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JRM 36 JRG

COMMUNIST PREPARATIONS FOR THE TET OFFENSIVE
IN RETROSPECT

1. The overall concept of a massive attack against South Vietnam's cities and towns was probably formulated by the High Command in Hanoi at least as early as last summer. Subsequently, the outline plan for the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign was communicated to various headquarters in South Vietnam by September 1967.

2. From the beginning, extreme precautions were taken to keep the Tet plans secret in order to preserve the all-important element of surprise. Need-to-know criteria were probably strictly enforced in disseminating battle plans. Possibly only the Communists' Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) and some elements of the Military Administrative Regions and major theatre commands were given a complete overview of the planned offensive.

3. At the other end of the Communist chain of command, battalion commanders probably were given the specifics only of their own missions and those of cooperating units. The country-wide character of the effort apparently was described only in the most general terms to the command staffs even at the provincial and regional levels. Thus, only the

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highest echelons probably had clear knowledge that for the first time virtually every major city and town in South Vietnam was to be invaded in force.

4. The Communists began a new indoctrination program among all their party cadres and military officers in September, based on Resolution 13 of the Hanoi party central committee. The resolution called for a "general offensive" and "general uprising" which would prepare the way for a Communist-dominated coalition government.*

5. A wide variety of battle preparations for the Tet offensive had to be undertaken, many of them starting in November. Detailed operations planning commenced at each command level. Units had to be strengthened by replacements and augmented or reinforced with newly arrived units. Some effort apparently was made to infiltrate guerrillas into cities and towns to strengthen units there. Special local recruiting and new infiltrators provided some of the fresh personnel. Others were upgraded from irregular elements. Larger volumes of supplies had to be brought in and stockpiled.

*A copy of the resolution itself has never been obtained; the reflections of it in captured documents and other sources have been so general as to preclude judgments on any specific changes in strategy that the resolution might have called for.

6. Communist intelligence, security, and logistical elements probably began to reconnoiter approach routes toward each target city and town in order to assure that large forces would be able to march long distances in complete secrecy. Requirements for detailed city maps showing key control points were levied under some cover story, for example, to support stepped up terror operations, and arrangements for special communications were made to coordinate the attack.

7. Special training for newly organized sapper units presumably was under way by late November. All units needed special training in street fighting, but many apparently received relatively little so as to keep Hanoi's intentions well disguised.

8. By December, each command level was reviewing the tactical plans of subordinate commands and monitoring their implementation. Many coordination problems were solved along the way. By this time, all command levels of the Communist military apparatus must have had a clear idea that a major coordinated attack would be launched sometime around the turn of the lunar year.

9. By late December, preparations along the approach routes were almost certainly well advanced, since troops would begin to march in mid-January. Security arrangements were completed to assure that villagers living along the approach routes kept silent. Bivouac areas were selected, prepared and staffed. Guides were arranged. Boats were made available at water crossings. Ammunition and some of the heavier weapons were cached, and forward stations were prepared near the target cities and towns.

10. Briefings were given to commanding officers on their missions.

11. When Hanoi decided that preparations were satisfactorily advanced, attack plans presumably were given final approval for all command levels, the timing was set, and orders were issued to march at the appropriate time.

12. Thus, in mid- and late January many Communist units began to converge on the cities and towns of South Vietnam, some making relatively long forced marches and all employing the tightest possible security precautions.

13. Meanwhile, more routine operations continued in the Khe Sanh and DMZ areas as well as

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further south. These operations probably were mounted partly to help screen the coming urban offensive.

14. As the troops neared their final pre-attack stations, rear services elements presumably supplied them with the previously cached weapons and ammunition. Final briefings were given to prepare the officers and troops to fight in a new environment.

15. Shortly before 30 January, Hanoi gave the attack order and the Tet offensive was launched.