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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600  
19 FEBRUARY 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
19 February 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

Political Developments in South Vietnam

1. The success of the military effort launched today to oust General Khanh is still in doubt, but the coup group appears to have substantial support in the Saigon area.

2. The coup group involves many leaders of the abortive 13 September coup, who were subsequently cashiered, plus several middle-grade officers commanding combat units near the capital. The organizer and primary spokesman, however, appears to be Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, veteran plotter who has been in hiding in Saigon after deserting his post about two months ago as South Vietnamese press attache in Washington.

3. The coup forces control the Saigon Radio and have blocked Saigon's airport with tanks and troops. They have announced that their move is intended to put an end to governmental instability under Khanh. They state that General Tran Thien Khiem, now ambassador to the US, is being summoned back to replace Khanh as commander-in-chief.

4. Despite announcements that Khanh and Air Force Chief General Ky have been arrested, Khanh is at his headquarters in Vung Tau, apparently attempting to rally airborne forces in the area. Ky is at Bien Hoa airbase near Saigon, and has threatened to bomb the rebels. Various other "Young Turks" appear to be targets of the coup. The naval commander, Admiral Cang, has joined Khanh in Vung Tao. General Thi, in northern-most I Corps, recently issued a statement accusing Colonel Thao of being in touch

with the Viet Cong. Other corps commanders at the moment appear uninvolved. Marine General Khang claims that most of the military oppose the coup.

5. The coup group has broadcast a proclamation, promising to return the armed forces to fighting the Communists and endorsing a purely civilian government. Although Khanh presently is the principal target, the rebels, if successful, may act later to remove the newly installed government of Phan Huy Quat.

6. Most of the coup leaders have ties with the southern Dai Viet Party--a rival faction of Quat's party--and many are Catholics. Their seizure of power is almost certain to provoke a serious reaction from the Buddhist leaders, and their prospects of uniting the military are questionable.

#### Viet Cong Military Activity

7. Press reports indicate that South Vietnamese troops drove off Viet Cong forces near Da Nang, cite of an important US air base, late yesterday afternoon. These reports suggest that the Viet Cong had planned to launch an attack on the base similar to those at Bien Hoa and Pleiku. No information has been received from US officials in South Vietnam to substantiate the press reports.

8. Government troops are attempting to recover and determine the origin and activities of an apparent Communist vessel sunk by South Vietnamese air force planes off Phu Yen province in central Vietnam on 17 February. The vessel was sunk after spotter air craft and junks were fired on, presumably by Viet Cong on shore, as they tried to approach the well-camouflaged boat.

#### Communist Military Developments

9. No significant deployment of North Vietnamese or Chinese Communist forces has been detected in the past 24 hours.

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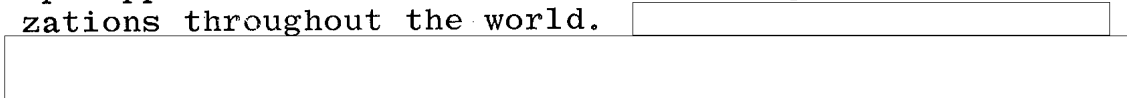
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Communist Political Developments

11. Communist media have not yet reacted to last night's coup in Saigon.

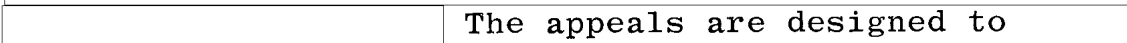
12. The lull in military activity continues to be reflected in the diminution of significant Communist propaganda. No major pronouncement specifically related to the US attacks on North Vietnam were issued during the past 24 hours by Hanoi, Peiping or Moscow.

13. A Viet Cong propaganda statement on 17 February appeared designed to maintain its pose of defiance in the face of possible future US attacks and its determination to continue the war in the South. Hanoi is making a concerted effort to line up support from Communist and left-wing front organizations throughout the world.



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The appeals are designed to arouse sympathy for the Vietnamese people and indignation at the danger to world peace posed by US air attacks on North Vietnam.

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14. Although the volume of Chinese propaganda concerning Vietnam has dropped off, statements by leaders in Peiping continue to strike an ominous note calculated to deter the US from stronger military action.

15. At a banquet for Tanzanian President Nyerere on 17 February, Liu Shao-chi warned that a "war crisis" is threatening Southeast Asia. He declared that the US had "taken the lead" in violating the demarcation line and would have to bear responsibility for all the consequences.

16. A new formulation of Peiping's promise of support for Hanoi appeared in Chen Yi's remarks at the Nepalese national day reception on 18 February. Chen asserted that the Chinese have "already made every preparation" and are "pledged to give staunch



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backing" to the Vietnamese people. He said that peace could be ensured only if "imperialists" were forced to withdraw and dismissed US demands for a cease-fire by the Viet Cong as "sheer drivel."

17. Soviet propaganda contained no new initiatives during the past day, but Moscow again cautioned the US of the "danger" of assuming that North Vietnam stands alone.



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