

SANITIZED COPYWARNING OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

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A. More specifically, General Taylor asked us to examine both the intelligence available and what was done with it.

B. Did warning reach the policy-makers in Washington and the commanders in the field? How well were they able to respond?

II. These questions required a detailed investigation beyond our customary "post-mortem" procedures.

A. This was a big task. Messages and reports run perhaps into the hundreds of thousands. Literally thousands of commanders and intelligence officers played a direct role. Moreover, these people are all still engaged in fighting

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WARNING OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

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the war in Vietnam or in producing intelligence here in Washington on the war. We therefore had to compromise between our desire for absolute thoroughness and over-riding operational requirements. We could not see everyone we wanted to. We were forced instead to sample the documentation. We think we got the answers, but we do not pretend to have pursued every thread.

- B. A formal working group was formed under myself as Chairman with representatives from State (Fred Green), JCS (General Depuy), DIA (General Glass), and NSA (Milton Zaslow). This group steered the enterprise and examined intelligence production at the Washington end.
- C. The group in turn sent a delegation to Saigon under (sanitized) from CIA, with General Glass from DIA, Colonel Viney from JCS, and observers from CINCPAC to interview senior commanders and their intelligence officers and collect documents.
- D. The Delegation:
  - 1. On the US side interviewed Bunker, Westmoreland, Abrams, Komer, Cushman, Rosson, Peers, Eckhardt, (IV Corps

Senior Adviser) J-2 MACV, all G-2's  
and G-2 advisers at Field Force/Corps  
level, DI 7th AF,

(sanitized)

2. On the Vietnamese side, talked to  
Commanding Generals of I and II Corps,  
J-2 of JGS and Deputy Director of National  
Police.

3. Visited Phu Bai, Da Nang, Pleiku,  
Camp Enari, Nha Trang, Bien Hoa, Long  
Binh, Can Tho.

E. Upon return, the working group prepared a (Sic)  
interim report, which the DCI sent to  
General Taylor last week. After further review, we  
believe this report is a good summary of our  
findings, and we are confident we cannot  
improve it except perhaps to add some de-  
tails, if desired. Our agencies will continue  
to study the materials, of course, to digest  
the lessons we have learned.

F. We have a mass of back-up material. We have  
included a selection of these studies, sum-  
maries, and documents in a supplementary  
book which I am now delivering to the Board.  
We can, of course, provide additional copies  
if you wish them.

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III. Our findings essentially confirm what Mr. Helms told you in February.

- A. There was convincing evidence, both in Washington and in Saigon, that the enemy was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks, probably on a larger scale than ever before.
- B. This intelligence had been analyzed and had been made available to commanders. In general, we found that US units were on higher state of alert than normal and that some unit relocations had been made.
- C. The intelligence available did not, however, pinpoint the time of attack, or give a full picture of the extent and intensity of the enemy offensive.

IV. We believe this reflects a considerable achievement for the US intelligence apparatus in Vietnam.

Problems:

- A. The dual US-Vietnamese intelligence systems, ranging in parallel down from Saigon to Corps to Province to District, are most complex. The volume of low-level human-source reports is immense.

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1. The CIA (sanitized) receives  
(sanitized) up to 200 reports  
a day.
  2. MACV's Combined Intelligence Center re-  
ceives about 600 a day from military  
collection.
- B. The nature of the war means that many of  
these will be low-level reports of impending  
attacks. Some are received every day for a  
variety of cities. Resisting the temptation  
to cry wolf every day requires judgment and  
discipline.
- C. Enemy security measures before the offensive  
were extremely stringent.
1. General Westmoreland said the enemy  
sacrificed coordination to security.  
This showed up when enemy units in MR-5  
attacked 24 hours early (on the night of  
29-30 January).
  2. The enemy's plans were compartmented.  
Probably no Communist officer below  
"front" level knew the full extent of  
offensive.

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3. Attack orders were not disseminated until the last possible time, 24 to 72 hours before attack.

D.

(sanitized)

V. A sample of the kinds of warning provided:

A. COMUSMACV (20 January)

"The enemy is presently developing a threatening posture in several areas in order to seek victories essential to achieving prestige and bargaining power. He may exercise his initiatives prior to, during, or after Tet."

B.

(sanitized)

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## C. State (27 January)

"Communist forces have significantly improved their capability to launch major offensives simultaneously or alternatively in several areas in South Vietnam."

## D. CIA (28 January)

"Within the past week (sanitized) intelligence has provided evidence of a widespread coordinated series of attacks to be launched by the Communists in the near future. Although the bulk of this evidence indicates the most critical areas to be in the northern section of South Vietnam, there are strong indications that key Communist military units throughout most of the country may also be involved. It is not yet possible to determine if the enemy is indeed planning an all-out, country-wide offensive during, or just following, the Tet holiday period."

## E. DIA (29 January)

"Reports of a forthcoming 'N-Day' have been received from enemy units in all corps areas; they may indicate an increase in activity only or could mark the beginning of coordinated



attacks against allied installations and bases throughout the country. If the latter is the case, it would be the first such coordinated campaign the enemy has attempted. Indications point to N-Day being scheduled in the Tet period, but it still seems likely that the Communists would wait until after the holiday to carry out a plan."

VI. The timing was the key question.

A. Although there were some indications that the attack might come in Tet, most analysts thought the Tet holiday too meaningful for the VC to take advantage of it.

1. Westmoreland believed the enemy would attack just before or just after Tet.

B. By attacking during the holiday the enemy could expect two things.

1. ARVN forces would be off-guard and many would be on holiday leave.

2. The presence of large numbers of VC in the cities would not cause alarm.

VII. Next to timing, the most serious question was the basic one of enemy capabilities.

A. Most commanders and intelligence officers did not believe the enemy could do what his propaganda about the "winter-spring" offensive and

the "general uprising" said--in general terms--he would do.

- B. Prevailing estimates of attrition, infiltration and recruitment, reports of low morale, and a long series of defeats had degraded our image of the enemy.
- C. As a result, we did not expect the enemy:
  - 1. To attack on the scale he did or with the coordination he showed (although we gave him the capability of attacking individually almost all the targets he hit).
  - 2. To aim for the cities, and specifically the civilian command and control apparatus. (We did not think he would attempt a general uprising because we did not think he could bring it off: in this we were right.)

VIII. Although the full scope of enemy intentions was not known, as early as 10 January General Westmoreland canceled certain operations in Northern I Corps and ordered General Weyand to reposition forces nearer to Saigon.

- A. In subsequent days he issued warnings to US and Vietnamese commanders, and to the US Mission.

On 15 January, he discussed with President Thieu the possibility of canceling the Tet truce, and on 25 January he and Ambassador Bunker succeeded in having the truce canceled for I Corps.

- B. Westmoreland recognized the significance of the enemy's premature attacks in MR-5 and on 30 January placed all his units on full alert.
1. This measure " saved Tan Son Nhut," according to 7th AF, and may have saved other bases as well.
  2. When attacks did not occur before Tet, the JGS had allowed 50 percent leaves for ARVN. Thus on the 30th it was too late to restore ARVN units to full strength.

IX. We sense that in the day or so before the attack the "adrenalin level" in Saigon was a little higher than in Washington.

- A. That is, the sense of urgency felt in Saigon does not fully come through in the words received in Washington by the Washington agencies. Atmosphere is not transmitted well over a teletype.

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- B. This is a subjective judgment, and one which had no effect on the outcome of the battle, but it does help explain why there was more of a sense of being "taken by surprise" in Washington than in Saigon.
- X. Within this general picture, there were notable differences among the four Corps Tactical Zones.
- A. I Corps was in the best shape.
1. III Marine Amphibious Force expected attacks on Khe Sanh and Quang Tri, and  
(sanitized)  
but did not have a date for this attack.
  2. General Cushman expected to be attacked during Tet.
  3. With the truce canceled, most ARVN units were at full strength and all units were on a high state of alert.
  4. The extent and coordination of the enemy's attacks, and his focusing on the cities, was not expected.

- B. In II Corps, warning was better in the highlands than on the coast.
1. On the coast attacks were launched by MR-5 a day early. US units were on alert, but primarily against ceasefire violations, rather than city attacks, and the enemy achieved some initial successes.
  2. In the highlands, the intelligence picture was the best in Vietnam, with all sources combining to warn of several enemy attacks. The defense of Pleiku was the most successful US operation during the offensive.
  3. ARVN division commanders in the highlands canceled leaves on their own. Nevertheless, in some units, strength was far below normal.
- C. III Corps had good strategic warning.
1. A reorganization of MR-4 in the fall had pointed to an attack on Saigon.
  2. Other indicators (sanitized) led to a move of US units closer to the city.
  3. All units were alerted on the 30th, but most ARVN units were in their normal Tet posture nonetheless.

4. During the 30th II Field Force received specific information from prisoners that Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, etc, were to be the target. Tet, and the responsibility of ARVN for defense of Saigon proper, led to the enemy's initial successes in that city.

D. In IV Corps the enemy's attacks were almost totally unexpected.

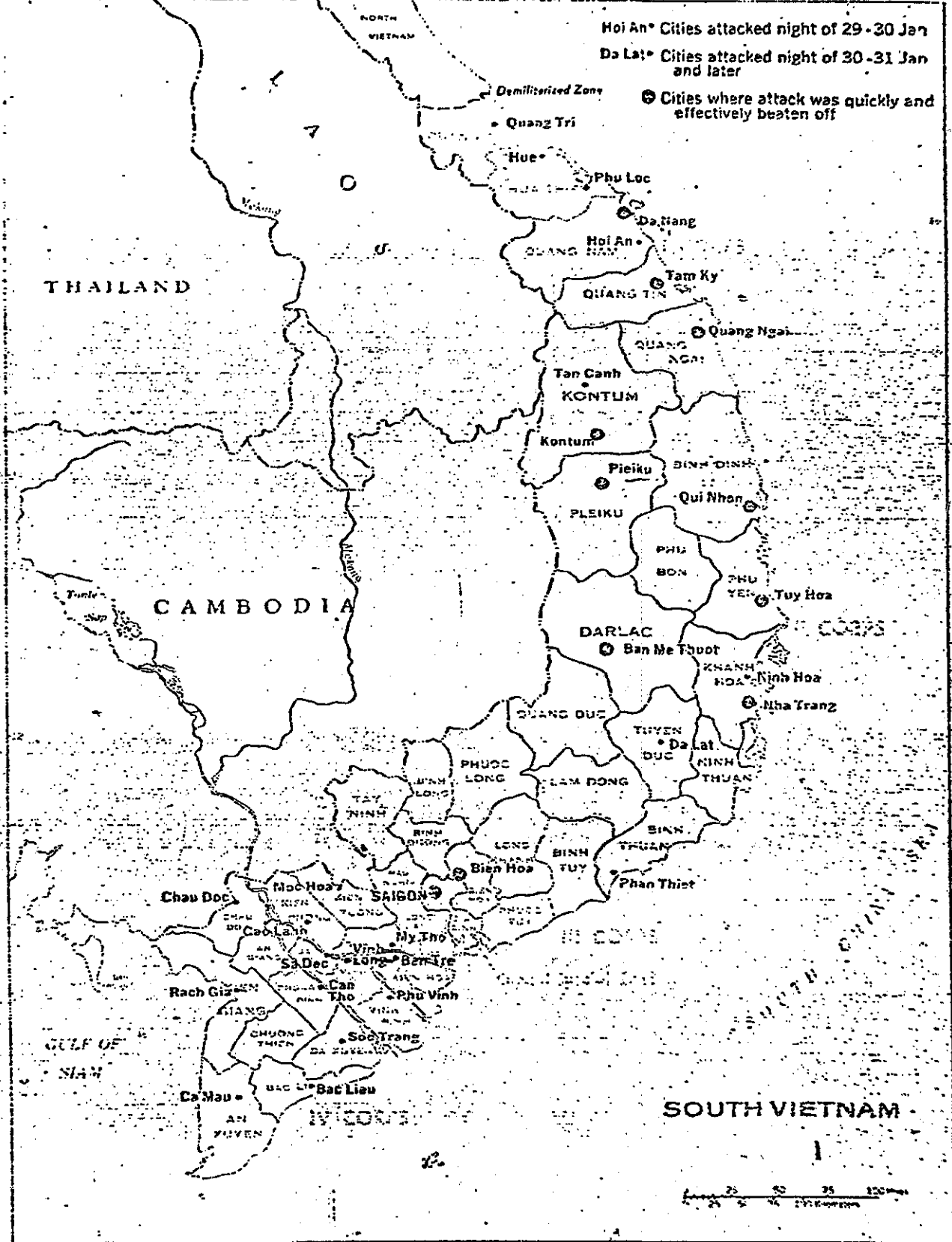
1. The VC were known to be in the cities in large numbers, but this was traditional during Tet.
2. General Eckhardt, Senior Adviser, said the only warning he received was General Westmoreland's alerting message of 30 January.
3. He had no US maneuver battalions under his command; he tried to alert ARVN units, but was unable in the time available to restore their readiness.

XI. These then are our general findings:

- A. Senior officials in Washington and Saigon were given a high degree of general warning. They were led to expect that wide-spread coordinated attacks were imminent.

- B. They were not given a picture of the extent and intensity of the attacks, or of the precise timing. An attack during Tet was thought less likely than one before or after.
- C. Field commanders were specifically warned of a number of individual attacks, and were warned of a wide-spread enemy offensive. They too were not warned of the timing.
- D. This intelligence was sufficient for alerting measures to be taken throughout Vietnam, although these measures were not too effective in certain areas and units.
- E. As a result, intelligence considerably reduced the impact of the enemy offensive. This map shows those cities attacked, and indicates those from which the enemy was easily thrown back with heavy losses.

# MAJOR LOCATIONS ATTACKED DURING THE TET OFFENSIVE



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