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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam



~~Top Secret~~
126

14 February 1968

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Information as of 1600
14 February 1968

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HIGHLIGHTS

Except for continued fighting in Hue and scattered contacts in the delta, the lull in the enemy offensive against urban areas continued on 14 February. Sporadic fighting was reported in the suburbs of Saigon, but the capital itself continued its gradual return to normal. North Vietnamese gunners intensified their shelling of Khe Sanh, but no significant ground probes were launched against the base or other allied strongpoints in the area.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

The enemy intensified his shelling of Khe Sanh and continued close surveillance of aircraft activity in the area (Paras. 1-2). [redacted]

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[redacted] at least two battalions supported by armor conducted the attack at Lang Vei on 6 February (Para. 3). B-52 aircraft will provide continuous, 24-hour support for Khe Sanh (Para. 4). Enemy resistance in Hue continued to be stiff (Para. 5). The Communists have reportedly established a "Peoples Court" in Hue (Para. 6). The Thua Thien Province Chief claims a high-ranking South Vietnamese officer defected to the Communists (Para. 7). Enemy preparations for sustained operations in I Corps is evidenced by road construction in the A Shau Valley (Para. 8). Viet Cong forces overran a refugee camp in Quang Ngai Province (Para. 9). There is still some fighting reported in the Saigon area and in the delta provinces. (Para. 10-17).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

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[redacted] Food prices are falling gradually in Saigon, and market activity in the provinces is resuming slowly (Paras. 5-6).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
US strikes on Phuc Yen appear to have driven North Vietnam's IL-28 bombers back to China (Paras. 1-2). Two MIG-17s were downed on 14 February (Para. 3). North Vietnam is using its large MI-6 helicopters to transport MIGs (Paras. 4-5).

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

V. Communist Political Developments: [redacted]

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[redacted] The recent interview of North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Trinh was another attempt to highlight Hanoi's position on talks and to make it seem as reasonable as possible (Paras. 5-7).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Cambodians report more allied helicopter activity over eastern Cambodia (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Khe Sanh Area

1. The Communists stepped up their shelling of the Khe Sanh complex during the 24-hour period ending the morning of the 14th. They fired about 200 artillery, rocket, and mortar rounds on the base area during the period. Light ground contact was reported. [redacted]

[redacted] another attack may have been planned for the night of 14 February.

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2. Elements of the 101D Regiment/325 "C" Division were noted [redacted] keeping US aircraft activity at Khe Sanh under close surveillance. These elements were instructed on the 12th to "frequently report on the enemy. Report clearly the quantity of all types of aircraft and enemy activities."

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3. It is now clear [redacted] that at least two battalions of the 29th Regiment, 325 "C" Division, supported by armor, conducted the 6 February attack on the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp, southwest of Khe Sanh. The enemy captured nine South Vietnamese soldiers, but no Americans [redacted]

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[redacted] Communist casualties were not described, but one North Vietnamese company and possibly a second were detailed to evacuate the wounded.

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4. Beginning on 15 February, B-52 aircraft will provide continuous, 24-hour support for the Khe Sanh garrison. This operation will involve 48 B-52 sorties per day, flown in flights of three aircraft at one and one-half hour intervals.

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Hue

5. The battle for Hue entered its 17th day today, as US Marine and South Vietnamese forces continued to encounter stiff resistance in their effort to clear the enemy entrenched in the Citadel area.

6. According to Vietnamese police sources, the Viet Cong in Hue have established a "Peoples Court" near the Citadel to sentence South Vietnamese military and civilian officials. A "ranking member" of a newly formed Communist front group in Hue--the "alliance of Peace and Democracy"--is reportedly serving as presiding judge.

7. Lt. Colonel Khoa, the province chief of Thua Thien, claims that the Deputy Chief of Staff for Political Warfare of the South Vietnamese 1st Division, Lt. Colonel Thi, has defected to the Communists. If so, Thi would be the highest ranking South Vietnamese official known to have done so. However, Khoa's motives in reporting this information are suspect. He has lumped Thi with the enemy since the latter's involvement in the Buddhist anti-government movement in 1966.

8. The construction of a new road from the Communist-controlled A Shau Valley base area toward Hue provides further evidence of enemy preparations for sustained military operations in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] about four miles of new road has been constructed eastward off Route 548 in the vicinity of Ta Bat. The route is apparently to be built to the vicinity of Ta Luong. From Ta Luong, there is an existing road to Hue, although its condition is not known, and some reconstruction work may be needed to restore it to use. Completion of this new route toward Hue would give the Communists a direct tie-in with the Laos panhandle roadnet via Route 922.

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Quang Ngai Province

9. An estimated Viet Cong platoon-size unit attacked, overran, and completely destroyed a refugee camp located some 12 miles north of Quang Ngai city on 13 January. The camp was garrisoned by two Revolutionary Development teams and two Popular Forces platoons. Incomplete reports indicate that 94 personnel, including 59 Revolutionary Development personnel and 35 paramilitary troops, are missing. No information is available on the status of civilian refugees interned at the camp.

Saigon and III Corps

10. South Vietnamese Army troops reported killing 58 enemy on the western outskirts of Saigon near the Phu Tho race track the afternoon of 13 February. South Vietnamese losses were 11 killed and 18 wounded. The race track area has been the scene of the heaviest action in Saigon in recent days. The Communists apparently have sizable forces still holding out in this sector.

11. South Vietnamese forces conducted sweeps through several other sections of the capital area during the past few days--including the troubled 5th Precinct in Cholon--but no significant action has been reported. In the outlying suburbs, however, allied forces continue to clash with Communist troops. On 13 February nearly 100 Viet Cong were reported killed in three separate small unit clashes from seven to 20 miles north of the capital. US and South Vietnamese losses were 13 killed and nearly 60 wounded.

12. Meanwhile, there has been no confirmation of several low-level reports which claimed that large numbers of enemy troops were moving toward Saigon for a second offensive against the city. There is tenuous evidence that certain Viet Cong local force units

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which participated in the initial attacks on Saigon are withdrawing to the west. Captured documents [REDACTED] indicate that two local force battalions may have pulled back to central Hau Nghia Province and a third may have returned to Tay Ninh. In addition, a radio terminal serving the headquarters of Viet Cong Military Region 4 was located on 12 February in central Hau Nghia Province, nearly 25 miles northwest of its previous location just south of Cholon.

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13. Other than small-scale probes against South Vietnamese Popular Force outposts, there was no significant military activity in III Corps.

IV Corps

14. Viet Cong forces launched a mortar attack on Rach Gia, the capital of Kien Giang Province some 120 miles southwest of Saigon on 13 February. Over 300 homes were reportedly destroyed or damaged in the attack. There were several other incidents in the delta on 13 and 14 February initiated by the Viet Cong.

15. US and South Vietnamese Army forces engaged Viet Cong forces near Vinh Long city on 13 February. Three Viet Cong battalions appear to be sticking close to this provincial capital and new attacks on the city may be planned.

16. In Phong Dinh Province less than six miles west of Can Tho, US forces discovered a large Communist arms cache containing 460 bazooka-type rocket rounds, 59 75-mm. pack howitzer shells, 89 120-mm. mortar rounds, and other assorted ammunition.

17. Reports continue to come in from a number of towns in the delta indicating that the people are uneasy and fear new enemy attacks. Reports also reveal that the people in the countryside are still feeling the impact of the Tet offensive. One of the worst examples of deteriorating security in rural areas has been reported in Go Cong Province, about 25 miles south of Saigon. Reportedly, the Go Cong Province chief has been forced to pull all revolutionary development teams in from their pacification

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areas to man static defenses in the vicinity of the province capital. This has, in effect, turned the countryside over to the Viet Cong who are taking advantage of the situation by increasing their recruiting efforts and taking over villages which were formerly declared pacified. [redacted]

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[redacted] government programs have suffered a major setback and the Communists have scored a psychological and propaganda success, if not a military victory.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM



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Economic Situation

5. Food prices in Saigon continue to fall gradually, but are still 70-75 percent higher than the pre-Tet level. Some food deliveries are being made to the city by road from surrounding Gia Dinh Province and by air from other areas. There have been no road deliveries to the capital from the Mekong Delta, Da Lat, or Vung Tau, but plans are being made to bring food supplies in by convoy from some of these areas within the next few days. Normal (commercial) distribution of rice was scheduled to be resumed on 14 February.

6. Reports from some of the provinces indicate that there are few critical food shortages, although pork, charcoal, sugar, and canned milk are in short supply in some areas. Prices in some localities are running 10-30 percent above the pre-Tet level, while in others they have held steady. Market activity is gradually resuming although at reduced levels because of curfews and travel restrictions.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Repeated US air strikes on Phuc Yen appear to have driven North Vietnam's IL-28s back to Nan-ning--at least for now. On 14 February two of the bombers flew toward the China border when US aircraft neared Hanoi. They were subsequently ordered to recover at Nan-ning because of damage to the Phuc Yen runway. An earlier raid on Phuc Yen is believed to have hit the other IL-28 which arrived from China on 6 February.

2. The bombers could return to Hanoi/Gia Lam at any time or to Phuc Yen when runway repairs are completed. If they remain at Nan-ning with three other IL-28s which flew there from Yunnani on 6 February they will still pose a threat to US naval forces in the Tonkin Gulf, friendly units in Laos or Thailand, and allied military positions and cities south of the Demilitarized Zone. If they return to Yunnani, it may indicate that a combination of air strikes, bad weather, and poor progress in the tactical situation in South Vietnam have persuaded Hanoi to defer offensive air operations for the time being.

3. In related developments, two flights of USAF fighters which apparently were involved in the Phuc Yen raid each succeeded in downing MIG-17 aircraft on 14 February. The double kill is unusual because MIG-21s appear to have undertaken most of the intercept attempts against US strike groups in recent months.

Helicopters Haul MIGs

4. [redacted] North Vietnam is using its large MI-6 "Hook" helicopters to transport MIG aircraft. [redacted]

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[redacted] some fighter aircraft in remote, camouflaged revetments which presumably could not be reached by road. [redacted]

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5. The Soviet-build MI-6 helicopter is the only aircraft in the North Vietnamese inventory which could transport a fully assembled MIG fighter. There are believed to be four of these helicopters hidden in dispersal areas in the vicinity of Hanoi. They probably have been used to carry high priority military equipment such as jet engines and SA-2 missiles.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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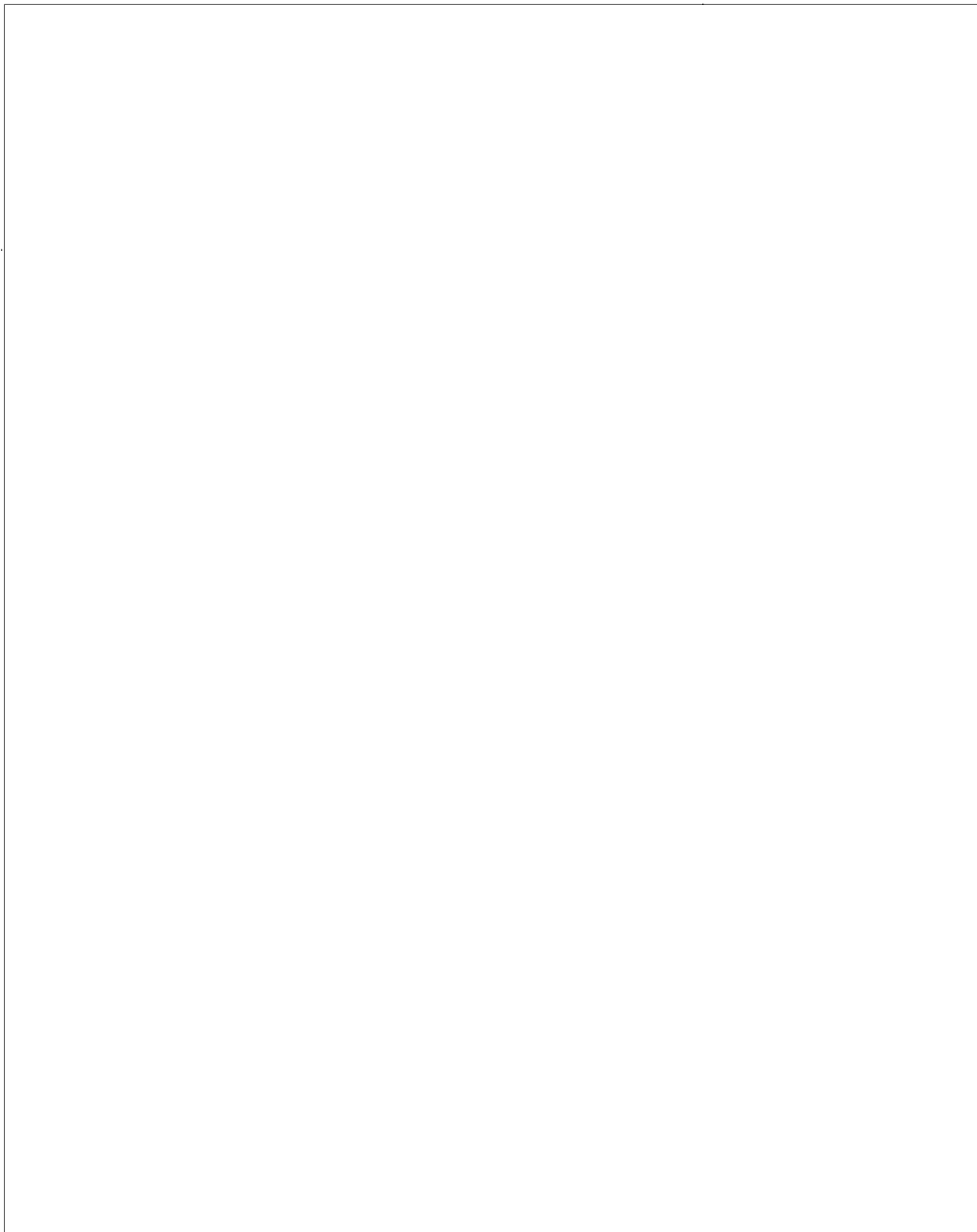
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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Background of Latest Trinh Interview

5. The French press agency office in Paris has provided some background on North Vietnamese

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Foreign Minister Trinh's interview on 8 February with AFP Hanoi correspondent, Bernard Cabannes. In this interview the foreign minister related the Tet offensive in South Vietnam to Hanoi's offer to talk after a bombing pause. He also varied the language of his "will" talk offer to imply that postbombing talks could cover the entire question of the war.

6. AFP says that the timing of the interview was a Hanoi initiative. The foreign minister acted on a two-week-old request for an interview and in response to questions that had already been submitted in writing. Hanoi broadcast the interview even before the copy had reached the AFP office in Paris. In commenting on the interview, Cabannes said the foreign minister's new language meant that talks could concern "the heart of the problem and the very solution to the war." This statement was approved by the North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry.

7. This explanation of the circumstances surrounding the interview leaves little doubt that the North Vietnamese were attempting to promote their "will" talk offer with another semantic exercise designed to keep the issue in the headlines and to make it seem as reasonable and forthcoming as possible.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Cambodian provincial defense units continue to report allied helicopter activity over eastern Cambodia.

2. A military post located about 25 miles inside the Cambodian border near Post Deshayes in Mondolkiri Province has reported that three helicopters flew low over the post on the afternoon of 10 February. [redacted]

[redacted] the Cambodians fired at the aircraft with their "antiaircraft defenses" but did not hit them.

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3. A similar incident involving five allied helicopters occurred on 28 January at the nearby border town of O Rang. Phnom Penh's silence so far about these incursions may indicate the Cambodians' intent to object only to those border incidents that involve Cambodian casualties or damage to property. It would not be unlike Prince Sihanouk, however, to publicize such incidents at a time of his own choosing. (See map in Section I)

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