

VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF
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DATE: 10 Feb 1968

TO: The Director

FROM: George W. Allen

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Attached is a coordinated, revised version of the memorandum on the Current VC Campaign. Copies were sent to Honorable Rostow, Ambassador Leonhart, Mr. Habib, Maj. Gen. DePuy, and Lt. Gen. Carroll, as you instructed, over George Carver's signature.

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[Redacted Signature]

GEORGE W. ALLEN
Vietnamese Affairs Staff

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Current VC Campaign

Recent enemy activity must be reviewed within the framework of the overall aims of his winter-spring campaign -- to break the will of U. S. to continue the war, and to create conditions favorable for a settlement on Communist terms. In this context, the winter phase of the campaign (October - January) was intended to set the stage for a "decisive" period of the war during the spring phase. The winter phase was characterized by major operations in outlying areas (Dak To, DMZ, Loc Ninh) to draw out and engage U. S. mobile forces, coupled with attacks on US-GVN bases and administrative centers and intensive guerrilla pressure against the pacification program to tie down allied forces. It also included preparation for a major (conventional) warfare campaign of potentially climactic character in the Khe Sanh and general DMZ area. These activities were accompanied by political and subversive actions preparatory to a "general uprising" in urban areas.

The Tet offensive represents the beginning of the spring phase -- which our adversaries have described as the decisive phase of the war. There is abundant evidence to demonstrate that this phase aims at a "general offensive" combined with a "general uprising." The VC hope that this offensive will inflict major defeats on U. S. forces, disintegrate the Vietnamese forces, and collapse the GVN. The Communists evidently believe that major successes along these lines will create irresistible international and domestic pressures on the U. S. to open negotiations on Communist terms.

The evidence available suggests that the Communists hoped to accomplish a great deal more than they did in their initial assaults on the cities. They had made arrangements to seize control of the radio stations, seize key officials, destroy the local GVN apparatus, and organize and manipulate the populace. This they failed to accomplish except in portions of a handful of cities. This failure, coupled with the heavy losses they have suffered, must be regarded as a setback to their campaign.

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On the other hand, other reports, the basic documents pertaining to the winter-spring campaign, and analysis of the pattern of recent operations, suggest that the Tet offensive may have been only the spectacular initial onslaught of a sustained offensive, with a successful uprising as an ultimate, rather than the immediate goal.

Although they probably are disappointed to some extent with the results, they probably also believe that they have created conditions favorable for the attainment of the basic objectives of their winter-spring campaign. They have dealt a severe psychological blow to the urban population -- much of which had sought sanctuary in the cities from the terrors of the war in the provinces. Although it is true that the urban populace did not rise against the GVN, it did not depart from its normally passive, neutral stances. The Communist attacks have resulted in widespread devastation and imposed substantial new economic and social burdens on an already overtaxed GVN administration. They have also inflicted significant damage on US and ARVN military installations and materiel, and tied allied military forces down to an effort to restore security to urban areas, to some degree at the expense of protecting pacified areas. These limited accomplishments may satisfy the minimum objectives of the Tet offensive and encourage the Communists to pursue their basic strategy.

There are numerous indications that the Communists intend to continue their pressure in many areas, probably in concert with major operations in the Khe Sanh - DMZ region. In that sector, North Vietnamese units comprising two divisions are probing outposts of the Khe Sanh base camp while extending their entrenchments in siege-like fashion. Another two divisions remain capable of attacking U. S. positions in the central and eastern DMZ area.

In the coastal plain, strong Communist forces -- two or three regiments -- remain in the districts surrounding Quang Tri city, and U. S. officials expect further attacks there. Another regiment or two are in the vicinity of Hue, and may attempt to reinforce those units still contesting allied control for that city. In Quang Nam province, the North Vietnamese 2d Division, reinforced by the 31st Regiment of the 341st Division and possibly the 4th Regiment, has moved into the area between Hoi An and Danang, and may attempt strong attacks against either or both of these cities. Strong Communist forces reportedly remain close to the cities of Tam Ky and Quang Ngai.

In II Corps, all three regiments of the North Vietnamese 1st Division are now located near Dak To, and major action appears imminent. Reports from Darlac province indicate that the North Vietnamese 33d Regiment is

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being reinforced from Pleiku and that new attacks are expected. In the central coastal provinces, Qui Nhon and Nha Trang anticipate mortar attacks, but no major ground assaults. Two or three battalions are reported west of Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen province, however, and new attacks are expected.

In III Corps, the 7th Division apparently remains in northern Binh Duong province with the mission of maintaining pressure on bases of the U. S. 1st and 25th Divisions. The status of the 9th Division is not clear; major elements have been reported in action in the area north of Saigon, but there are indications that others are located further north in Binh Long province. The 5th Division, which attacked Bien Hoa, has disengaged and may have withdrawn temporarily to regroup.

In IV Corps, Viet Cong concentrations continue to be reported in the immediate vicinity of several province capitals, maintaining limited pressure through sporadic mortar attacks.

Numerous reports from various parts of South Vietnam indicate that many of the threats enumerated above will result in new attacks in the period between 9 and 15 February; the most frequently mentioned date is the 10th. These actions would be intended to further disrupt allied control in the cities, to demonstrate the ability for repeated attacks, to further intimidate the populace, and thus contribute to the ultimate goal of a general uprising.

One ominous aspect of the current posture of the enemy military forces is their apparent implantation in the immediate vicinities of the district towns and province capitals. This pattern, reported in many parts of the country, suggests that the Communists have moved into and reasserted authority over the rural populace in formerly pacified areas. The current flow of refugees into district and provincial capitals would seem to be further evidence of this; the refugees could be fleeing their homes for fear of allied air attacks on the Communist forces occupying their hamlets.

Several documents have suggested that the winter-spring campaign entailed the creation of new guerrilla forces. A number of recent reports indicate that the Viet Cong are organizing and arming new guerrilla elements, both in the cities and in adjacent hamlets. Since Communist plans for the general uprising must have provided for arming additional guerrilla and militia elements, these reports are plausible. Some reports have suggested that these newly organized guerrillas will be used in renewed attacks on the cities. The fragmentary nature of available information precludes a firm estimate of the numbers that may be involved, but it is

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conceivable that they may be sufficient to offset, at least in part, the heavy losses incurred by the Viet Cong in their recent attacks. While the quality of such elements would be low, they could be used as replacements for the depleted main and local force units.

There is also a disturbing lack of information on the status of RVNAF soldiers who were home on leave during Tet, and hence possibly trapped in hamlets now occupied by the Viet Cong. We also have received little information on the status of RF and PF outposts in the areas engulfed by the Viet Cong. These isolated elements would seem to be vulnerable to Communist propaganda claims of urban successes, and hence another source of potential manpower for depleted Viet Cong units.

There are indications that the intensified offensive in South Vietnam may be coupled with some form of air action by the North Vietnamese Air Force, by ground attacks in Laos, and possibly by terrorist attacks on U.S. bases in Thailand. Recent unusual flight activity by North Vietnamese MIG-21's and IL-14's and the movement of IL-28's from China back into the Hanoi area could be indicative of preparations for some new form of hostile air action. Reports from Laos indicate impending Communist attacks against government installations in the North [redacted] and South (e.g. Saravane). Some reports say Saravane is to be attacked on the 10th or 12th -- a timeframe coinciding with the indicated new wave of attacks in South Vietnam. [redacted] Thailand reflect rumors of impending terrorist action against U.S. air bases. While the Communists have not previously reflected the interest in, or the capability for such far-flung coordinated actions, an attempt in this direction would not be inconsistent with the general concept of distracting attention from the main theater of operations and exercising all available capabilities in order to decisively alter the situation in the Communists' favor.

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The Communists, in the weeks ahead, thus seem likely to confront the U.S. and the GVN with the most serious political-military challenge since the introduction of our combat forces in 1965. We cannot be certain how the initial phase of the spring offensive has affected Communist plans and capabilities. The evidence, however, strongly suggests there will be renewed and repeated attacks on some urban areas and nearby military installations, and a major campaign against Khe Sanh and along the DMZ. If this effort materializes, it will indicate the Communists remain committed to pressing an "all out" endeavor to bring the war to an early and favorable conclusion.

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