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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam



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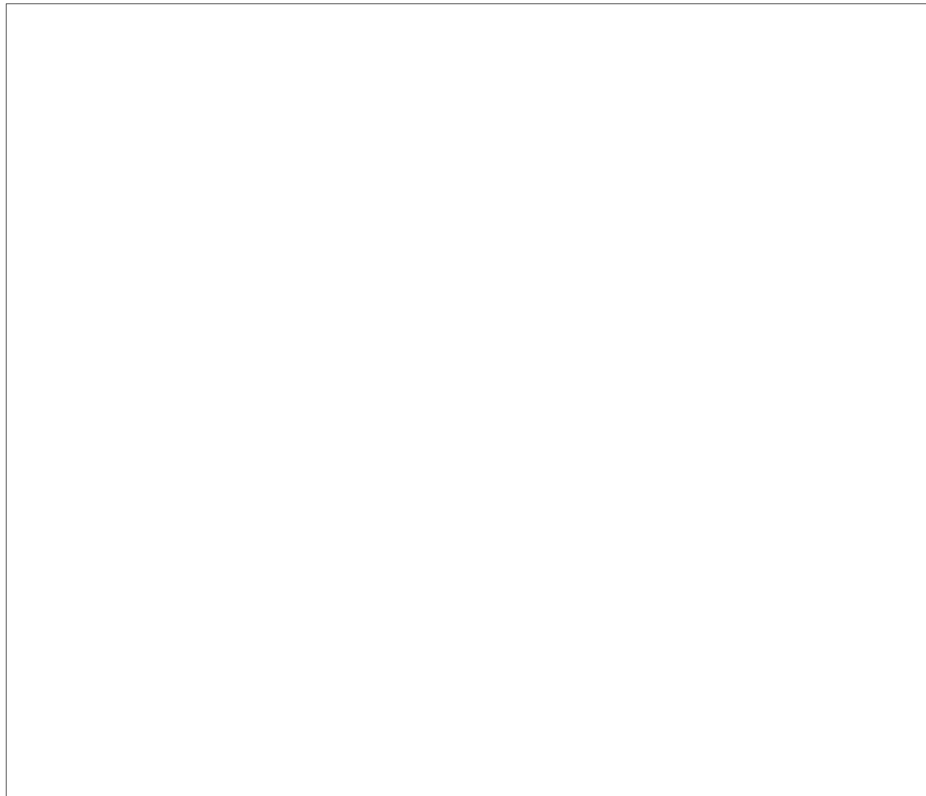
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WARNING

This document contains classified information affecting the national security of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, US Code Title 18, Sections 793, 794, and 798.



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Information as of 1200
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HIGHLIGHTS

The Lang Ve Special Forces camp, a scant five miles from Khe Sanh, has fallen to North Vietnamese Army units spearheaded by tanks. Communist forces remain entrenched in the Cholon section of Saigon, and the enemy position in the city of Da Lat is strong. Scattered clashes have been reported throughout the country.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Lang Vei Special Forces camp has fallen (Paras. 1-3). The situation elsewhere in I Corps is described (Paras. 4-7). Except for heavy pressure at Kontum and Da Lat, the situation in II Corps is relatively quiet (Paras. 8-10). The situation in III Corps is good although security in Saigon itself remains unstable (Paras. 11-13). Can Tho city was the scene of the only significant enemy action in IV Corps (Para. 14). The status of Route 4 is reported (Para. 15).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

A number of influential personalities seem to be coming around to the view that the Viet Cong offensive will increase the people's support for the government, provided the government properly exploits present anti-Communist sentiment (Paras. 1-8). Many senators are criticizing the military leadership, and their attitude prevented passage of a resolution worded to express support for the government (Paras. 9-10). The food situation in Saigon is improving, and prices are coming down (Para. 11).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Unprecedented activity on the part of North Vietnamese bombers and transport aircraft during the past week suggests that Hanoi will employ its limited air power in some way to support the current Communist offensive in South Vietnam (Paras. 1-9).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Interrogation of captured Viet Cong who participated in the recent attacks on major cities indicates some of their pre-offensive indoctrination took the same line the Communists are now peddling in their propaganda (Paras. 1-7). Vietnamese Communist diplomats speaking in Pyongyang have linked the Pueblo incident with the Vietnam conflict (Paras. 8-9). Vietnamese Communist spokesmen are underscoring their contention that the first moves to end the war must come from the US (Paras. 10-11). Communist propaganda is now stressing that their military offensive in South Vietnam may not necessarily be short lived (Paras. 12-13).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Some of the Communists who attacked Saigon were apparently trained in Cambodia, according to prisoner interrogations (Paras. 1-3). Truck deliveries to North Vietnam during the past three months are reported (Paras. 4-5).

Note: Because of a disruption in field reporting from MACV the Weekly Review of South Vietnam Battle Statistics will not be published on schedule. They will appear when available.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Lang Vei Special Forces camp, five miles from Khe Sanh, has fallen to North Vietnamese Army units spearheaded by tanks. The enemy position in Da Lat appears stronger than previously reported, and Communist units hold several key strongpoints. In Saigon, little activity has been reported, as South Vietnamese forces have not pushed against the Communist forces entrenched in Cholon. Sporadic firing, primarily from isolated Communist detachments, continues in a number of other urban areas. Allied forces have reported a series of other armed clashes throughout the country.

I Corps

2. On the morning of 7 February, enemy forces, supported by at least nine PT-76 tanks, overran the Lang Vei Special Forces camp. Latest reports indicate that about one enemy company controls the camp. An allied reaction force on 7 February reported rescuing 14 of the 20 US Special Forces advisers and approximately 70-100 of the 450 indigenous forces originally in the camp. The attack against Lang Vei was coordinated with a mortar and artillery barrage against the main Khe Sanh combat base and a ground probe against Hill 861. On 7 February intermittent fire was reported to be continuing against US positions in the Khe Sanh area.

3. MACV has reported that an estimated 6,000 refugees from the Lang Vei area have moved to a position about one quarter of a mile from Khe Sanh. This presents a serious tactical problem for Khe Sanh and efforts are being made to deter the refugees from moving any closer.

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4. On 5 February radio stations serving the forward headquarters of the Communist Thua-Thien-Hue Military Region and the headquarters of the 6th Regiment were located in the immediate vicinity of Hue city. A prisoner captured during the fighting in the city has stated that the Hue municipal unit and the 800th battalion, 6th Regiment, had the mission of conducting a three-day attack against the MACV compound. If allied resistance was heavy, the attack, according to the prisoner, would continue for seven days, and if the Communist units were reinforced, they would maintain the pressure for 15 days. The prisoner claims that the municipal unit and 800th battalion consist largely of regroupees or local Viet Cong, lending credence to some assumptions that most of the recent attacks in I Corps, and elsewhere, were primarily conducted by Viet Cong units, and that by and large few North Vietnamese Army units have been committed.

5. An after-action report [redacted]

[redacted] concerning the attack on Quang Ngai city indicates that elements of every combat effective force in the province were used in the attack. Captured documents and prisoners have identified eight sapper/infantry battalions and 12 local force companies as having participated in the assault.

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6. Weapons captured during the attack indicate that the enemy was well equipped. The RPG-7 rocket launcher was employed for the first time in Quang Ngai. In addition, US advisers report that much of the enemy's ammunition was new. Sapper munitions, such as satchel charges and bangalore torpedoes were well made, suggesting that they came from an arms factory and were probably not homemade.

7. The Vietnamese estimate that the total strength of the enemy force attacking Quang Ngai city was around 3,600. Enemy killed, according to Vietnamese and advisory body counts, exceeded 1,200. Included in the enemy losses were several high-ranking officers,

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such as the 48th battalion commander and two of the battalion's subordinate company commanders.

II Corps

8. Except for continuing heavy pressure by Communist forces against the provincial capitals of Kontum city and Da Lat, the military situation in II Corps was relatively quiet.

9. Heavy contact between US forces and probable elements of the North Vietnamese Army 66th Regiment apparently continues northeast of Kontum city. The heavily damaged city is bracing for an epidemic of plague and cholera. There are also reports that the Vietnamese 24th Sector commander, responsible for the defense of Kontum, has been relieved for incompetence.

10. In Tuyen Duc Province, an estimated 1,500-man Viet Cong force reportedly remains entrenched within the Da Lat city limits.

III Corps

11. While the provincial capitals and district towns in III Corps are under allied control, security in Saigon remains unstable. The situation is clearly at its worse on the southwestern side of the city; it appears as though the Viet Cong are trying to isolate the Cholon section from the rest of the city. On 6 February 16 allied soldiers and 120 Communists were reported killed in a battle near Tan Son Nhut Air Base northeast of Saigon.

12. Military activity elsewhere in the III Corps area on 6-7 February centered in Hau Nghia Province. In three engagements there on 6 February, 56 Viet Cong were killed compared to allied losses of 51 killed and 28 wounded.

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13. Interrogation of a prisoner captured on 4 February indicates that the 5th Viet Cong Division--active in the Bien Hoa area--has a radio intercept capability and heavy weapons support organic to the division. The prisoner stated that his unit provided the division with a radio intercept and a cryptanalysis capability. It has cryptographers proficient in the English language. By utilizing these capabilities, the prisoner claimed that division elements recently were able to avoid at least one B-52 strike and to thwart an allied ground attack. The source also stated that the 5th Division had a "light" artillery regiment providing it with 140-mm. rocket support. The prisoner claims to have heard that the division possesses a weapon larger than the 140-mm. rocket, but he was unable to provide any details.

IV Corps

14. The only significant activity reported on 5-6 February was a series of clashes in and around Can Tho city. The Communists apparently have been driven out of the Can Tho university buildings in which they had barricaded themselves.

Status of Highway 4

15. On 5 February Highway 4, the strategic route linking Saigon with the delta provinces, was reported impassable due to numerous interdictions in Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, Phong Dinh, and Ba Xuyen provinces. The nine miles of this highway which traverse An Xuyen were reported clear, but the status of the road in Bac Lieu is unknown.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. An increasing number of influential personalities seem to be coming around to the view that the Communist offensive has not only hurt the Viet Cong image in the eyes of the people but will also serve to increase support for the government. They say, however, that the degree of popular backing which the government can expect will depend on the government's ability to provide for the people and mobilize them for the anti-Communist fight.

2. Tran Quoc Buu, president of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, who took a pessimistic view early in the crisis, told an embassy officer on 6 February that he believes many people previously "neutral" have now swung to support of the government. This opinion was concurred in by Vo Van Tai, secretary general of the confederation's Saigon Council. Tai, who is still scheduled to be tried for his part in the recent labor disputes, had previously issued a statement on behalf of his council voicing full support for the government in the crisis.

3. Buu told the embassy officer that the regime now has a perfect opportunity to capitalize on anti-Communist sentiment, but should not use its own resources exclusively to mobilize the population. The government would do better, he feels, to encourage the direct participation of leading nongovernment personalities. [redacted] Buu's own effort to organize his confederation affiliates to assist the government are being encouraged by several cabinet members.

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4. Oppositionist Lower House deputy Ly Quy Chung expressed similar views in a recent conversation with an embassy officer. Chung voiced optimism at the lack of popular response to the Viet Cong and, like Buu, views the present situation as a good opportunity for the government to broaden its base of popular support by calling on the assistance of various prestigious figures. Chung said that the Lower House will continue to support the government's efforts in the current crisis, as long as no unconstitutional steps are taken.

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5. Phan Khac Suu, an oppositionist and defeated presidential candidate, was taken into protective police custody on 6 February because of a Viet Cong prisoner's allegation that Suu would be kidnapped. Suu has expressed his eagerness to help the government [REDACTED]

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he planned to confer with other political leaders and then offer his services to the government and his willingness to work with any official or organization.

6. Although Suu's remarks were made before the police took him into custody, there is little reason to believe that his attitude has changed. His ability to carry through with his plans will, of course, be hampered if he remains in custody.

7. These indications of a willingness to join forces with the government from persons who, like Suu and Chung, are known oppositionists or, like Tai, have a grudge against the government, are encouraging signs. All of these individuals can probably command a considerable following, and their influence should be useful in committing more of the public to the anti-Communist effort.

8. As for the people themselves, a number of reports indicate that morale in many areas is on the upswing. Some confusion still exists, unfounded rumors still find currency, and there continues to be criticism of the government, but for the most part, observers in Saigon report, anti-Communist sentiment is growing. This is true, despite the fact that people in some localities view the Viet Cong offensive as having resulted in a psychological victory for the Communists.

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Upper House Dissent

9. Despite these encouraging signs, there continue to be serious expressions of dissent from the Upper House. During a heated session on 6 February, several senators severely criticized the government, and particularly the military leadership. They charged that, although the security services had had prior warning of impending Viet Cong attacks, no steps were taken to prevent them. One senator called the military commanders incompetent and irresponsible, saying that "a sense of decency should compel them to resign."

10. As a result, the Upper House was unable to reach agreement on the wording of a resolution to voice support for the government. The question was deferred until the 7 February session, when a resolution was finally drafted without any explicit mention of backing for the government. The communiqué denounces the Viet Cong, expresses gratitude to Vietnamese soldiers--but not military commanders--and to allied forces. It also urges creation of an armed peoples' self-defense force. Antigovernment sentiment was somewhat muted in the second session, but more criticism can probably be expected in the future.

Food in Saigon

11. The food situation in Saigon is apparently not as serious as it first appeared early in the crisis. On 1 and 2 February food stocks available in the markets were very limited and prices skyrocketed to three and four times the normal price in many instances. By 3 February, however, prices began to come down and on the 5th the markets carried an almost complete stock of foodstuffs, including meat, fish, poultry, and vegetables. Food vendors reported that some fresh products were arriving from areas close to Saigon. Stocks of rice, which are stored in warehouses in the Saigon-Cholon area, were held up for a time because of insecure conditions in Cholon, but on 6 February the government began to move quantities of rice out to the public in some parts of the city and planned greater distribution for succeeding days.

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AN-2 Activity

6. The southward deployment of North Vietnam's AN-2 force may also have been complicated by weather conditions or tactical considerations. [redacted]

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[redacted] about seven AN-2s did depart Hanoi/Gia Lam in the late afternoon of 7 February (Hanoi time) and flew at least 50 miles south of Vinh.

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[redacted] shortly thereafter these planes flew farther south and attempted to land--possibly at an "inactive" airstrip at Tchepone, Laos, which is located about 35 miles west of the Khe Sanh area. [redacted]

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[redacted] the AN-2s ran into bad weather and were forced to abort their mission in this region.

8. [redacted]

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[redacted] five AN-2s did fly north from the southern section of the country in the early evening hours of 7 February (Hanoi time). By about 2200 hours three of these aircraft had landed at Gia Lam Airfield and one at Vinh. It is still not clear whether the AN-2s were involved in a transport or an attack mission.

9. Meanwhile, North Vietnamese air defense nets continued to carry warnings of B-52 operations in the vicinity of the Demilitarized Zone on 7 February. The steady bombardment of Communist positions by these bombers makes them an important target for North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile units, which are known to be in the area, or for MIG-21s based near Hanoi.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Interrogation of captured Viet Cong who took part in the recent attacks indicates some of their pre-offensive indoctrination took the same line the Communists are now peddling in their propaganda. These prisoners assert that the Communists hoped the Tet military offensive would attract dramatic popular support, particularly in urban areas. They say that the end product was to be a coalition of the Liberation Front with new "front" groups--a coalition which would take the form of a new national "administration" or "government."

2. A group of officers captured at Nha Trang claim to be especially informed on Communist political intentions and that these intentions were embodied in North Vietnam's Communist Party Resolution No. 13. Although there have been many references to this policy paper dating back to the spring of 1967, details are sketchy. One of the Nha Trang prisoners claims that the main purpose of the military offensive was to establish a significant Communist presence in important cities in an effort to strengthen the hand of the Liberation Front in negotiations with the US. The actual technique used was to establish other "fronts" composed of groups or individuals with a record of disagreement or disaffection with the Saigon government. The Liberation Front, in alliance with these new "fronts," planned to form a new national government for South Vietnam which could negotiate directly with the US for withdrawal of all foreign troops.

3. Many of the prisoners claim to have no knowledge of any long-range political objectives in the current Tet offensive. Others, however, like the Nha Trang group, claim that their mission was primarily a propaganda one. One man says he was under instructions to organize the kind of popular "opposition" groups which Hanoi and Liberation Radio have claimed were springing up all over South Vietnam. He reports that part of the plan at Nha Trang was to capture the local radio station so that the Communists could use it to generate a general uprising among the people. The existing government administrative structure was to be won over or destroyed.

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4. Another Nha Trang prisoner claims that in early December, he and 40 military and political types were instructed on how to organize new popular fronts. He says that even the name, "alliance for peace and democracy"--now used widely in Communist propaganda--was used in the indoctrination sessions. Such fronts were to be organized in any area where the Viet Cong were successful in holding territory--a possible explanation of why Communist propaganda has such organizations springing up only in Hue and Saigon so far. The prisoner reports, for example, that no such organization was formed in Nha Trang because the military action died out too quickly.

5. Prisoners from other areas have provided variants of the same story. Details vary, but the theme recurs--the Communists are creating new "fronts" for the purpose of establishing a "coalition" with the Liberation Front. This coalition will then pose as a political power capable of challenging the present governmental authority.

6. Although the failure of the Communists to win over significant popular support in the initial effort clearly shows a glaring weakness, their actual expectations for the first part of the Tet offensive may have been less than some of the prisoners were led to believe. By creating chaos and insecurity in widespread sections of the South, they have brought about conditions where increased political agitation, combined with continuing military pressure, may still promote the kind of situation which is outlined by Communist propaganda and by prisoners and captured documents.

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7. Hanoi's Resolution 13, furthermore, may have framed only the broad policy directives on which current strategy is based. The tactics of the Tet offensive and its immediate goals may not have been spelled out in these long-range Communist plans. However, military action (a "general offensive"), the "general uprising," and the concept of a "coalition government" were continually referred to in captured documents throughout the fall. The emphasis on these ideas probably stemmed from a Hanoi policy resolution in late 1966 or early 1967 which put renewed stress on improving the political position of the Liberation Front and played up the importance of political tactics, possibly including a "talk-fight" strategy in negotiations with the US. It is unlikely that these long-range plans have been abandoned even though the Communists did not achieve all they hoped for initially.

Vietnamese Laud North Korean Support

8. In what seems to have been a deliberate attempt to link the Pueblo incident with the Vietnam conflict, a rally was held in Pyongyang at which Vietnamese Communist representatives praised the North Koreans for their support.

9. Although their Korean comrades steered clear of any specific claim of capturing the Pueblo in order to support the Communists in Vietnam, a Liberation Front speaker described the action as an "effective contribution to the struggle of the South Vietnamese people." The North Vietnamese ambassador was not so explicit and only claimed that Vietnamese Communist successes would be "unthinkable" without the support tendered by the North Koreans. Earlier Communist propaganda seemed to avoid making any direct connection between the Pueblo and events in Vietnam.

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Front Spokesmen in Cairo

10. Vietnamese Communist spokesmen continue to underscore their contention that any moves to end the war must start with the US.

11. The head of the Liberation Front mission in Cairo held a press conference on 6 February to make this point and to present the Front's line on the current Communist offensive. The approach was that taken by his colleague in Moscow on the same day. Both rejected a coalition government or negotiations with the Thieu-Ky government, and both expressed determination to continue the struggle as long as necessary to achieve a settlement on Communist terms. The Front spokesman in Cairo sidestepped a question about volunteers if the US "doubled" its strength in Vietnam, saying there are plenty of Vietnamese, both North and South, and they will "always be able to defeat" whatever forces the US sends.

Communists Stress More Fighting

12. Vietnamese Communist propaganda is stressing that the present military offensive will not be a short-term effort and that more difficult days are ahead. Earlier appeals seemed to characterize the fighting as "urgent" and stressed the immediate objectives. Front and Hanoi statements in recent days have predicted that the fighting would become fiercer and fiercer, but that greater victories are yet to come. The AFP correspondent in Hanoi, whose material is censored and sometimes inspired by the North Vietnamese, reports he was told that the present fighting is only the beginning of a "new phase" in the struggle and that there will be a "second phase" which will prevent the allies from recovering from the first blow.

13. In the absence of any genuine popular uprising, the Communists have probably found it necessary to bolster Viet Cong morale in some quarters by stressing that the fighting must continue in order to nail down the successes achieved in the initial Tet thrust. Such propaganda is also designed to encourage greater uncertainty and fear among the already shaken South Vietnamese populace and to magnify and prolong the Communist threat.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Preliminary interrogations of Viet Cong prisoners indicate that some of the Communist units which attacked Saigon were trained on Cambodian territory.

2. Several members of Company 3 of the Viet Cong 6th Independent Battalion have stated that their 40-man company received military training between 2-28 January near Ba Thu village, Cambodia, across the border from South Vietnam's Hau Nghia Province. In addition to their group, the captives reported, there were "many other" Viet Cong cadre undergoing military training in the area. They had no knowledge of other Viet Cong units participating in the Tet offensive, nor of any staged from Cambodian territory, although this could have resulted from tight security.

3. Ba Thu village is populated almost entirely by Vietnamese and has long served as a rear area for Viet Cong training, medical, and logistic facilities. In the past, though, the Communists have refrained from basing organized, armed combat units there, presumably to avoid political repercussions from Phnom Penh. In this instance, however, they seem to have given higher priority to tactical requirements.

Truck Deliveries to North Vietnam

4.

[redacted] the Soviets shipped almost 1,400 vehicles to North Vietnam during the three months from 1 November 1967 to 31 January 1968. An added 550 trucks were probably imported by sea from all Communist countries during the same period.

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5. Imports appear to be somewhat higher than previously and may be in response to increasing truck losses the Vietnamese have been suffering in both Laos and North Vietnam since June. Hanoi would have had to increase its truck imports during that period to maintain its estimated truck inventory of about 11,000 vehicles.

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