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## II. The Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Winter-Spring Campaign

1. Numerous recently captured documents have brought into focus Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese (NVN) plans and ambitions for their 1967-68 winter-spring campaign. This campaign is to consist of three phases: a first phase from October to December, 1967; a second phase from January to March 1968; and a third phase from April to June 1968. (CDEC 11-2436-67) The campaign entails military and political ambitions which surpass anything previously attempted in such a relatively short period of time by the VC/NVN in South Vietnam. Moreover, thus far VC/NVN activity indicates that they are indeed attempting to implement these plans at their intended levels of intensity. For example, there has been a definite increase in coordinated attacks on GVN and Allied installations. The most notable of these thus far have been at Loc Ninh and Dak To. In these attacks, the VC mounted sustained assaults despite very heavy casualties, and apparently with less preparation than is normal for VC operations of such size, in an only partially successful attempt to "coordinate" the two attacks. In brief, the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign is described by the VC/NVN as the "decisive" phase of the war, crucial to its ultimate outcome.

2. In their assessments of the current situation, the VC state that they are in a very favorable position. Strategically, the American military forces are described as having been forced into a defensive posture as a result of the widespread VC/NVN attacks, especially in the DMZ. Moreover, according to the VC/NVN, the combat strength of the U.S. forces has been reduced and their attacking power limited, thereby leaving the over-all U.S. position weakened. (CDEC 11-1206-67) In addition, the U.S. is viewed as being increasingly isolated politically abroad and torn by mounting dissension from within. The VC/NVN state that the present U.S. administration feels itself under pressure

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to end the war before the 1968 elections in order to guarantee its political survival. (FVS-16,187, CDEC 10-2255-67)

3. Within South Vietnam, the VC/NVN also view their position optimistically. They describe the Government of Vietnam (GVN) as corrupt, increasingly unpopular, and inefficient. They also apparently believe that the GVN is becoming weakened by internal disagreements within the Vietnamese society, such as those represented by the militant Buddhists and the disgruntled candidates in the recent national elections. Furthermore, the GVN military forces are now described by the VC/NVN as playing only a minor role in the war, a situation that the VC/NVN believe will lead to increased anti-U.S. sentiment in the GVN armed forces and in the Vietnamese body politic as a whole. In any event, the VC/NVN consider these forces as incapable of fighting effectively, as having failed to protect the pacification program, and, most important, as incapable of being improved. (CDEC 11-1206-67)

4. The VC, on the other hand, consider themselves in a strategically offensive posture with the initiative firmly in their hands. While admitting "certain difficulties" such as recruitment and manpower problems, food shortages, and war-weariness, which have given rise to hopes or "illusions" of peace among "some" troops, (CDEC 11-1591-67) the VC/NVN describe the over-all situation as offering a significant opportunity for gaining great military and political victories in the forthcoming winter-spring campaign. (CDEC 11-1206-67)

5. Viet Cong pronouncements concerning the significance of upcoming periods of activity (winter-spring, summer-autumn, etc.,) traditionally stress the importance of impending campaigns. Descriptions of the current 1967-68 winter-spring campaign, however, are placing unusually heavy emphasis on its historic significance and decisive nature. A letter, dated 31 August 1967 from the Central Office for South Vietnam to party chapters and members throughout South Vietnam exhorts its addressees to "make all-out efforts to achieve unusual and historical

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successes during the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign." (CDEC 10-2038-67) A letter dated 18 September 1967 from one military cadre to another in Long Khanh Province states that "the period of late 1967-early 1968 is being regarded as a "historical phase." (CDEC 10-1558-67) A directive outlining the missions and objectives of the winter-spring campaign issued by the current affairs section of VC Military Region 3, dated 21 October 1967 and classified Top Secret, describes VC/NVN missions in the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign as "militarily and politically decisive to the achievement of our (VC/NVN) objectives." (CDEC 11-1206-67) Numerous other references to the decisive nature of this winter-spring campaign have been noted in enemy documents, circulars, notebooks and letters.

6. These same documents call for all-out, coordinated attacks throughout South Vietnam utilizing both military and political means to achieve "ultimate victory" in the near future. (CDEC 10-2038-67) Although the exact date by which this "ultimate victory" is to be achieved is not specified, it is strongly implied that it will be some time in 1968.

7. VC/NVN strategy for this campaign is described as an "all-out attack." This is a departure from the traditional VC/NVN three-phase strategy "of resistance, general offensive, and general uprising." (CDEC 11-1209-67) The immediate objective is to step up military and political offensives "on all battlefronts" and to create favorable conditions for a "turning point" which will result in "a general counter-offensive and general uprising." (CDEC 11-1206-67) A notebook captured in Kontum states that "we must carry out large-scale and continuous attacks" and "coordinate activities with other areas of operations throughout South Vietnam." (CDEC 11-1421-67) A directive captured in Dinh Tuong Province describes the winter-spring campaign as a "campaign of large-scale and continuous attacks conducted evenly on all battlefields (in South Vietnam)." (CDEC 11-1501-67)

8. Viet Cong/North Vietnamese military and political missions for the winter-spring campaign can be broken down as follows--

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A. Military:

- (1) Conduct large-scale continuous, coordinated attacks by main force units, primarily in mountainous areas close to border sanctuaries.
- (2) Conduct widespread guerrilla attacks on large U.S./GVN units in rural/heavily populated areas.
- (3) Attack key U.S./GVN agencies and rear service bases.
- (4) Destroy lines of communications.
- (5) Conduct terrorist activities in the cities by special action and sapper units. (CDEC 11-1501-67)

B. Political:

- (1) Consolidate and strengthen VC/NVN organizations at province, district, and village levels throughout South Vietnam.
- (2) Coordinate military actions with political activities to promote political turmoil and struggle movements.

9. Through these tactics, the VC/NVN hope to force the redeployment of major Allied military units to the border areas where the VC/NVN enjoy sanctuary and will be able to inflict heavy casualties on them. According to the VC/NVN plan, this will tie the Allied forces down in static defensive positions and, equally important, will relieve the pressure on the VC/NVN activities in the populated areas. Elsewhere, the VC/NVN intend to accomplish the systematic destruction of the GVN's administrative apparatus in the rural areas, and to "liberate" most of these areas. A final goal of the VC/NVN is to launch the long-promised "general uprising." To accomplish this, the VC/NVN have set themselves the task of occupying

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and holding some urban centers in South Vietnam and of isolating many others.

10. The VC/NVN state that if they are successful in the above activities, the conditions will have been created for the overthrow of the present GVN and its replacement by a regime which will consent to form a coalition government with the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) and will follow the program of the NFLSV. Moreover, in these circumstances, the VC/NVN state that they would assume control of the country's armed forces and would ensure that they exercised control at the local administrative level. (CDEC 10-1811-67) The second major expectation on the part of the VC/NVN is that if they are successful, this will break the "aggressive will" of the Americans and force them to agree to withdraw from South Vietnam in a short period of time. (CDEC 10-2038-67 and 10-1558-67)

#### Conclusions

11. VC/NVN strategy toward the war appears to have reached a crucial phase in which changes in the tempo and scale of the war are envisioned. In which direction these changes will go probably depends very much on the success or lack thereof of VC/NVN efforts during the next few months. Based on the position that the VC/NVN have taken in this campaign so far, they appear to have committed themselves to unattainable ends within a very specific and short period of time.

12. Despite the apparent lack of realism in their goals, it would be illusory to assume that the higher VC/NVN echelons have no realistic objectives in this campaign. These real objectives are still obscure, but based on present information, it appears that VC/NVN strategy in the winter-spring campaign involves the following three related strategic options--

- A. A serious effort to inflict unacceptable military and political losses on the Allies regardless of VC casualties during a U.S. election year, in the

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hopes that the U.S. will be forced to yield to resulting domestic and international political pressure and withdraw from South Vietnam. This would probably involve the commitment of at least some elements of the NVA's reserves to South Vietnam.

- B. Negotiations after a major military and political effort to place themselves in as advantageous a position as possible.
- C. Reversion to a relatively low-intensity stage of warfare after having inflicted maximum casualties on the Allies and pre-empting any major allied offensive campaign.

These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the degree of success attained by the VC/NVN in the winter-spring campaign will probably determine which strategy will be emphasized.

13. In this context, the winter-spring campaign appears to be an attempt to utilize to the maximum possible extent current VC/NVN resources in North and South Vietnam in an attempt to place maximum pressure on the Allies to come to an agreement on terms favorable to the Vietnamese Communists. It is doubtful if the higher VC/NVN echelons seriously expect to be able to accomplish all of the tasks they have enumerated for their troops. They may feel, however, that at current rates of attrition the present scale of the conflict cannot be continued for much longer in any event, and that a retrenchment to a lower-intensity form of struggle will probably be inevitable unless there is a major change in the situation. Any such retrenchment would probably involve the dismantling or scaling down of many present VC/NVN organizational components -- military, political and economic -- since they would not be necessary for support of a much reduced level of activity.

14. If the VC/NVN view the situation in this light, it is probably to their advantage to use their

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present apparatus to the fullest extent in hopes of fundamentally reversing current trends before attrition renders such an attempt impossible. This could explain the risk they are taking in promising their followers and cadres victory within a short period of time. This tack has the effect of bolstering morale in the short run for an all-out effort. It does, however, run a high risk of engendering serious disillusionment and disaffection among the VC/NVN rank and file when the promises are not fulfilled. Even if the VC/NVN fail in this endeavor, however -- so the reasoning goes -- they would hopefully have at least inflicted serious damage to Allied military units and the GVN infrastructure, pre-empted any major offensive plans the Allies may have had for the current dry-season, and placed themselves in a better position to continue a long-range struggle with a reduced force. The cost to themselves would be substantial, but one they would ultimately have to pay anyway.

15. If this speculation is correct, then opportunities for negotiations would be most likely if the winter-spring campaign enjoyed unexpected successes and would be designed largely to facilitate acceptance by the Allies of the VC/NVN's major objectives -- withdrawal of U.S. troops and organization of a so-called "coalition government" under the control of the NFLSV. Barring this, the prospects of negotiations to settle the war would depend on the situation prevailing at the particular time, and the VC/NVN assessment of it. We are unable to estimate what this might entail, but both external and internal factors would be involved. We do believe, however, that it is unlikely that the VC/NVN would opt to negotiate unless they could do so with some aura of success, or at least the semblance thereof, to place before the world and their followers. They have already paid too high a price to negotiate a defeat. We believe that they would prefer instead to let things drag on and on at reduced levels, rather than to negotiate under such adverse conditions.

16. In sum, the one conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that the war is probably

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nearing a turning point and that the outcome of the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign will in all likelihood determine the future direction of the war.

\*17. Sources used in the preparation of this report, in addition to those cited in the text, included the following: (CDEC numbers unless otherwise specified)

10-1698-67, 10-1282-67, 11-1353-67, 11-1375-67, 11-1426-67, 11-1563-67, 11-1543-67, 11-1613-67, 11-1608,67, 09-1983-67, 11-1754-67, 11-1690-67, 11-1959-67, 11-1935-67, 11-2036-67, 11-1794-67, 11-2152-67, 11-2272-67, 11-1365-67, 11-1761-67, 11-1728-67, NIC No. 1275/67, NIC No. 1276/67, FVS-16,142, FVS-16,187, and 11-2552-67.

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