

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY Intelligence Information Cable

• ROUTINE

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COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

COI 8-22 FEBRUARY 1968

SUBJECT REACTIONS OF THE SAIGON POPULATION TO
THE VIET CONG TET OFFENSIVE

ACQ

SOURCE

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SUMMARY: SINCE THE VIET CONG TET OFFENSIVE, THE MORALE OF THE ARMY OFFICER CORPS IN SAIGON HAS REMAINED HIGH, ALTHOUGH CRITICISM OF ITS HIGHER COMMAND ECHELONS CONTINUES TO EXIST. MORALE OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IS LOW, RANGING FROM GLOOM OVER LOST BUSINESS TO DEEP

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FEAR. IN GENERAL, THE PEOPLE GAVE ASSISTANCE TO THE VIET CONG ONLY UNDER DURESS. END SUMMARY.

1. FIGHTING MORALE AMONG OFFICERS OF THE ARMY OF VIETNAM (ARVN) AND THE VIETNAM AIR FORCE (VNAF) HAS REMAINED CONSISTENTLY HIGH, WITH THE CONTINUING CONVICTION THAT THE BATTLE HAS GONE HEAVILY AGAINST THE VIET CONG (VC). HOWEVER, AN UNDERTOW OF CRITICISM, PERCEPTIBLE FROM THE OUTSET STILL PERSISTS AGAINST THE HIGH COMMAND. CIRCUMSTANTIAL STORIES OF NEGLECT, INCOMPETENCE AND SOMNOLENCE AMONG THE GENERALS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE AMONG JUNIOR AND FIELD RANKS, BOTH ON STAFF DUTIES AND IN FIELD UNITS. HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL NO DETECTABLE TALK OF ANY PLANNING BY JUNIOR OFFICERS TO REBEL AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OR THE HIGH COMMAND.

2. THE DOMINANT REACTION AMONG GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) OFFICIALS OF RANKS FROM CLERKS TO UNDER-SECRETARIES HAS FROM THE FIRST MOMENT OF SHOCK BEEN ONE OF FEAR. THEY ARE DEEPLY APPREHENSIVE OF VC REPRISALS AGAINST THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES SHOULD A SECOND ATTACK BE MADE ON SAIGON. STORIES OF VC EXECUTIONS IN HUE, BROADCAST BY THE GVN WITH THE EVIDENT INTENTION OF STIFFENING RESIS-

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TANCE, HAVE HAD THE DIRECTLY CONTRARY EFFECT. OFFICIALS IN SAIGON WERE SO SHAKEN BY THE TET OFFENSIVE THAT FOR SOME TWO WEEKS THEREAFTER MANY WERE MARKEDLY RELUCTANT TO APPEAR AT THEIR OFFICES OR INDEED IN PUBLIC AT ALL. THEIR PRINCIPAL CONCERN WAS IF POSSIBLE TO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT. WHILE ATTENDANCE AT OFFICES IS IMPROVING, CIVIL SERVANTS REMAIN VERY FEARFUL.

3. THERE IS MUCH GLOOM AMONG THE INDUSTRIALISTS AND ENTREPRENEURS. MANY INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENTS ARE AT A STANDSTILL THROUGH VC ACTION OR FROM ALLIED COUNTER-MEASURES. AT LEAST ONE MAJOR FACTORY IN GIA DINH, OCCUPIED BY THE ARVN, IS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN LOOTED BY THE SOLDIERY. SEVERE LIMITATIONS ON BANK DRAWINGS HAVE MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR FACTORY OWNERS TO MEET CURRENT DEMANDS OR EVEN PAY THEIR LABORERS. THEY VIEW THE FUTURE IN PESSIMISTIC TERMS. MERCHANTS ARE BEING PRESSED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO CLEAR GOODS QUICKLY FROM THE CUSTOMS UNDER THREAT OF PENALTIES. THEY ARE FORCED TO PAY DUES IMMEDIATELY, BUT REGARD THE PROSPECT OF SALES AS HIGHLY DUBIOUS.

4. AT THE WORKING CLASS LEVEL THERE IS WIDESPREAD

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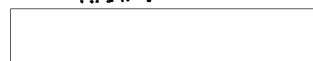
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AND DEEP FEAR OF THE VC, FELT MOST INTENSELY BY THOSE MANY WHO HAVE LOST THEIR HOMES AND POSSESSIONS. ALTHOUGH MANY WORKERS HINT THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN GLAD TO HELP THE VC IN AREAS OCCUPIED BY THEM, FEW BUT THOSE ALREADY ENLISTED AS VC CADRES DID SO. THE MAJORITY HAVE CONTINUED TO BELIEVE IN THE SUPERIOR STRENGTH OF THE GVN. HELP HAS THUS GENERALLY BEEN GIVEN TO THE VC ONLY UNDER DURESS. VC AGITATORS ADDRESSING MEETINGS IN OCCUPIED DISTRICTS MET WITH LITTLE RESPONSE. HOWEVER, THE GVN, WHILE STILL FEARED, IS HELD IN ALMOST UNIVERSAL CONTEMPT, AND THE ARVN PARTICULARLY IS WIDELY DENOUNCED FOR ARSON AND LOOTING. MANY REFUGEES CAMPED IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS HAVE AS YET HAD NO RELIEF FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S EMERGENCY MEASURES AND VIEW THESE WITH CYNICISM. TO A HIGH PROPORTION OF WORKERS, UNEMPLOYMENT IS AN IMMEDIATE THREAT.

5. ALTHOUGH SOME ETHNIC CHINESE SEEM TO HAVE HELPED OCCUPYING VC UNITS TO TRACK DOWN GVN OFFICIALS AND OFFICERS FOR EXECUTION, THESE MAY WELL ALREADY HAVE BEEN VC CADRES. THE CHINESE COMMUNITY AT LARGE SEEMS TO HAVE DONE ITS BEST IN TRADITIONAL FASHION TO MINIMIZE INVOLVEMENT WITH

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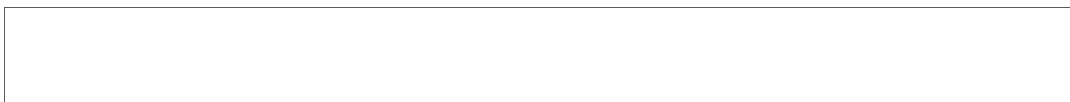
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THE VC. PREVAILING FEAR OF THE COMMUNISTS IS PERHAPS EVEN MORE INTENSE IN CHOLON THAN AMONG THE VIETNAMESE IN SAIGON, BUT CO-OPERATION WAS VERY LIMITED. CHINESE FAMILIES ASKED FOR FOOD BY THE VC SUPPLIED IT WHILE KEEPING GRILLES OF THEIR HOUSES FIRMLY LOCKED AGAINST THEM.

6. THE PREVAILING MOOD OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IN SAIGON REMAINS ONE OF APPREHENSION. THE VC IS MUCH MORE DEEPLY FEARED THEN EVER BEFORE. BY ALL LEVELS OF CIVILIAN SOCIETY INCLUDING HIGH OFFICIALS OF THE GVN. THE ARVN OFFICER CORPS, WHILE RETAINING THE HIGH BATTLE MORALE, REMAINS CRITICAL AND DUBIOUS OF ITS COMMAND ECHELONS. THE LEGEND THAT THE AMERICANS ARE SOMEHOW IN LEAGUE WITH THE VC HAS TAKEN ROOT FIRMLY EVEN AMONG SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS.



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