUS HAS BEEN QUITE EFFECTIVE ON THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GVN WHICH HAS, WITHIN THE PAST THREE WEEKS, TAKEN A NUMBER OF RAPID AND DECISIVE STEPS TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

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	INFO: _____ FILE, _____ VR. _____			

PAGE 7 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

IT APPEARS THAT THE PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED PLANS TO REORGANIZE THE GVN ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS AND TO STEP UP THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN RECEIVED NEW AND NEEDED MOMENTUM FOLLOWING THE TET ATTACKS. THE REPLACEMENT OF EIGHT PROVINCE CHIEFS AND TWO CORPS COMMANDERS AND THE REINSTATING OF THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT DELEGATES MAY WELL BE THE REACTIONS BY THE GVN TO THE DEMANDS FOR BETTER LEADERSHIP, ALTHOUGH BOTH ACTIONS HAD BEEN UNDER CONSIDERATION BEFORE TET. (AND PRESIDENT THIEU STATED ON 22 MARCH THAT HE PLANNED TO REPLACE SIX MORE PROVINCE CHIEFS "WITHIN THE NEXT DAY OR TWO"). A STEPPED-UP MOBILIZATION PLAN IS BEING IMPLEMENTED, INCLUDING THE DRAFTING OF 18-YEAR OLDS.

IT WOULD APPEAR THERE IS EVEN SOME POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESS IN DECREASING THE TENSION BETWEEN PRESIDENT THIEU AND VICE PRESIDENT KY SINCE THIEU ALSO SAID ON 22 MARCH THAT HE HAS OFFERED KY THE ROLE OF SUPERVISING CIVIL DEFENSE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE PRESIDENT ADDED THAT HE PLANS TO SEND TO THE ASSEMBLY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS THE DRAFT CHARTER FOR THE THREE COUNCILS THE CONSTITUTION AUTHORIZES TO OPERATE UNDER THE VICE PRESIDENT'S CONTROL.

AT THE PRESENT TIME, IT SEEMS THAT THE TRAUMA FROM TET

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PAGE 8 SAIGÓN 0357 ~~SECRET~~

ATTACKS FORCED THE GVN TO A REALIZATION OF ITS RESPONSIBILITIES AND CAPACITIES.

ATTEMPTS TO FORM ANTI-COMMUNIST FRONTS AND EVEN THE CRITICISM DIRECTED AT GVN HESITANCY IN THE CRISIS ARE INDICATIVE OF A POPULAR ACCEPTANCE OF THE GVN AS A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE TO ORGANIZATION OF LIFE BY THE VC. TOP GVN LEADERS HAVE MET AND ARE CONTINUING TO MEET WITH MANY RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION AND TO SOME EXTENT HAVE ACCEPTED AND ACTED ON THEIR ADVICE. EVEN THOUGH THIS MAY FALL SHORT OF A L^OYAL OPPOSITION, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THERE IS A FRAMEWORK WHICH PERMITS THE VOICING OF CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM - AND THAT IT WAS USED. THIS IS AT LEAST A STEP FORWARD IN NATION BUILDING.

THE TET ATTACKS CAUSED SERIOUS ECONOMIC DISRUPTION AND A HALT TO LONG-RANGE GROWTH PROGRAMS; NONETHELESS THE ECONOMY IS FUNCTIONING ADEQUATELY ALTHOUGH INDUSTRIAL REBUILDING REMAINS TO BE TACKLED. THE PEOPLE SEEM TO BE SATISFIED WITH THE STOPGAP MEASURES ALREADY INSTITUTED. SHORT RUN INFLATION, WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN A MAJOR PROBLEM, DID NOT DEVELOP TO ANY GREAT EXTENT BECAUSE OF GOVERNMENT ACTION TO RELEASE ADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLIES AND FACILITATE IMPORT OF NECESSARY GOODS, AND DUE TO SUCH NON-

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			2	7		
			3	8		
			4	9		
			5	10		

PAGE 9 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

GOVERNMENTAL FACTORS AS REDUCTION IN DISPOSABLE INCOME AND INCREASED SAVINGS. THE WILLINGNESS OF THE PEOPLE TO SAVE AND THE RELATIVELY CONSTANT DOLLAR RATE INDICATE THAT THE PIASTRE IS MORE STABLE THAN EXPECTED.

THE GVN HAS ALSO SATISFACTORILY HANDLED THE CARE AND FEEDING OF REFUGEES AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD TO THE URBAN POPULATION. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE CONCRETE PLANS FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND RESETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEES. THE RESPONSE OF THE REFUGEES TO THESE PROGRAMS INDICATES THEIR PREFERENCE FOR THE GVN DESPITE INTENSIVE VC PROPAGANDIZING.

ALTHOUGH THE GVN WAS RETICENT IN ACCEPTING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN RECOVERY PROJECTS, SUCH OFFERS ARE STILL FORTHCOMING AND THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IS FULLY ENGAGED IN THIS EFFORT. WHERE DESTRUCTION AND THE DISRUPTION OF THE GVN APPARATUS WERE GREATEST, AS IN HUE, RELIGIOUS (BOTH BUDDHIST AND CATHOLIC) AND CIVIC GROUPS, SUCH AS THE BOY SCOUTS, LED THE PEOPLE IN EFFORTS TO ASSUAGE THE SUFFERING. THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS WORK, SUCH AS THE WELL PUBLICIZED BLOOD DONATION MOVEMENT, IS CREATING A SENSE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY WHICH HAS BEEN SO DEPLORABLY ABSENT IN VIETNAM OVER THE CENTURIES.

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PAGE 10 SAIGON 0357 ~~SECRET~~

AT TET PLUS 52, THESE POSITIVE ASPECTS ARE NOT ONLY A SOLACE IN THE CONTINUING CRISIS, BUT MORE IMPORTANT, TO SOME EXTENT THEY ARE A PRODUCT OF AMERICAN EFFORTS IN THE PAST AND THEY PROVIDE A FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE CAN CONTINUE TO BUILD.

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