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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
7 February 1968

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in South Vietnam No. 20
(As of 7:00 A.M. EST)

Summary

Despite their first use of tank warfare in South Vietnam, the Communists failed in a nightlong attempt on 7 February to seize and hold the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp.

The enemy apparently hoped to move his armor on up Route 9 toward Khe Sanh after taking the camp. Coordinated ground and mortar assaults were also mounted at Khe Sanh during the Lang Vei battle.

No major new attacks were reported elsewhere in South Vietnam overnight, but the situation is still touch and go in several urban areas--over a week after the Communist offensive started. In Hue, the enemy is still dug in at strongpoints and there appears to be little prospect of rooting him out soon.

In Saigon, little activity was reported overnight, but this appears to have resulted largely from the inactivity of the South Vietnamese forces in pushing against the Communists in Cholon. This sector of the city may now be largely under enemy control.

The enemy position in Dalat also appears stronger than previously reported. Communist units assertedly hold several key strongpoints and outnumber friendly forces.

Elsewhere, there are still numerous reports of enemy units concentrated close by some urban centers and new attacks could be forthcoming.

In North Vietnam, there are continuing indications of enemy plans to use his air arm in supporting the ground offensive in northern South Vietnam.

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I Corps

1. The North Vietnamese attack on the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp between Khe Sanh and the Laos border was repulsed on the morning of the 7th. The enemy force, of undetermined size, used flame-throwers and Soviet-built T-34 tanks in their attack. Five of the nine enemy tanks were reported knocked out.

2. The assault was undertaken in coordination with a small-scale attack on Hill 861 and a large-scale artillery, rocket, and mortar barrage on the Khe Sanh base itself. No reports of casualties are in, but the Khe Sanh airstrip is again operational after a brief closure due to numerous craters.

3. Although tanks or armored vehicles were reportedly used by the North Vietnamese in a recent action in Laos, this is the first confirmed enemy use of tanks within South Vietnam. The Communists probably believed that the location of Lang Vei in close proximity to Route 9 from Laos would render a tank attack advantageous. Enemy use of tanks in most other western DMZ areas, however, would be more difficult due to the thick jungle growth and treacherous, hilly terrain.

4. In Hue, street fighting continues with US Marines pressing forward block by block in their effort to drive the resisting enemy forces out of the western half of the city. South Vietnamese forces still have the enemy holed up in two areas of the citadel.

II Corps

5. The night of 6-7 February was quiet in the major cities in the coastal provinces of central South Vietnam. In the highlands to the west, skirmishing was reported continuing in Dalat, where the enemy grip seems stronger than reported earlier. New fighting also erupted near Kontum city.

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6. In Dalat, the provincial capital of Tuyen Duc Province, an estimated 1,500 Communist troops presently are holding the railroad station, the principal church, and many ambush sites. These forces are apparently elements of those used by the Communists in their initial assault on Dalat; it is not known if a new attack has been mounted. Friendly forces in Dalat are reported to total just over 1,000.

7. Just to the north of Kontum city, US units engaged in heavy contact with a large enemy force, identified as elements of the North Vietnamese 66th Regiment. No details of the battle, which was still in progress at midday on 7 February, have been received. Other North Vietnamese units, including the 24th Division, are reported approaching the city from the south. There have been continuing reports during the past few days that enemy units were close by Kontum city.

8. The nature of North Vietnamese weapons and equipment, captured during recent clashes in the Dak To area of Kontum Province, indicate that the enemy units in western Kontum have been newly supplied. The weapons were newly manufactured and the latest models. Almost every type of weapon in the North Vietnamese inventory, possibly including 57-mm. and 75-mm. field howitzers, have been employed by the enemy in the area near Dak To. The first use of the B-41 bazooka-type rocket was noted here on a 6 February attack on the US perimeter at Dak To.

Saigon and III Corps

9. Downtown Saigon was relatively quiet during the night, but 16 allied soldiers and 120 Communists were reported killed in a battle near the Tan Son Nhut Airbase just to the northwest of the city on 6 February. Occasional small arms fire was heard in the capital last night and government police reported a sharp clash with a group of Viet Cong in Cholon.

10. The Director of the Saigon Municipal Police said yesterday that the Communists appear to be trying to cut off the Cholon district from the rest of Saigon.

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He said that the Viet Cong now have at least one main force battalion in Cholon, barricaded in several strong positions which government forces have not been able to penetrate. Two other main force battalions, he says, are currently deployed to the west and south of the capital and may also attempt to enter Cholon.

11. The municipal police director reportedly was refused a request on 6 February that tanks and recoilless rifles be brought in to the Cholon clearing operation. National Police Director General Loan is said to have turned down the request because the use of such heavy weapons would destroy portions of the city.

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13. Military activity elsewhere in the III Corps area centered mainly in Hau Nghia Province to the west of Saigon on 6 February. A Viet Cong force overran a Regional Force outpost, killing 41 South Vietnamese and two Americans. In two other engagements in Hau Nghia, allied troops lost another 8 killed and 28 wounded while reporting 56 Viet Cong killed. In Tay Ninh Province the provincial capital was hit by two mortar attacks and a ground probe last night. Three Popular Force soldiers were killed and an estimated 20-25 civilians were killed or wounded. In the other provinces of III Corps Viet Cong actions were limited to harassing fire and light ground probes.

IV Corps

14. South Vietnamese Army and Regional Force units engaged Viet Cong forces in a number of sharp clashes, while on clearing operations in and around Can Tho city on 5-6 February.

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15. The Communists apparently have been driven out of the Can Tho university buildings in which they had barricaded themselves.

16. South Vietnamese and US forces also continue to make contact with strong enemy forces while conducting sweeps on the outskirts of several other delta provincial capitals. The massing of large Viet Cong forces in close proximity to these cities is an indication that, although the Communists have suffered heavy casualties in some cases they clearly have not yet been forced to withdraw to base areas to regroup and refit.

North Vietnamese Air Activity

17. New developments in the North Vietnamese air situation on 7 February include [redacted] "probable" enemy high performance aircraft over Laos opposite the southern panhandle of North Vietnam and the southward movement of seven AN-2 transports.

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18. The jet aircraft were said to be operating south of 17:30⁰ latitude. If the planes are confirmed as North Vietnamese, it would mark some highly unusual flight activity for the enemy who usually confines his air activity to the region above Vinh--some 90 miles to the north.

19. On 7 February, [redacted]

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[redacted] a minimum of seven AN-2 transports deploying from the Hanoi area to Vinh. Two of the AN-2s were believed to have radioed their destination possibly as Vinh Linh--a point along the coast just to the north of the DMZ. During the past week there has been a round of enemy activities suggesting that Vinh airfield might soon be utilized by North Vietnamese aircraft. The stop at Vinh could be used to refuel and/or arm the aircraft for offensive activities in northern South Vietnam.