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Memorandum

Communist Intentions In The Current Campaign In South Vietnam

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COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN

IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

10 April 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN THE CURRENT
CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Overview

The Vietnamese Communist Party's basic, overriding objective has not changed for more than four decades. Hanoi wants to gain political control over all of Vietnam, i.e., to conquer South Vietnam. The major campaign launched on 30 March is a virtually all-out effort to bring the Communists much closer to achieving that objective this year. In this campaign, the Communists appear ready to expend a large number of lives and great quantities of ordnance with little concern for the future, i.e., without much regard for husbanding resources that would be needed in the next dry season or the one after that.

Hanoi, in short, is playing this hand for the highest stakes. As outlined below, it is shoving most of its chips into this hand's pot. Such action is perforce a major gamble, no matter how strong Hanoi may consider its cards. If the North Vietnamese win this hand--i.e., if the current Communist campaign produces what comes to be considered in South Vietnam or the United States as a major Communist victory--Hanoi will have gone a long way toward recouping its losses of the past four years and a long way toward achieving its definition of winning the game.

Note: This paper was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinated with the Defense Intelligence Agency.

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This memorandum focuses on Communist near term tactical intentions in South Vietnam, assessing these intentions region by region. It therefore does not specifically address or discuss near term Communist intentions in Laos or Cambodia. South Vietnam is of course the main theater of combat and will clearly be the focus of Hanoi's major efforts in the weeks immediately ahead. In reading the paragraphs below, however, it should not be forgotten that Hanoi will use the residual forces it has in Laos and Cambodia to exert what pressure they can to support Communist efforts and further Hanoi's objectives in South Vietnam.

The conduct and net political outcome of Hanoi's current offensive campaign will be materially influenced by a subtle but profound change that has gradually come over the Indochina struggle over the past year or so. Hanoi, in a sense, is now in the politico-psychological position the allies were in during the second half of the nineteen sixties: It is now the Communists who stand to lose if they are not widely regarded as having won. This becomes even more the case now that Hanoi has launched what is so clearly an all-out effort, putting so many of its remaining chips unarguably and undisguisedly into this pot.

The current offensive is not a "do or die" effort in the sense that failure to win decisive victories would necessarily spell a quick end to Hanoi's struggle. Four decades of history give abundant witness to the Communist Party leadership's tenacity and dogged determination in the face of adversity. Should the current Communist offensive come to be widely deemed a failure in South Vietnam and the US, however, the stakes involved in its initiation are such that Hanoi's already existing problems would be compounded by orders of magnitude. This would probably not produce surrender and probably would not even produce early acceptance of negotiation on essentially US/GVN terms. But it would produce profound stresses within the top levels of the Vietnamese Communist leadership and,

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almost certainly, a basic re-examination of Hanoi's long term prospects and feasible strategies for their pursuit.

Given the stakes involved, Hanoi's current offensive effort will be as prolonged and intense as the Communists can make it. There will undoubtedly be peaks and valleys, sharp actions followed by respites or lulls. Overall, however, the current phase of struggle will last for many weeks and, with recycling, will probably be extended until mid-summer or even beyond. Its ultimate outcome is not inexorably fore-ordained at this writing and hence cannot be predicted with confidence or certainty. The long term results of Hanoi's current major gamble will be determined by what actually happens on the battlefields of South Vietnam and, equally, on how what is happening comes to be viewed and regarded by the people and governments of both South Vietnam and the United States.

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PART I: HANOI'S CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

A. Headlines and Courage

1. If Hanoi is to take over the South, it must reverse a number of unfavorable trends. The decline in popular support for the Communist cause and the decline in locally based Communist forces has become conspicuous during the last two years. One of the principal objectives of the current Communist campaign is to stop this decline in Communist vitality within South Vietnam. The main force assault on government forces and positions is meant to give new courage to all Communist cadre, fighters and commanders, and their sympathizers.

2. Moreover, Vietnamization had been proceeding in an orderly fashion inside South Vietnam, steadily eroding Communist strength and assets in populated areas. Partly (but not entirely) because Communist main forces have been fighting in Laos and Cambodia, the withdrawal of US forces from a direct ground combat role has gone smoothly, and South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) units and the territorial security forces and local militia have assumed the burden of protecting the country. Although they have moved with some caution in order to keep their own losses down, ARVN and the RF and PF have generally kept the initiative, and this has given them new confidence. Conversely, the confidence of the Communist side within South Vietnam has been undermined. At a minimum, the current Communist offensive is intended to reverse this trend, by destroying the new confidence of the government's military and paramilitary forces. Ideally, Hanoi wants to inflict shattering defeats against at least some major GVN forces or units.

3. The Communists have always considered it essential to destroy the cohesion of the anti-Communist government in Saigon. They now hope at the least that they will be able to inflict such punishment on the government's forces and so impressively challenge the government's control to some key populated areas

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that the GVN will lose its confidence and new dissension will arise among its ranks and within its leadership.

4. Hanoi has also been deeply concerned as it has seen world attention turn away from the Indochina war. Since it has counted heavily on the pressure of US public opinion to induce the US Government to withdraw its support from Saigon, it is particularly concerned that anti-war sentiment within the US no longer appears very vigorous or politically potent. Moreover, trends in South Vietnam have given some weight to allied claims in Paris that the Communists are not dealing from a position of strength in South Vietnam. The new enemy offensive is meant to reverse these trends as well, to incite new agitation by anti-war elements in the US and to backstop Communist negotiators in Paris.

B. Options and Opportunities

5. Given the decline in Communist local forces and the adverse trends on the diplomatic and political fronts, the main-force option is practically the only one remaining to Hanoi. Since the initial allied incursions into Cambodia two years ago, the Communists have been laying the groundwork for a return to heavy main-force action in South Vietnam. They have improved supply routes down through Laos and into Cambodia. They have developed a new system of base areas deeper in Cambodia. Last year, at heavy cost, they fought off a major ground threat to their essential Laotian routes. This year the Communists have dealt major blows to Cambodian and Laotian government forces, in an effort to secure their rear from attack as they adopt a more aggressive posture against South Vietnam's borders. The enemy's heavy, and effective use of artillery on the Plaine des Jarres provided a preview of their recent tactics against the line of South Vietnamese fire support bases on the southern edge of the DMZ. In a similar way, their strategy of inflicting heavy punishment on Cambodian forces in last December's action along Cambodian Route 6 may provide a preview of what the Communists hope to do to demoralize many South Vietnamese units.

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6. Because of the size of the stakes, because of the pressing need to reverse so many adverse trends, because the main-force option seems to be the only one that holds out any promise of success, and because this will work only if heavy damage is done to South Vietnamese defending forces, it seems clear that the Communists are intent on launching heavy assaults, even though these will inevitably entail severe Communist losses. Hanoi is probably willing to accept such losses because it also sees this as a year of special opportunities. US withdrawals have reduced the strength of all allied forces in South Vietnam to the point where the Communists feel much less concern for the safety of their supply routes and base areas in Laos and Cambodia. Moreover, this is an election year in the United States. For all these reasons, Hanoi regards this as the year to try to demonstrate its clout on the battlefield, to demonstrate to the US public and to the world at large that the Communists are far from a spent force in South Vietnam, and to make clear that there is no end in sight to the war unless the allies are prepared to offer Hanoi real hope of taking over control of the South, i.e., to bargain on what are essentially Hanoi's terms.

C. The Campaign's Objective: A Watershed Military Victory

7. The Communists clearly hope their efforts will produce what comes to be regarded as an over-all net victory, so impressive that it will lead to a whole series of new trends. At best, they hope to unravel the fighting forces of South Vietnam, to sow such dissension in the government establishment that it begins to come apart at the seams, and to mortally weaken US support for the anti-Communist effort in Indochina, thus paving the way for a direct take-over of the South. This may have been what Pham Van Dong was talking about months ago when he told more than one diplomatic contact that he expected to see fundamental changes in Vietnam by mid-1972. This is the message, reminiscent of Tet 1968, that is now being passed to Communist soldiers; they are being told that this is to be the "last battle of the war."

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8. At a minimum, the Communists hope to get some fundamental if less spectacular returns on their investment basically reversing currently adverse trends. They hope to take the initiative and make the government's military forces more self-protective, cautious, and defensive-minded, vacating much of rural South Vietnam in order to defend urban centers and other vital areas. Conversely, Hanoi hopes to give new courage and new freedom of movement to Viet Cong local forces. Even if the main-force campaign fails to achieve Hanoi's objectives, if it goes at all well the Communists will be looking for a shift in psychology and in local balances of power favorable to their side. If the Communists again appear to many South Vietnamese to be the invincible wave of the future, if their local assets can be rebuilt and move about with greater freedom, and if they can again draw support from the local populace, they will probably believe they have achieved a considerable victory.

D. The Costs and the Risks

9. The Communists are prepared to accept heavy personnel losses to their main forces this year, partly because these losses can be replaced--albeit at considerable cost and with a further decline in troop quality--by drawing on the manpower pool available within North Vietnam. It is less clear, however, that they are willing to suffer heavy losses among what remains of their local force structure within South Vietnam. If their campaign falls far short of its goals, as their offensives in 1968 did, it would be even harder this time to find replacements among southerners for these losses. Decisions on how to employ remaining local forces will therefore probably be made only after the Communists get a clearer picture of the likely outcome of the main-force campaign.

10. The Communists are also prepared to accept political and propaganda setbacks as a result of their use of more conventional invasion tactics. They are

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prepared to accept any stresses or strains the current offensive may possibly produce in Hanoi's relations with Moscow or Peking (though here we caution that the question of Moscow and Peking's positions with respect to this offensive is a complex subject beyond the scope of this paper.) Furthermore, Hanoi's air defense preparations throughout North Vietnam indicate that the Communists have also anticipated and are prepared to accept a limited resumption of the bombing of southern North Vietnam. Indeed, they may feel the costs of such bombing may be at least partially offset by political or propaganda gains abroad.

11. What Hanoi has to fear more than these concrete costs is the political cost of having to settle on the battlefield for something that looks like a failure, or even a result that cannot be plausibly touted as a net success. If Communist forces eventually must pull back from Quang Tri city and Hue without capturing either, and if they suffer very heavy losses in the sieges, it would be widely interpreted in South Vietnam as a success for the defending forces and failure for the Communist side. If this happens, if the Communists have not at least broken government control over some important centers, if they have not driven local security forces back to the towns and out of much of the countryside, and most important, if their actions have not resulted in some significant political breakthrough in South Vietnam, it will be considered a serious reverse for their side. Given the trends that have characterized the situation up to today, Hanoi must be regarded as having won its watershed victory or it will perforce suffer a major and damaging psychological defeat with profound political ramifications.

12. A clear defeat at the hands of South Vietnam's defending forces might well produce an agonizing reappraisal in Hanoi. There have been many signs of disagreement on priorities and strategies in North Vietnam for much of the past year, and a clear defeat of the army now invading South

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Vietnam would call many recent decisions into question. A less clear defeat or even an ambiguous net result would also produce considerable anguish in North Vietnam, but the North Vietnamese would retain the capability and probably the will to return to the battle another year.

E. High Stakes and High Strategy

13. With the local force war going badly against them, the Communists have for the first time turned to a relatively straightforward, conventional invasion. Never before have the Communists relied so heavily on invading divisions and so lightly on in-country local forces. The new premium they are putting on heavy artillery, tanks, and heavy anti-aircraft weaponry indicate that this time they do not mean to fade away quickly if the battle appears to be going against them. This time they are much more likely to fight for control of the lines of communication that are needed to move their weaponry and supplies, and also to fight for territory and position, particularly at the northern end of South Vietnam.

14. It seems highly likely that the Communists hope to sustain heavy pressure simultaneously on several fronts for as long as possible. Hanoi hopes that with most of the US force gone, the South Vietnamese will feel themselves spread thin and in danger of being whipsawed, as they were in 1965. Over a three-day period last week, the South Vietnamese decided in rapid succession to send the 9th ARVN Division from the delta to the northern end of the country, to send the 21st ARVN Division north instead of the 9th, and finally to send the 21st to northern Military Region 3 rather than MR-1. This series of decisions demonstrated graphically how difficult it may be for the South Vietnamese to reinforce several major theaters if they are threatened simultaneously. Similarly, the Communists doubtless are also hoping to confront the allied side with difficult choices in allocating its air resources. The rapidity of the allied buildup of air and naval power, however, may have already exceeded Communist expectations.

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15. The Communists have already compounded the reinforcement problems on the government side, merely by maintaining a credible threat against Hue, Kontum, and the area north of Saigon, while mounting an actual heavy assault against Quang Tri Province. The mere presence of strong enemy forces has been enough to make it dangerous to send units from Hue to Quang Tri city, or from Saigon to Kontum. It seems unlikely that the Communists plan to expend their supply stockpiles or their manpower resources quickly. Instead, they are more likely to keep the pressure on in each of South Vietnam's military regions at least for at least the next several weeks.

16. As will be discussed in greater detail in the region by region discussion that follows, it appears likely that the Communists would ideally want to seize and hold virtually all of Thua Thien and Quang Tri provinces, including the cities of Hue and Quang Tri. They very probably also hope to seize and hold Kontum city and much of the surrounding highlands. They often speak and think in terms of maximum objectives, but they are realists, and they probably recognize that in the final event they may achieve a good deal less than this.

17. The Communists undoubtedly expect that even if they fail to seize and hold Hue or wide stretches of the highlands, their attacks in the attempt will be devastating for South Vietnamese morale. If they can get into some major cities, the Communists can make expelling their forces a very costly proposition--costly both to the allied forces fighting them and to the cities themselves.

18. The extent to which the Communists can seize and how long they can hold key centers or stretches of territory will depend, of course, on how the battles go. As the course of the battle becomes clearer, the Communist High Command will decide how to proceed: whether to commit available local forces in particular areas; whether to have

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the Provisional Revolutionary Government run up the flag and claim to govern certain areas for a period or indefinitely; or whether to take new initiatives in the propaganda and diplomatic fields.*

**For example, a quick call for cease-fire if significant tactical successes are achieved.*

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PART II: BATTLE PLANS BY REGION

19. The Communists have always been able to bring their greatest strength to bear on the northern end of South Vietnam for the simple reason that this area is closest to North Vietnam. In general, the farther south one goes in South Vietnam, the less serious is the threat from the North. Quang Tri presently is most seriously threatened, Hue is next, and Kontum third. Although the enemy has assembled a powerful force north of Saigon, the supply routes there are long and the defending forces relatively strong. At the southern end of the country, the enemy can cause considerable disruption, but, his capabilities in Military Region IV are weaker than elsewhere.

A. The Northern Part of South Vietnam

20. The terrain of northern South Vietnam gives the North Vietnamese Army both advantages and disadvantages in its current campaign in the coastal lowlands. Just south of Hue, a spur of mountains extends to the sea. Thus, while the terrain is fairly flat from the DMZ into Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces, land routes must wind through some rugged hills to connect those provinces with the rest of South Vietnam. In terms of terrain alone then, these two provinces may be more accessible from the North than from the South.

21. On the other hand, these same mountains will soon shield the Quang Tri and Thua Thien coasts from the Southwest Monsoon rains, and although flying weather will get progressively worse by late May and early June through much of the rest of South Vietnam, the weather will improve along this particular short stretch of coast. In sum, the weather cuts both ways. At the same time that it may be easier to reinforce and resupply this area from the north, it will also be easier for the allied side to bring its expanded air power to bear.

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22. The Communists are probably prepared to undergo prolonged assaults from the air if they can secure control of this coast. Their initial assaults into Quang Tri Province and their subsequent deployments lend some substance to their bold words about trying to make this a "last battle." The ferocity of the first artillery and ground assaults were clearly a shock to the green and untried elements of the recently formed 3rd ARVN Division. It appears that it was primarily the sheer volume and accuracy of the artillery fire, rather than ground force pressure that caused friendly forces to withdraw from most of the fire support bases along the southern edge of the DMZ.

23. Since their initial assaults, the North Vietnamese have been compelled to regroup, and bring up equipment. They have been maneuvering the equivalent of over two divisions toward the South Vietnamese defensive positions along the Cua Viet River. These forces include the 308th NVA Division and the regiments controlled by the Communists' B-5/70 Front. Trucks, heavy field guns, anti-aircraft artillery, and possibly even surface-to-air missiles have been detected converging on the government's new lines. The presence of these heavy weapons in the enemy's arsenal seems to imply that they will try to stay and hold their ground for an extended period rather than attack for two or three weeks and then move off to safer terrain as they have often done in the past. They have, however, been taking considerable equipment losses, particularly a large number of tanks.

24. At the same time this force of over two divisions has been moving toward Quang Tri city from the north, a third division, the 304th, has been moving from west to east toward Quang Tri city. It would appear that the enemy intends to send all three divisions against Quang Tri city's defenses. The latter includes the one regiment of the 3rd ARVN Division that is still considered combat effective, and South Vietnamese Marine and Ranger battalions recently sent as reinforcements from the south. These forces are getting better air

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support than could be made available during the initial assaults on the northern tier of fire support bases when the weather was bad, but the Communists will doubtless try to concentrate their attacks during the intervals of cloudy weather that are likely to occur this month.

25. The Communists probably cannot muster as much heavy firepower for the next attacks as they did during their initial assaults from across the DMZ. For one thing, allied air attacks and their extension above the DMZ are making it increasingly difficult for the Communists to bring their heavier equipment south. Thus the Communists will probably have to rely more heavily this time on powerful infantry assaults, protected from air attack, if possible, by cloudy weather and by the anti-aircraft weapons they have brought with them. Given the size of the enemy forces the enemy can bring to bear, repelling them will not be easy.

26. To the south of the Quang Tri theater, the Communists' 324B Division has been edging east out of the mountains to threaten Hue, much as the 304th is putting pressure on Quang Tri. At the moment, however, the 324B is the only major force threatening Hue. It is possible that it will mount strong attacks against the defending 1st ARVN Division, the best South Vietnam has to offer, but it seems more likely that for the time being it will basically continue to put on enough pressure to make the threat credible, tying down the 1st ARVN Division while the action proceeds to the north around Quang Tri. The 324B's pressure will include heavy probing, however, and if tactical opportunities develop the Communists would certainly want to exploit them to launch an attack on Hue simultaneously with their renewed pressure against Quang Tri.

27. If the two divisions bearing on Quang Tri city from the north and the one division moving in from the west can seize and occupy that center and destroy or scatter the defenders, then two of the three divisions are likely to continue south to

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repeat the same general scheme of attack against Hue in cooperation with the 324B. If the threats to the south against Kontum and north of Saigon sufficiently impede South Vietnamese reinforcement of Hue, and if the Communists manage to seize Quang Tri, they may be able to develop enough momentum to seize Hue, mainly on the strength of their infantry. This would be such a major setback for the South, involving as it would the defeat of the government's most respected division, that it would be well worth a great cost in lives to the North Vietnamese. Whether or not the Communists proved able to hold this territory indefinitely, they could make it extremely costly for the allied side to drive them out again. Under such a scenario, civilian losses in Hue and Quang Tri cities would be particularly severe.

28. This is what the Communists probably hope to do if all goes well for their side. But their initial impact on the still-new 3rd ARVN Division should not be taken as a clear indication of how they will fare in future battles. The Communists are now up against better quality troops in the Rangers and 1st ARVN Division, and the South Vietnamese have always fought more effectively when they have been defending their homes and families. Moreover, allied air power has now begun to inflict a heavier toll. Even if the Communists fail to achieve their maximum objectives, they are probably willing to continue to take substantial losses from government counterattacks on the ground and from allied air attacks, in order to throw a real fright into the population of the cities and their defenders.

29. If the Communists can put enough pressure on Hue and Quang Tri city, and if they can do enough damage to the government side farther south, they may then decide to use some of their remaining local forces. It is unlikely, however, that they will accept very heavy local force losses unless they think they can seize the area, since it would otherwise be almost impossible to rebuild their local apparatus.

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B. The Highlands

30. The enemy has built the largest force it has ever deployed in the highlands, over 40,000 men. Although this force is impressive by virtue of its size, it does not include high quality troops comparable to those of the 304th, the 308th, the 324B, and the B-5/70 Front to the north. In fact, the quality of this force is highly uncertain, particularly that of the 320th Division, which is the main new addition to the enemy's highlands deployments this year. The 320th has been taking casualties since it started through Laos and does not seem as competent as some of the others. This division has a history of taking substantial casualties in battles where the military return was slight and of breaking contact when the going got rough.

31. So far, this force has not accomplished much. It has been in the area for about two months, and has been hit from the air by pre-emptive B-52 raids and on the ground by ARVN spoiling probes and it may have been severely disrupted. Much of this force has been edging toward Kontum city. It clearly should have launched a powerful attack against the city timed to precede the attacks across the DMZ and add to the psychological impact of the assaults across the DMZ. The bulk of the force still seems to be holding its fire and it clearly has problems of some sort. Some elements have put pressure on a few fire support bases on "Rocket Ridge," north of Kontum city, but without success and with heavy losses. Nothing has yet been heard from the heavy enemy guns known to be in the area.

32. Whatever the enemy's difficulties may be, it is clear that he intends to do a lot more with this sizable force than he has so far. Enemy documents say that the Communists want to capture Kontum city, Pleiku city, and much of the surrounding territory. They want to overwhelm the not-very-highly-respected ARVN forces there and seize Route 14 and Route 19. The enemy would then like to push east to the sea, destroying the government's control over

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Binh Dinh Province, the most populous in the country. Even if the Communists cannot impose their own control over this stretch of coast, if they could severely damage the government's control they would have cut the country in two, an objective of the Communists since the early 1960s.

33. If the force now assembled in the Kontum area could merely push into western Binh Dinh, it could expect some help from the Communist 3rd Division that operates in northern Binh Dinh and southern Quang Ngai provinces. This is the area where the Communists' local roots are three decades deep and they still enjoy considerable popular sympathy. The Communists might be willing to expose their local forces to government counterfire here if they thought this would help swing the balance in their favor.

34. If the enemy achieves his maximum objectives in the highlands, and if he manages at the same time to overrun Hue, he would then be able to call on the strong local support still available in Quang Nam Province and in Quang Ngai Province and put heavy pressure on Da Nang. Control over the whole northern half of the country would then be within his grasp. This is probably the enemy's ideal scenario for northern South Vietnam.

35. The Communists' opportunistic use of bad flying weather to protect their advancing troops in Quang Tri Province, however, also suggests the possibility that the highlands force may be waiting until the weeks just before the onset of the Southwest Monsoon, which could begin in late May or early June. Logistics problems would mount during the rainy season and it would be difficult to deploy large units, but the strong assaults might be timed for shortly before the rains, particularly if the Communists hope to capitalize on their heavy weapons. If the Communists could capture Kontum city and the surrounding district towns, it would be extremely difficult for the government side to bring air power to bear in any effort to dig them out without destroying the cities and towns. It would also be

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difficult to send in a large relief force overland to the highlands. It therefore seems entirely possible that by timing his attacks carefully with the weather, the enemy still hopes to make his word good, seize large portions of the highlands, and hold them for months to come.

36. But just as the Communists may well be stopped in their tracks before they get into Hue, their unimpressive showing so far in the highlands suggests that they should have a hard time taking Kontum city, let alone holding it or pushing east to the sea.

37. The Communist local force may be able to mount some troublesome harassing actions in the south of Military Region 2 in such centers as Dalat and Ban Me Thuot, but the enemy is not believed to have effective concentrations in these areas, and the challenge to government control there is likely to be limited. The same also holds true for much of eastern Military Region 3, where the enemy is relatively weak both locally and in terms of main force strength.

C. The Saigon Area

38. Along the Cambodian border north of Saigon the enemy has assembled three first-line divisions, the 5th, 7th, and 9th, and during the last week he has sent regiments from each of them into northern Military Region 3. Moving down Route 13 through Binh Long Province, the enemy has already captured a district town, some fire support bases, and an airfield. The threat to Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces, both sparsely populated and not very heavily defended, is high. These provinces by their nature, however, are not very lucrative targets for the North Vietnamese.

39. Politically more important Tay Ninh Province, home of the Cao Dai sect, and the provinces closer to Saigon, on the other hand, are relatively well defended. The South Vietnamese 25th, 18th, and

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5th divisions are now being reinforced by the 21st Division from the delta, and the Regional and Popular Forces man many defensive positions between the Cambodian border and the urban centers in Tay Ninh and farther south. Any Communist drive in force toward Tay Ninh city and points south would be extremely vulnerable to air attack until the monsoon rains come, and thereafter large scale deployments will be difficult. If the Communists do manage to take some important centers in Military Region 3, the government almost certainly has enough forces nearby to push them back out and certainly enough to limit their progress toward Saigon.

40. Because the government enjoys a more favorable local balance of forces than in the threatened areas to the north, the prospects for keeping the Communists at bay seem relatively good. The enemy nevertheless clearly intends at the least to maintain a credible threat, partly to prevent the government from freely sending reinforcements farther north. The move of the 21st Division from the delta to MR-3 rather than farther north suggests that he may be having some success. To make his threat seem more menacing, the enemy probably intends to attempt to send elements of the 5th, 7th, and 9th divisions fairly deeply into Tay Ninh Province, and he may well attempt to seize and hold parts of Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces. He probably also will ask his more modest forces which operate in the provinces surrounding Saigon to conduct harassing actions.

41. If government forces should be severely discouraged by news of possible Communist successes to the north, and if there were signs of growing dissensions within the government, the enemy might well revise his thinking and, accepting heavy losses, try to drive hard against the government's superior forces in the capital area. This involves a whole series of "ifs," however, and at present the enemy's intentions in Military Region 3 appear to be limited to developing a credible main-force threat to the northern three provinces of the region and mounting some harassing actions closer to Saigon.

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The Delta

42. As usual, the delta is receiving the lowest priority from the Communists as a theater of main-force operations. So far, the enemy is sending four regiments and a division-level headquarters (the 1st NVA, now called the "Phuoc Long Front") from its forces in Cambodia to help raise the threat level in Military Region 4. Clearly Hanoi intends to rely primarily on the few forces it already has in the region to do their best to tie down the government forces there and prevent their being used as reinforcements farther north.

43. On the other hand, the departure of the 21st ARVN Division for MR-3 and the arrival of four enemy regiments in or near the delta will improve the enemy's force position in MR-4. With the 7th and 9th ARVN divisions stretched thin, the Communists probably hope that the three understrength Communist regiments that have been operating out of the U Minh Forest and the four other regiments scattered across the delta will be in a better position to try to overrun some major government military positions and district towns. They are certain to ask them to try.

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