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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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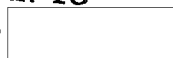
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HIGHLIGHTS

New fighting has broken out against the allied positions at Lang Vei and Khe Sanh. Allied forces continue to battle small enemy pockets in Saigon and Hue. Only scattered harassment has been reported elsewhere in the country.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

New fighting has broken out against the Lang Vei Special Forces camp near Khe Sanh, possibly involving the use of tanks. There continue to be indications that major new enemy action could occur elsewhere in the South (Paras. 1-3). Allied troops are continuing to make slow but steady progress against Communist troops in the city of Hue. Scattered attacks were reported elsewhere in I Corps (Paras. 4-6). Renewed fighting has occurred near Da Lat; airfields in some other key provincial capitals have received mortar fire (Paras. 7-8). Sharp fighting has been reported in the Cholon area of Saigon. There are indications that fresh enemy troops have entered Saigon (Paras. 9-11). The enemy drive in the delta is losing momentum, but harassment continues in and around several key towns (Paras. 12-13). Evidence is beginning to accumulate of the effect of the enemy offensive on pacification activities (Paras. 14-18). Civilian casualties have been heavy and new refugee problems are extensive (Paras. 19-21).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

The police have taken Phan Khac Suu into protective custody because of an alleged Liberation Front attempt to kidnap him (Paras. 1-2). Senator Ngai has changed his view that the Communists won a psychological victory, but still intends to call for an Upper House investigation of several senior military officers for failing to prevent the attacks (Paras. 3-5).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. New fighting has broken out in western Quang Tri Province in the vicinity of the Lang Vei Special Forces camp, five miles from Khe Sanh. MACV reports that a heavy ground assault against the camp began in the pre-dawn hours of 7 February (South Vietnam time). Preliminary reports indicate that seven tanks or tank-like vehicles were used. One vehicle was reported destroyed. Khe Sanh has also come under a brief mortar barrage, according to press reports.

2. There have been intermittent reports during the past several years that tanks were present in the Laos panhandle adjacent to the Lang Vei/Khe Sanh area. In the past two weeks, US aerial observers reported "tank-like" vehicles moving on Route 9, which crosses the panhandle from South Vietnam. The Laotian encampment at Ban Houei Sane on Route 9 reported when it was overrun in the latter part of January that the enemy used tanks in its attack.

3. Allied forces continued on 6 February to battle small enemy concentrations in both Saigon and Hue. In addition, two towns in I Corps came under Communist attack. Elsewhere, only scattered harassment occurred, particularly in the delta. There continue to be indications that major new attacks may be launched in several key areas of South Vietnam where large enemy forces are maneuvering near major towns.

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I Corps

4. US and South Vietnamese forces continued a block by block sweep of Hue, reporting slow but steady progress. South Vietnamese troops now control the major portion of the "imperial city," or citadel area, north of the river, with the Communists still resisting around the old palace grounds. US Marines have regained control of some 40 percent of the city on the southern bank.

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5. Elsewhere in I Corps, an estimated three Viet Cong companies attacked the city of Hoi An on 6 February, reportedly meeting stiff resistance from South Korean defenders and suffering heavy losses. Quang Ngai city was also hit by a mortar and ground assault shortly after midnight. The Revolutionary Development headquarters and a power plant were the apparent targets. Two refugee camps in Quang Nam and Quang Tin Province were also attacked, with nearly 100 houses destroyed. Fifty-two Communists were killed in these assaults.

6. Scattered fighting continues to be reported by allied forces operating south of Da Nang, where a major concentration of enemy forces involving the entire 2nd North Vietnamese Division and other regimental formations continues to pose a threat. A heavy clash, involving South Vietnamese troops, occurred on 6 February about six miles south of Da Nang.

II Corps

7. Renewed fighting was reported near Da Lat on 6 February. The enemy force, the 186th Main Force Battalion, previously was reported in this area. The attackers reportedly used tear gas in an assault on the town. Airstrips at the highlands provincial capital of Ban Me Thuot and at Tuy Hoa on the coast also received limited mortar bombardment. Most other provincial towns in the corps were reported quiet, but several were tense and expecting new attacks.

8. Substantial units subordinate to the B-3 Front in the highlands, including almost the entire North Vietnamese Army 1st Division, have not been involved in the action to date. Elements of the North Vietnamese 3rd and 5th divisions are also apparently being held in reserve near the coastal areas. There has been some recent maneuvering of B-3 Front elements near the Dak To strongpoint in the highlands.

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III Corps

9. Sharp fighting was reported on 6 February in the Saigon area, primarily in the Chinese quarter of Cholon where enemy remnants have been holding out for several days. Two police substations in outlying precincts were seized late on 5 February, and a third has come under heavy enemy fire. Only scattered fighting has been reported elsewhere in the capital city, although two Communist companies raided the main gate of nearby Tan Son Nhut Air Base early on 6 February just as civilian workers were returning to their jobs.

10. There has been some evidence that the Communists have thrown fresh troops into the Saigon area. Some 500 Viet Cong wearing traditional peasant garb were reported seen in Cholon this morning. An 18-battalion South Vietnamese task force is conducting a house-to-house clearing of the capital, while a US force is conducting search-and-destroy operations in areas surrounding the city in an effort to prevent additional infiltration.

11. Reinforcing troops in the capital area may include elements of the Viet Cong 9th Division although [REDACTED] 3.3(h)(2)
[REDACTED] identification of the 9th Division headquarters on the outskirts of the city appears erroneous. The headquarters has been subsequently identified in its normal operating area in Binh Long Province near the Cambodian border. Elements of the Viet Cong 5th Division have been identified in Bien Hoa Province, [REDACTED] over the weekend 3.3(h)(2)
suggested plans to mortar Bien Hoa Airfield. Units of the North Vietnamese 7th Division may have moved into Binh Duong Province from positions farther north.

IV Corps

12. There have been no new major assaults on provincial towns in the delta, but fighting was reported in, or on the outskirts of, several capitals early on 6 February. The heaviest assault was at Can Tho city, where 40-50 Viet Cong reportedly barricaded themselves in the university.

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13. Late on 5 February or early on 6 February, light mortar attacks or ground probes were reported at several locations, including Vinh Long, Ben Tre, and Soc Trang. In general, however, the Communist offensive appears to be losing momentum in the delta. At the same time, the population remains tense, some food shortages are reported, and renewed attacks are feared in many areas.

Impact of the Communist Offensive on Pacification

14. One objective of the recent enemy campaign may have been to assert or reassert control over large segments of the rural population, using guerilla and district units, while allied forces were diverted to protect the urban areas. One major element of the government's pacification effort, the Revolutionary Development (RD) teams, appears to have been bypassed by the Communists. Preliminary reports from US officials indicate that there has been no large toll among the teams, which number over 42,000 persons, even though all are not yet accounted for. The low team casualties thus far reported may be due to the fact that in many provinces, about 50 percent of the teams' members were on Tet holiday leave.

15. Reports indicate that hamlet development in a large number of provinces has been set back considerably. Since military forces supporting them were withdrawn to defend towns, many teams have been unable to stay in their hamlets, and others have been pulled in to guard installations in towns or to assist in rooting out Communist remnants. This has occurred in Da Nang and Saigon, and in Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh provinces, where teams are helping with refugees or have been assisting in district towns.

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16. In Binh Dinh Province, 20 Revolutionary Development teams have been removed, at least temporarily, from their hamlets due to the withdrawal of supporting government troops. About eight additional teams are in Qui Nhon city on temporary security duty. Vietnamese officials in Binh Dinh believe the teams should be able to return to their hamlets around 10 February, if the security situation remains at its present level. Many of the new refugees in Qui Nhon are from hamlets which have been overrun, and it may be difficult to persuade these people to return.

17. US officials in Binh Dinh Province believe that it will take at least 18 months to reach the same stage of hamlet development that existed six months ago, when provincial security began to decline. Advisory personnel believe that the province's 1968 pacification plan may have to be set aside and resources directed towards areas previously developed during 1966 and 1967. This is a serious setback, since Binh Dinh was one of the showplaces for the pacification program.

18. The situation in Binh Dinh, while reflected in other provinces such as Ninh Thuan, Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Binh Thuan, Darlac, and Kontum, is not characteristic of all provinces. In Tuyen Duc Province, where the capital city of Da Lat has been under unrelenting enemy pressure, all 14 Vietnamese and montagnard development teams have been relatively unmolested and remain in their hamlets.

Refugees and Civilian Casualties

19. In most of the urban areas, US officials have reported that the Communist attacks and, even more so, allied counterattacks have inflicted relatively heavy civilian casualties and rendered thousands homeless. To handle the estimated 20,000 homeless in Saigon alone, 34 refugee centers have been set up and stocked with foodstuffs and bedding. Present estimates of civilian casualties in Saigon stand at about 200 dead and 2,400 injured. The number of refugees in Bien Hoa city, near Saigon, has declined, however, from around 11,000 to about 1,000. Most of the people returned to their homes in the outskirts of the city.

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20. In IV Corps, where several large provincial capitals suffered extensive destruction, an estimated 80,000 to 120,000 people are homeless. US officials feel that civilian casualties may exceed the present estimate of 1,250 dead and 3,000 injured.

21. South Vietnam programs for the care and handling of refugees, social welfare, health, and psychological warfare have long been weak. Intensive US efforts are under way to assist the Saigon government in these areas.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The police in Saigon have taken Phan Khac Suu into protective custody, reportedly with his consent. Police Director Loan told an American observer on 6 February that Suu had accepted police protection after it was pointed out to him that he was a likely target for Viet Cong "exploitation attempts." Reportedly, Suu is free to go whenever he desires. According to Loan, two Viet Cong cadres captured in Saigon claimed that the National Liberation Front had plans to kidnap Suu. The Front was going to use him to attract South Vietnamese liberals and persuade them to accept North Vietnamese peace conditions.

2. There does not appear to be anything sinister about the police action. Suu is an outspoken oppositionist who has recently been attempting to form an opposition party, but his position on negotiations fully supports the government's policy. He has rejected the possibility of holding talks with the Liberation Front, contending that only North Vietnam can represent the Communists in negotiations. On 4 February he stated that the Communists "have broken all hope for peace" by launching their offensive. If the Communists did intend to kidnap him, it would appear that they misjudged his attitude toward them.

Senator Ngai on the Lack of Government Preparedness

3. Senator Nguyen Van Ngai appears to have changed his initial view that the Viet Cong scored a psychological victory in their Tet offensive and that the people would not rally to the government cause. He still blames the military leadership for its lack of preparedness, however, and intends to propose that the Upper House bring several officers up for investigation.

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4. On 4 February Ngai [redacted] believes the Communists have been psychologically as well as militarily defeated and that the offensive will not undermine the people's confidence in the government. Although the people are criticizing certain government officials and a good portion of the military leadership, they are, according to Ngai, proud of the rank-and-file of the armed forces and highly incensed at the Viet Cong. He further believes that the offensive will bring an increased willingness by many nationalist elements, as well as labor and intellectual groups, to cooperate with the government. He anticipates at least a temporary cohesiveness among civilian political elements in the effort to defeat the Communists.

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5. Despite Ngai's apparent willingness to cooperate, he intends to press for an investigation of several senior officers who he believes were unprepared for the Communist attacks. He told the source that he hopes a House investigation will give President Thieu sufficient cause to dismiss Interior Minister Vien and possibly Defense Minister Vy and Police Director Loan. Ngai claims at least two other senators support his plan, including Senate Defense Committee Chairman Ton That Dinh. [redacted]

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[redacted] the defense committee agreed on 5 February that an investigation is needed. [redacted]

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[redacted] III Corps Commander Khang and the new Capital Military District commander will also be called.

Cooperation From Lower House

6. The Lower House is proving more cooperative. On 3 February two Lower House committee chairmen sought out government officials for briefings on the situation and, in turn, briefed other deputies. This initiative contrasts with the actions of the Upper House defense committee which has reportedly made no effort to get in touch with officials. The committee apparently is basing its decision to investigate the military leadership solely on information provided by the Military Security Service chief.

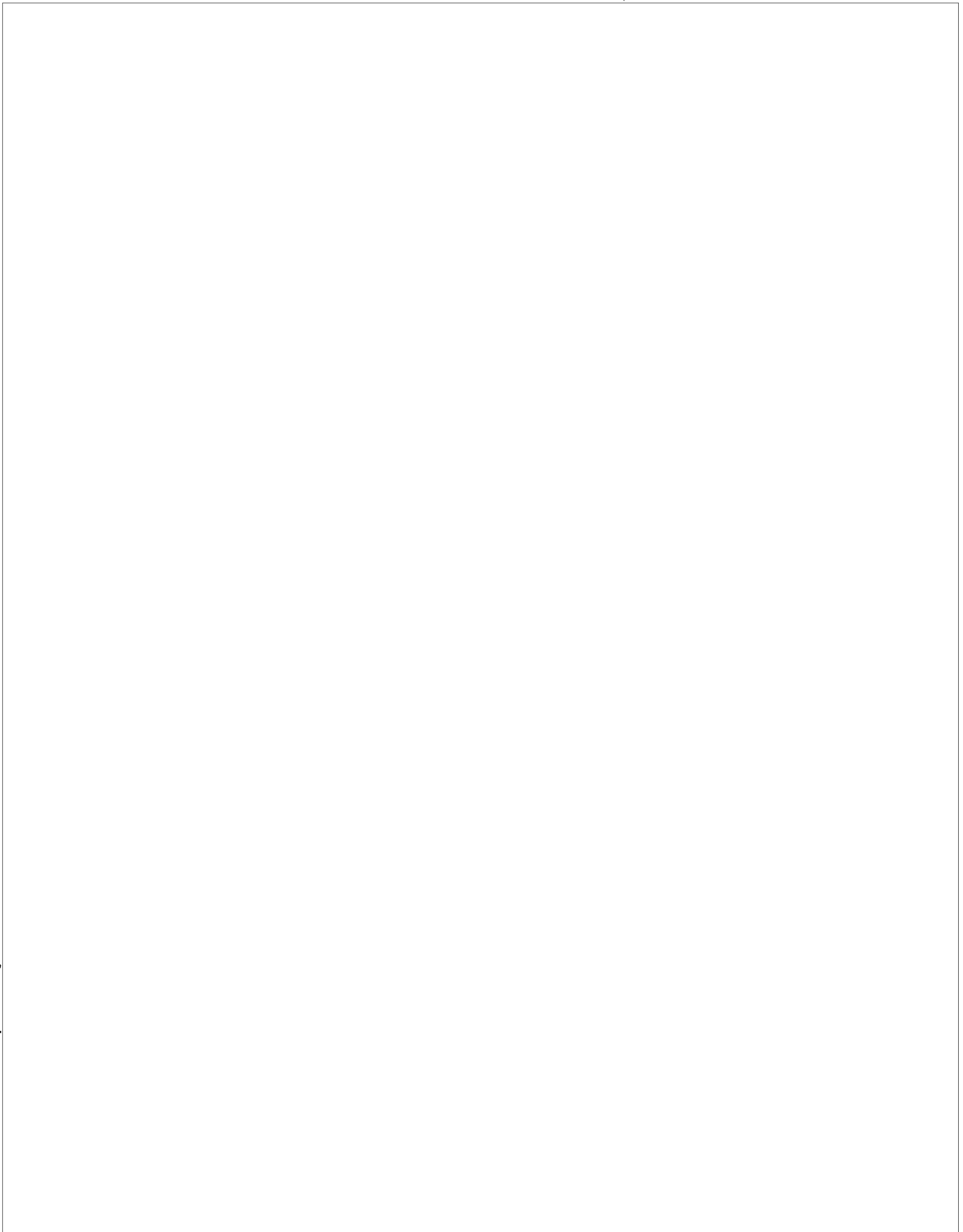
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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Unusual air activity in North Vietnam-- possibly directed against allied operations near the Demilitarized Zone [redacted]

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2. North Vietnamese air defense nets carried more warnings of B-52 strikes in the vicinity of Khe Sanh on 6 February. No reports of surface-to-air missile or fighter attacks on the big bombers have been received. Hanoi augmented its active fighter strength on 6 February, however, by transferring at least five MIG-21s to Phuc Yen [redacted]

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3. The activities of North Vietnam's small force of AN-2 transport planes, which have been adapted for a ground attack role, [redacted] the AN-2s were being readied for another strike in Laos. [redacted]

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[redacted] some AN-2s are being sent to the vicinity of the Demilitarized Zone.

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4. A North Vietnamese Army unit believed to be in the A Shau Valley--approximately 35 miles west of Da Nang between Laos and South Vietnam-- notified its subordinates that "our piston-engined aircraft" would land at an airstrip in the A Shau Valley in the afternoon or evening hours of 6 February. One of these subordinates was later noted requesting instructions about the collection of wood for lighting fires at the airstrip, perhaps to facilitate a night landing.

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5. Another North Vietnamese unit--probably located in Military Region IV north of the Demilitarized Zone--notified a subordinate on 6 February that "piston-engined aircraft" would be flying south from Hanoi to Quang Binh Province on 6 and 7 February. It instructed all units to avoid firing mistakenly at the aircraft.

6. It is possible that if AN-2s are being deployed to the area, they will be used only to transport important military leaders concerned with the campaign around Khe Sanh or certain high priority cargo. On the other hand, the attack carried out by two North Vietnamese AN-2s on a US navigational facility in Laos on 12 January demonstrates that Hanoi could employ these aircraft in a ground support role.

[redacted]

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8. On 3 February, five AN-2 aircraft, three Vietnamese and two Chinese, left Meng-tzu and flew to Nan-ning. On 5 February, eleven other North Vietnamese transports (IL-14s and LI-2s) departed Yunnani and flew to Nan-ning. On 6 February, seven IL-14s left Nan-ning for Hanoi/Gia Lam. [redacted]

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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. The Viet Cong, in an attempt to capture foreign press attention, called an unusual news conference in Moscow on 6 February. The purpose was to increase news coverage of the Communist version of the Tet offensive in South Vietnam. The Communists gave plenty of advance notice to the entire Moscow press corps, including western and US press representatives.

2. According to a Reuters dispatch, the head of the Liberation Front office in Moscow told the conference that the current military effort would increase and that the Front now had "large areas of the country under the control of revolutionary power." He said there was no hope of any change in Communist demands for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and that any move in that direction was entirely up to the US. He claimed that the main Communist objective in the new offensive was to overthrow the Saigon government and that under no circumstances would the Communists consider participating in a coalition government with Saigon authorities. He closed the conference with a statement of Communist determination to fight until the US withdraws from South Vietnam and until the Communists have achieved "final victory no matter how long" that takes.

3. The Communist spokesman also dredged up the old scare of foreign volunteers, an issue not used extensively by the Communists for more than a year. The Communists appear to be using it now to dramatize their potential military strength. The Front spokesman at the conference said the Communists have "every right to accept foreign volunteers if the time comes."

Communist Claims of Popular Support

4. After more than a week of claiming that popular support for their "general uprising is surging forward," the Communists have still failed

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to come up with good evidence of support from politically significant individuals and groups. Although both Hanoi and the Liberation radio continue to foster the impression that large numbers of people have rallied to the Viet Cong, the only new groups cited in Communist propaganda in the past three days are small groups of servicemen who, the Viet Cong claim, deserted from South Vietnamese Army units. In some cases both individuals and specific units are named. Most units are located in the northern coastal provinces, although one group of 31 was said to be in the delta province of Soc Trang. The only new references to nonmilitary groups are an amorphous "federation of patriotic and peace-loving workers, farmers, and Buddhists in Central Vietnam," cited in a 3 February Front broadcast, and a "union of patriotic and peace-loving Buddhist servicemen in central Trung Bo" dredged up in Hanoi's Nhan Dan on 5 February. There is no information to confirm these Communist claims.

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