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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600  
20 February 1965

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

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 ESTPolitical Developments in South Vietnam

1. South Vietnamese military leaders have put down the coup in Saigon, but they also appear to have taken this occasion to oust General Khanh as armed forces commander.
2. At a joint meeting this morning of representatives of the armed forces and the Quat government, Khanh is reported to have received a no confidence vote. Subsequently, according to a Vietnamese broadcast, head of state Suu signed a decree relieving Khanh from the post of commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and announcing the temporary appointment of Major General Nguyen Van Thieu, a deputy premier and the minister of the armed forces, to Khanh's old post. Although Khanh still may seek to contest these actions, General Dong, the military governor of Saigon, expects him to choose exile abroad instead.
3. Earlier in the morning, senior commanders with units near Saigon dislodged rebel forces from their positions in and around the capital with little or no bloodshed. Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao appears to be under arrest, but former General Phat and former Colonel Ton, the two other principal coup leaders have reportedly disappeared.
4. The ease with which the rebels were dispersed suggests the possibility of a deal between the coup leaders and those commanders who opposed the coup, but shared the rebels' distaste for Khanh. It became quickly apparent yesterday that the coup group would be unable to attract enough additional military support to make its takeover stick. The coup leaders may thus have decided to strike a bargain, settling merely for Khanh's removal and possibly promises of lenient treatment for themselves.

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5. Even though Khanh appears to have been ousted and even though the militant Catholic elements represented in the coup attempt have again been thwarted, serious divisions will remain in the military establishment. For example, two controversial officers, General Thi of I Corps and General Ky of the Air Force, appear to have strengthened their positions for the moment, but may face increased hostility from some of their colleagues.

6. The Buddhist leadership, while not involved in the events of the past two days, will probably be gratified by the suppression of a neo-Diemist coup attempt and the apparent ouster of Khanh, who was increasingly becoming the target of criticism by Tri Quang.

7. On 19 February a Hong Kong daily quoted Quang as saying that North Vietnam and the US should begin peace talks. The article was based on an interview Quang purportedly gave at some unspecified time after the US/Vietnamese air strikes. He allegedly said that despite recent Communist military gains in the south, "the north cannot overcome the south any more than the south can conquer the north." Asserting that the Vietnamese nation now wanted a negotiated peace, Quang called for a diplomatic offensive leading to a settlement which would guarantee the sovereignty of both North and South Vietnam without encroachment either way.

8. Although he has been long suspected of possible neutralist tendencies, in the past Quang has never made such an explicit call for peace talks. In view of Quang's characteristically ambiguous mode of discourse, it is possible that he was misquoted or that his stated views were oversimplified.

#### Viet Cong Military Activity

9. No unusual Communist military actions have been reported during the past 24 hours but the Viet Cong continue their recent pattern of widespread and gradually increasing small-scale guerrilla activity.

10. [redacted] concerning the suspected Communist vessel sunk at Cape Verelle, in Phu Yen Province on 17 February. Government ground forces which reached the area on 19 February reportedly

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found large quantities of ammunition and explosives, one 12.7 mm Soviet machine gun, one 57 mm recoilless rifle and between 2,000 and 3,000 individual weapons, primarily of Chinese manufacture, in the hulk. A search of caves in the area of the sunken vessel reportedly uncovered a Viet Cong weapons cache containing 918 rifles, 48 Czech submachineguns and 50 automatic rifles.

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#### Communist Military Developments

11. No significant deployment of Communist Chinese or Vietnamese military forces has been detected in the last 24 hours.

12. The North Vietnamese appear to be moving ahead with civilian evacuation from DRV urban centers. Plans for such a move were laid during the Tonkin Gulf crisis last August, but apparently were not extensively implemented.

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#### Communist Political Developments

13. North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist press services promptly reported the attempted coup, stressing the instability and confusion in Saigon.

14. Peiping rejected the possibility of a negotiated settlement in Vietnam editorially in People's Daily on 19 February as "too much wishful thinking." The editorial confidently predicted ultimate victory in Vietnam as a "foregone conclusion" and ridiculed American statements that Chinese intentions are not clear, asserting that Peiping's plans to help "tighten the noose" are "clear as day."

15. Moscow's extreme caution in dealing with the Vietnam crisis is reflected in its noncommittal attitude toward the possibility of negotiations.

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16. This lack of initiative apparently results in part from the Soviet leaders' desire to avoid an open divergence with the Hanoi and Peiping regimes. These regimes probably believe that any overture toward negotiations would be interpreted as a sign of wavering in the face of US actions. The USSR probably also wishes to play for time to assess further developments in US policy.

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