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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

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The Situation in Vietnam

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

As the Communist offensive continued into its fourth day, the military situation remained critical in several provincial capitals and there were indications that the enemy may be planning renewed attacks in the Saigon area. The Communists, meanwhile, may be trying to put together some new kind of political facade to back up claims that their current offensive has touched off a popular uprising in support of objectives long sought by them.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

As the Communist offensive against urban centers rolled into its fourth day, enemy losses were counted at well over 10,000 dead (Paras. 1-2). In I Corps, fighting continues in Hue. Several district towns have also come under attack and the city of Quang Ngai appears to be once again threatened by troops massing on its outskirts (Paras. 3-5). The situation remains critical in the central highlands province capitals of Ban Me Thuot and Kontum. In the southern portion of II Corps the Communists still hold the market place in Da Lat (Paras. 6-8). The Communists are reported attempting to move into positions in Saigon from outlying areas, but no new attacks have been reported. In the rest of III Corps there have been only scattered attacks (Paras. 9-10). In the IV Corps area the situation in Ben Tre remains critical; the city of Vinh Long is also the scene of heavy fighting (Paras. 11-12). Allied aircraft losses have been heavy (Para. 13). The Communists have the capability to commit further forces to sustain their offensive activity (Paras. 14-16).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Fumbling by President Thieu and Prime Minister Loc in the early stages of the current crisis may encourage Vice President Ky to press for greater executive powers (Paras. 1-3). There is some talk that martial law may be lifted soon and the 24-hour curfew

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in Saigon temporarily suspended (Paras. 4-6). National Assembly reactions to the current crisis are mixed (Paras. 7-9). Popular reaction to the crisis has generally been one of confusion and fear, causing an increase in refugees (Paras. 10-12).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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

V. Communist Political Developments: Communist propaganda is portraying the current military offensive as one having broad popular support (Paras. 1-3). The Communists may be trying to put together some new kind of political facade to back up claims that their offensive has touched off a popular uprising in support of objectives long sought by them (Paras. 4-11).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Improvements in the Laotian road net may enable the Communists to ship greater quantities of supplies into northern South Vietnam (Paras. 1-4).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Communist offensive continued for the fourth day. The military situation remained critical in the provincial capitals of Hue, Kontum, Ban Me Thuot, Da Lat and Ben Tre, and pressure is also being exerted against a number of other key towns or in their immediate environs. There are some indications that the enemy may be planning renewed attacks in the Saigon area although the situation presently appears relatively stable.

2. Enemy losses continue to soar. According to US military authorities, Communist dead now number well over 10,000 and an additional 3,000 enemy suspects have been detained. Only some 1,700 individual and crew-served weapons have been picked up in the fighting, however. Allied losses at last report totaled about 630 South Vietnamese and 280 US military personnel killed and 1,590 South Vietnamese and 1,200 Americans wounded.

I Corps

3. Heavy fighting continues in and around Hue where Communist forces entrenched in the two-square-mile citadel area north of the Huong River continue stiff resistance. Two ARVN armored battalions have been attempting to fight their way into the walled city, and an ARVN airborne battalion has been lifted into the citadel in the vicinity of the South Vietnamese 1st Division Headquarters. Two other ARVN battalions have been committed to the effort to secure Hue, and may be joined by a battalion of the US 1st Cavalry Division. All US and government installations are in allied hands, but severe house-to-house fighting is reported throughout all sections of the city. The VOA transmitter is presently inoperative after enemy mortar attack.

4. Elsewhere in I Corps, fighting continues near several provincial towns. The Phu Loc District headquarters, which was seized on 1 February, is now reported in allied hands, but remains threatened by a large enemy force in the area. Quang Ngai city, although quiet, may also be threatened by enemy forces which are again reported massing nearby after being routed from the town two days ago. The city received mortar fire on the night of 1-2 February. Tam Ky, the capital of Quang Tin Province, also sustained a mortar attack, possibly mixed with artillery fire, on the same night.

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5. The district town of Duy Xuyen, in southern Quang Nam Province, is reported still under enemy control, although a South Korean brigade is preparing a counterattack. In the northeastern part of Quang Tri Province, a Combined Action Platoon headquarters in the district town of Cam Lo repelled an enemy force early on 2 February after a six-hour assault.

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II Corps

6. The allied military situation remains critical in the central provincial capitals of Kontum and Ban Me Thuot. Regimental-size North Vietnamese forces still occupy major portions of both towns and their environs. Heavy damage has been reported, particularly in Ban Me Thuot.

7. To the south, the Communists still hold the market place in the center of Da Lat and scattered strongpoints, particularly in the western part of the town. Small-arms fire is reported throughout the town, but there are indications that allied reinforcements spearheaded by South Vietnamese troops are beginning to bring the situation under control.

8. New battalion-size attacks were reported on 2 February against Pleiku city and nearby village. Heavy fighting also resumed in the coastal city of Phan Thiet in southern II Corps. No recent details are available from Pleiku, but at last report, Phan Thiet was reported under shaky government control, with fighting west and east of the city. Scattered sniping was continuing within several other key coastal cities.

III Corps

9. There have been new reports that the Communists were attempting to move into positions in Saigon and outlying areas during the past 24 hours. No new attacks have materialized, however, except for sporadic firing around the airport. There has been evidence that enemy units involved in the recent attacks on Saigon had moved into the capital area from as far south as the delta and as far north as Tay Ninh Province. No North Vietnamese have been confirmed in the Saigon fighting although some northerners assigned as fillers to Viet Cong units may have participated.

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10. To the north of Saigon, scattered attacks have been reported in the past few days in Tay Ninh city area and around Phu Cuong in Binh Duong Province. No attacks were reported in this area of III Corps on 2 February, but there have been indications that Tay Ninh, An Loc, and Phuoc Vinh, the capitals of the provinces bordering Cambodia, may be targets in the near future.

IV Corps

11. Sharp fighting continues in the Mekong Delta provinces, where the Communists continue to apply pressure against several provincial capitals and surrounding areas. The most critical situation exists at Ben Tre in Kien Hoa Province, where heavy fighting continues against some 700-800 enemy troops still in the city. Two US companies of the 9th Division have arrived to reinforce the ARVN troops in the area.

12. The city of Vinh Long was the scene of heavy fighting on the night of 1-2 February, but there is no late word on conditions there. Two other towns, Moc Hoa in Kien Tuong Province and Ca Mau in An Xuyen, came under attack on 2 February, but Viet Cong forces appear to have been subsequently driven out. Sporadic firing continues around these towns as well as Can Tho and My Tho, which had been attacked earlier.

Nationwide Aircraft Losses

13. From 29 January to 1 February, at least 24 airfields and landing zones were attacked by enemy forces. Reports presently indicate that only the airfield at Kontum remains completely nonoperational. In these attacks, about 15 fixed wing aircraft and 23 helicopters were destroyed, and an additional 85 fixed wing aircraft and 267 helicopters were damaged.

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Prospects for the Immediate Future

14. Although the Communists have been pushed out of most urban areas, they continue to hold strategic ground positions near several major towns. They may attempt to renew their attacks, or merely to maintain pressure on surrounding areas to keep up the tension and intimidate the populace.

15. Despite extremely high losses in the recent fighting, the Communists appear to be prepared to sacrifice most of the units involved in order to carry out their offensive. This probably is because the enemy has not thrown the full weight of his forces into the current effort. For example, in the fighting around Hue, it appears that only elements of the 6th North Vietnamese regiment, plus some local forces, have been involved. At least four other enemy regiments are within 20 miles of the city. There is also evidence that parts of some regiments, or entire regiments, of the B-3 Front in the highlands and of the MR-10 Front in northern III Corps have not yet been committed in the present offensive. In the Khe Sanh western Quang Tri area, elements of at least three divisions of North Vietnamese troops remain poised for early action, although the situation continues generally quiet. A rallier captured earlier around Khe Sanh has alleged that offensive activity would begin about 3 February.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A leadership crisis could develop in the government as a result of continuing Viet Cong military pressure against urban areas. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Vice President Ky who took charge of the Joint General Staff and the government on 31 January and made all the decisions until President Thieu returned to Saigon from the delta that evening. Ky then pressed Thieu to declare martial law and also to use the opportunity to press for full mobilization of the nation. Ky reportedly urged the president to call the National Assembly into session and ask for "full powers" to run the nation. Ky also feels that, unless decisive action is taken to counter present and future Viet Cong actions, the people will begin to doubt the government's ability to protect them and will start to believe in an eventual Viet Cong victory.

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2. [REDACTED] Director General of Information Linh, reportedly indicated that Prime Minister Loc was in "a state of bewilderment" after the crisis erupted on 30 January, and was generally allowing the military to run the show. On 1 February Loc called a cabinet meeting which resulted only in a decision to draft a communiqué to be broadcast on that evening outlining the situation in broad terms. The rest of the cabinet meeting was unproductive, according to the source. The various ministers tried to play up what they did in their respective ministries to counter the Communist actions and criticized other ministries for their shortcomings.

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3. The fact that it was not Thieu but Ky who took the initiative in the early stages of the crisis will probably cause the senior generals to criticize more than before Thieu's indecisiveness in handling the government. Loc's apparent inability to function in a crisis situation also will probably come under fire. A possible result is that Ky may be encouraged to seek greater, and extra-constitutional, executive powers in the government. There have been earlier clandestine reports that at some point he might attempt to seek a constitutional amendment which would allow him as vice president to hold concurrently the position of prime minister.

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4. According to unconfirmed press reports, martial law, which was proclaimed on 31 January, will remain in effect only until the Viet Cong have been cleared out of the major cities. A spokesman for Thieu reportedly said today that "it shouldn't be long now," and suggested that martial law would be in effect no longer than a week. The government apparently is convinced that the situation is rapidly coming under control and that the Communist threat will soon be reduced to the point where some controls can be relaxed.

5. One indicator of the government's confidence is the scheduled lifting of the 24-hour curfew for about seven hours on 3 February. Secretary to the Prime Minister Cang indicated to embassy officers that the curfew will be lifted to allow people to move about for such essential purposes as the purchase of food. The curfew suspension will be officially announced only one hour before it is scheduled to begin to prevent the Communists from taking advantage of the move. Cang also said that the Ministry of Social Welfare is currently trying to provide food and shelter to victims of the fighting in Saigon.

National Assembly Reaction

6. Reaction among National Assembly members to the Viet Cong offensive and its effects on the population and the government thus far has been mixed. Senator Truong Tien Dat believes the Communists hoped to achieve a psychological victory by demonstrating their strength to the urban population. The result, Dat believes was both a military and psychological defeat. He is confident that the people now will more willingly rally to the government cause. Senator Huynh Van Cao also views the outcome as a psychological defeat for the Viet Cong.

7. Senator Nguyen Van Ngai, on the other hand, believes the Viet Cong have won a psychological victory despite the fact that Saigon residents are indignant at having the Tet holiday disrupted.

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Ngai does not feel, however, that the people's outrage will necessarily be enough to make them more responsive to the government.

8. The consensus of assembly members on President Thieu's imposition of martial law is apparently that the assembly will approve the emergency measures, even though many individual members are outspokenly critical. Senator Ngai told a US Embassy officer that the Communist attacks revealed the "weakness and ineffectiveness" of the government security apparatus. He regards the situation as serious enough to warrant assembly consideration of a no-confidence vote. Ngai believes, however, that the assembly will support Thieu's actions--a belief concurred in by Senators Dat and Cao and the prime minister's secretary, Doan Ba Cang. Cao has urged Upper House Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen to issue a statement expressing the house's support for Thieu's actions.

Impact on Population

9. Popular reaction to the crisis has, in general, been one of confusion and fear. Rumors are rampant in some areas of a possible coup in Saigon, of a possible coalition government, and of more Viet Cong attacks. After the attack on Saigon, rumors circulated that, since Vice President Ky had signed the martial law decree, President Thieu had either been killed by the Communists or kidnaped by forces staging a coup. Such stories are still prevalent in some areas, along with rumors that the US permitted the attacks as a means of pressuring the government into negotiating.

10. Attitudes toward the Viet Cong and their actions range from outrage at the Communists' flagrant violation of the cease-fire to fear and surprise at their strength. Many have criticized the government's failure to provide security for them, and some local observers fear that the net result will be a loss of confidence in both the government and the US. Despite this, however,

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there has been no indication of a significant swing to the Viet Cong and no apparent public response to the new Communist front organizations.

11. A number of areas have reported large refugee flows. The population of Quang Tri city is estimated to have doubled in the 48 hours between 30 January and 1 February. In Quang Nam Province residents of Duy Xuyen district town, had been evacuated by 1 February, and Hoa Vang District reported that approximately 1,000 refugees needed food. The Binh Long provincial capital has seen a steady flow of refugees from outlying areas, which are reportedly in Communist hands and there are some 4,000 refugees in Bien Hoa city. In Long Khanh Province, where no major enemy attacks occurred until the night of 1-2 February, people were reported leaving the provincial capital because they feared an imminent assault.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Communists are attempting to characterize their military offensive as a broad, patriotic uprising against the US and the Saigon government and are injecting a strong note of anti-Americanism into their propaganda in an effort to garner popular support.
2. Viet Cong broadcasts on 1 February described the "insurrectional atmosphere of the masses" and claimed that the nationwide attacks were an "irrepressible uprising of tens of millions of people" bent on a common cause of "national liberation." Other statements have called for continued resistance against the US "imperialists" and their Saigon "lackeys." One Front broadcast pitched the anti-American appeal directly to South Vietnamese armed forces and police personnel, claiming that their "golden chance" had come to contribute to the salvation of their country, and urgently calling on them to "resist the Americans." The broadcast pointed out that the program of the Liberation Front contained provisions for rewarding those who join the Communist cause as well as those who cooperate in the anti-American struggle, even if they do not join the Communists now.
3. Front statements discussing the formation of new popular "alliances" in Hue and Saigon have also stressed the popular nature of the offensive and claimed that their purpose is to oppose the US, to bring about the withdrawal of US troops, and to negotiate with the Liberation Front.
4. The Vietnamese Communists may be trying to put together some new political facade to back up claims that their current offensive has touched off a popular uprising in favor of objectives long sought by the Communists.
5. The Viet Cong radio on 2 February broadcast an "appeal" from the "National Leadership Committee" of the new organization called the "Alliance of National and Peace Forces." The appeal was dated 30 January to coincide with the nationwide surge of Communist attacks which began then. The appeal was designed to show that the popular "revolution" has "broken out." It called on all South Vietnamese to join the "ranks of people" and said that "we must at once set up a revolutionary government." The goals of the "Alliance" are said to include overthrowing the Saigon regime and replacing it with a "really" representative "administrative power," recovering national independence by demanding the withdrawal of the US and ending the war, building an independent and neutral South Vietnam, and negotiating with the National Liberation Front to achieve these goals.

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6. It is doubtful that the new "Alliance" will be any more useful to the Communists than the National Liberation Front itself in accomplishing Communist objectives. The Front's basic weakness since it was formed in late 1960 has been its almost total failure to attract support from politically significant individuals and groups in South Vietnam. The Front's leadership is composed of a hodge-podge of Communists, leftists, and political unknowns who collectively have failed to inspire any demonstrable popular following except among those already committed to, or enlisted in, the Communist movement.

7. The new "Alliance" presently shows no signs of being anything more than a paper organization created by the Communists to serve their purposes. Although the "Alliance" is presented as a "national" organization, Communist broadcasts have referred specifically to alliances only in the cities of Saigon and Hue.

8. There are no details about the organization in Saigon. A Hanoi broadcast reported its establishment and said it had issued a manifesto. In Hue, however, Hanoi claims the alliance is headed by Le Van Hao, a doctor of ethnology and professor of Saigon and Hue universities. Hao reportedly read an "appeal" over Hue radio.

9. Le Van Hao seems to be a non-Communist political nonentity of the same stripe found throughout the ranks of the National Liberation Front. He was active in the 1966 Buddhist struggle movement and was imprisoned between June and October of that year. He has also been mentioned in connection with the Hung Viet Party, a small little known antigovernment group formed in central Vietnam during or shortly after the struggle movement. Little is known of Hao's influence in central Vietnam or even at Hue University, but he may be able to generate some support for his "Alliance" among university students, who have frequently been active in antigovernment agitation. There is no evidence to indicate that Hao has had Viet Cong or Liberation Front connections.

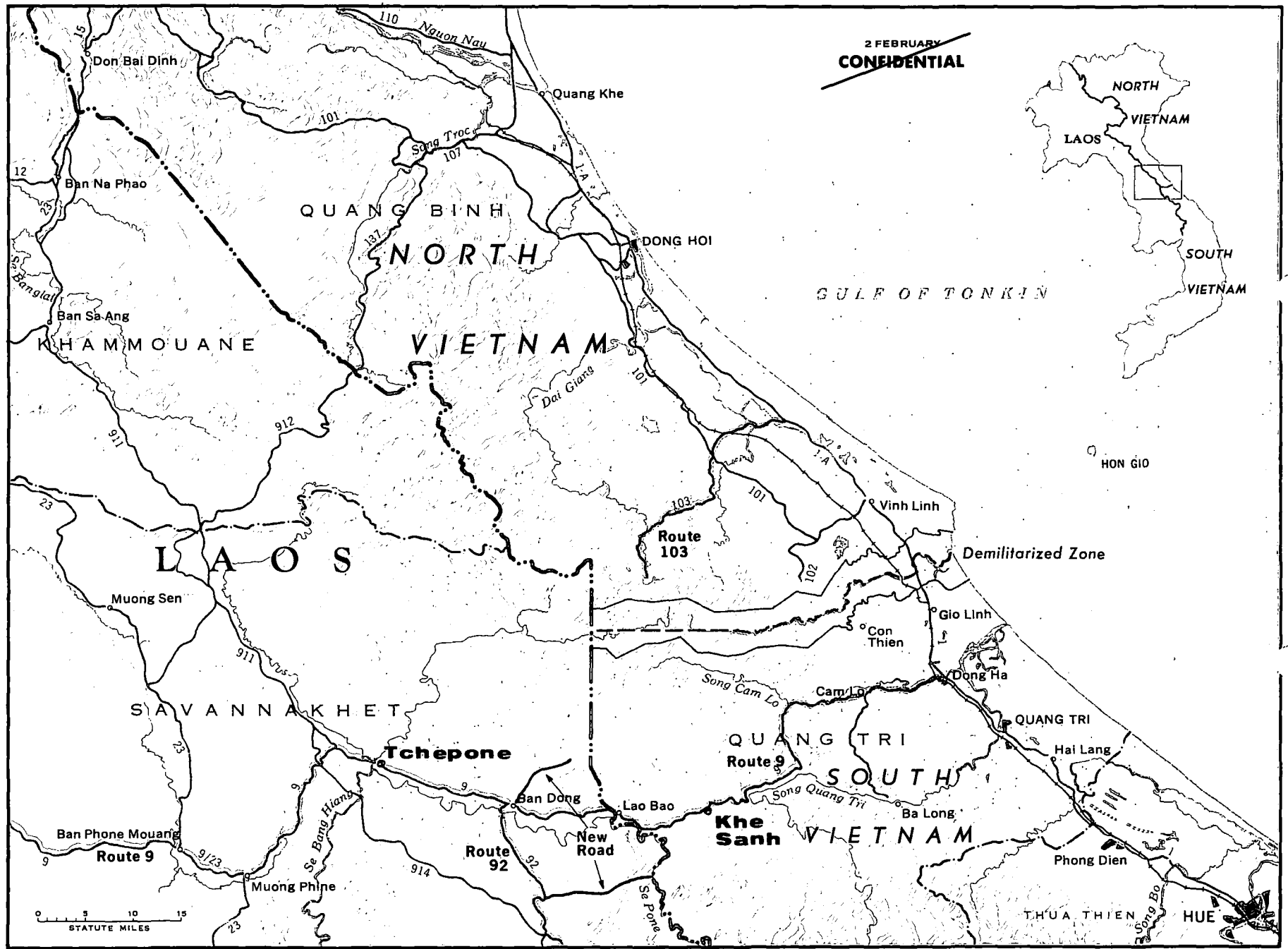
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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Recent improvements in the Laotian panhandle road net have provided the Communists with a greater flexibility in moving supplies.

2. The Communists are building a new road linking Route 92 immediately south of Tchepone with the western edge of the Demilitarized Zone, according to photography of 21 January. Although the road is still eight miles short of the Khe Sanh area, the presence of active truck parks and possible weapons positions indicate that the completed portion is already in use.

3. The North Vietnamese have also resumed construction of a new road north from Route 9 toward the zone. A trail connects this road with the southern terminus of Route 103 in the zone, suggesting that the Communists may attempt to link the two. Such a development would provide the Communists with an alternate means of moving trucks into the western edge of the Demilitarized Zone.

4. The Communists are also making additional efforts to make the road net less vulnerable to air attack. The construction of numerous additional bypasses throughout the road net will enable the Communists to better diversify their truck traffic, and depending on the amount of damage from bombing could increase the over-all capacity of the system.

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