

INTELLIGENCE WARNING
OF THE TET OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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INTELLIGENCE WARNING OF THE TET
OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Interim Report)

Rev Stf 25/21
Jim 30
CIA

A. Procedures

1. A working group has been formed under the chairmanship of R. J. Smith, on which CIA, DIA, INR, NSA, and the Joint Staff are represented. This group has compiled dossiers on the raw intelligence information and intelligence summaries and judgments received in various US headquarters before Tet, with emphasis on the period 15-30 January 1968, and on the finished intelligence disseminated to senior officers of the government as a result.

2. Representatives of the group from CIA, DIA, and the Joint Staff visited Vietnam from 16 to 23 March. They were joined there by observers from CINCPAC, MACV, and the CIA station in Saigon. In addition to collecting a large quantity of pertinent documents, the delegation received briefings and conducted interviews, both in Saigon and the field, with many senior officials, US and Vietnamese. On the US side, members of the delegation talked to Ambassador Bunker, General Westmoreland, General Abrams, Ambassador Komer, Lt. General Cushman, Lt. General Rosson, Maj. General Peers, Maj. General Eckhardt, and the commanding generals of 1st Marine Division and 4th Infantry Division. They also interviewed the G-2s of I and II Field Forces and the G-2 of III Marine Amphibious Force, and the G-2 advisers and the CIA Regional officers in all four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZs). They were briefed extensively by MACV J-2 and by the CIA station in Saigon, and contacted the Director of Intelligence, Seventh Air Force, [redacted] Vietnam, and the Army Headquarters Area Command in Saigon. On the Vietnamese side, they interviewed the commanding generals of I and II Corps, J-2 of the Joint General Staff and his deputy, and the deputy director of [redacted]. In the course of these discussions members of the group visited Phu Bai, Da Nang, Pleiku, Camp Enari, Nha Trang, Bien Hoa, Long Binh, and Can Tho.

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B. General Findings

3. As the DCI informed the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board in February, there was evidence, both in Saigon and in Washington, that the enemy was engaging in his much-advertised "winter-spring campaign" and was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks, probably on a larger scale than ever before. There was evidence in January that some attacks in the highlands might be conducted during the Tet holiday. In the latter part of the month it was evident that other attacks were imminent, and some of the targets had been identified. Both in Saigon and in Washington this intelligence was communicated to senior military and political officers. As a result, a series of actions were taken in Vietnam which reduced the impact of the enemy offensive.

4. The warning thus provided represents no small achievement for the US intelligence apparatus in Vietnam. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

It must therefore rely on classic indications techniques. This is difficult under any circumstances. The intelligence organization itself, military and civil, US [REDACTED], is complex and the volume of material it handles is large. Thus, the recognition of significant reports from human sources through the blare of background noise presents a major problem. Moreover, the very nature of the war leads to the "crying wolf" syndrome. We have little doubt that at some level of the intelligence apparatus low-level reports could be found forecasting many of the attacks made at Tet; we have equally little doubt that similar reports could be found alluding to attacks on many other cities and on many other dates.

5. The enemy took great pains to conceal his intentions. Knowledge of his plans was fully compartmented and the actual attack order was disseminated to attacking units only in the final 24 to 72 hours. Although US and Vietnamese authorities received some reports of individual attack plans, probably no Communist officer below the

level of COSVN, front, or military region was aware of the full scope of the offensive. General Westmoreland believes the Communists sacrificed coordination for security, and this is evident in the premature attacks by units of Military Region 5 (MR 5) on the night of 29-30 January, attacks which served to alert the US command to the much more extensive attacks on the following night.

25X1 6. Despite enemy security measures [redacted] [redacted] able to provide clear warning that attacks, probably on a larger scale than ever before, were in the offing. [redacted]

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25X1 [redacted] They included references to impending attacks, more widespread and numerous than seen before. Moreover, they indicated a sense of urgency, along with an emphasis on thorough planning and secrecy not previously seen [redacted]

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25X1 [redacted] served both to validate information from other sources [redacted] and to provide warning to senior officials. The indicators, however, were not sufficient to predict the exact timing of the attack.

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C. Impact of the Enemy Offensive

7. Although warning had thus been provided, the intensity, coordination, and timing of the enemy attack were not fully anticipated. Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland attest to this. The most important factor was timing. Few US or GVN officials believed the enemy would attack during Tet, nor did the Vietnamese public. There was good reason for this: Tet symbolizes the solidarity of the Vietnamese people. It is the most important holiday in Vietnam, an occasion observed by all members of every family whether they are Buddhist, Christian, or Communist. The Communists evidently believed they could exploit this solidarity to produce an antigovernment, antiforeign, antiwar uprising. This did not take place. The enemy therefore paid a price in the antagonisms he generated among the urban population,

but he gained enormously in two ways: The GVN's army and police were generally far below their usual state of readiness, and the precedent of Tet made it possible for large numbers of VC to enter the cities without causing alarm. General Westmoreland expected heavy attacks either just before or just after Tet, and as Tet approached and major attacks had not materialized, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff had authorized 50 percent leaves. Evidence to upset this general belief did not come to hand until 24 hours or so before the attacks were launched, the most important being the premature initiatives in MR-5. The latter brought the intelligence already available into sharp focus and provided the missing element of timing. In the short time available, US and ARVN units could be alerted and were, but ARVN performance was reduced in many areas by Tet leaves.

8. A second major unexpected element was the number of simultaneous attacks mounted. US intelligence had given the enemy a capability of attacking virtually all of the points which he did in fact attack and of mounting coordinated attacks in a number of areas. He was not, however, granted a specific capability for coordinated attacks in all areas at once. More important, the nature of the targets was not anticipated. Washington and Saigon expected attacks on some cities, but they did not expect the offensive to have the cities, the civilian command and control centers, radio stations and police headquarters as primary objectives. Finally, the quantity of new, modern weapons in the hands of Main and Local Force Viet Cong who engaged in the attacks was higher than expected. The AK-47 rifle and RPG-7 antitank grenade were particularly effective against ARVN units and the Regional and Popular Forces.

9. Underlying these specific problems was a more basic one: most commanders and intelligence officers, at all levels, did not visualize the enemy as capable of accomplishing his stated goals as they appeared in propaganda and in captured documents. Prevailing estimates of attrition, infiltration, and local recruitment, reports of low morale,

and a long series of defeats had degraded our image of the enemy. The general picture presented was an enemy unable to conduct an offensive of such scope and intensity. Commanders and intelligence officers saw his generalized calls for a "general uprising" as merely exhortatory, and not as a blueprint for what was to follow. Moreover, in the past many "great offensives" had blossomed in Communist propaganda but had not materialized on the ground.

D. Response to Warnings

10. Nevertheless, Washington and Saigon were, as stated earlier, fully aware that the enemy planned a major offensive, probably coordinated attacks in northern I CTZ, at Dak To in the highlands of II CTZ, and toward Saigon from virtually all sides in III CTZ. As early as 10 January, General Westmoreland had canceled certain planned operations in northern III CTZ in order to reposition US forces nearer to Saigon. In subsequent days he issued a series of warnings to his commanders, and to the US Mission, that the enemy was preparing to attack. Although he had not originally expected attacks during Tet, he recognized the significance of the premature attacks in MR 5 and on 30 January notified all his commanders to expect attacks that night. As a result all US units were fully alerted, although in most cases they did not have time or information to take offensive measures against the enemy prior to the actual attack. All Seventh Air Force bases were put on a maximum state of alert, and the 7th AF Director of Intelligence testifies that this step "saved Tan Son Nhut." Perhaps the best evidence that COMUSMACV's measures were effective and that the enemy's strategic intelligence was faulty is that, with the exception of Hue, the enemy failed to hold any of his major military objectives for a significant period of time.

11. The urgency felt in Saigon was not, however, fully felt in Washington in the immediate pre-attack period. As a result, finished intelligence disseminated in Washington did not contain the atmosphere of crisis present in Saigon. We do not believe this represents a failure on anyone's part. The information available

was transmitted and duly analyzed, but atmosphere is not readily passed over a teletype circuit. Although senior officials in Washington received warnings in the period 25-30 January, they did not receive the full sense of immediacy and intensity which was present in Saigon. On the other hand, with Saigon alerted, virtually nothing further could be done in Washington that late in the game which could affect the outcome.

12. Within this general picture, there were significant differences among the four corps areas. III MAF expected assaults on Khe Sanh and Quang Tri. It had received [redacted] the enemy attack plan for Da Nang, but not the date. General Cushman stated that he expected to be attacked during Tet, and enemy activities in northern I CTZ had prompted higher authority to cancel the Tet truce in I CTZ. As a result both US and Vietnamese forces were better prepared here than elsewhere. Most Vietnamese units were at nearly full strength. The extent and coordination of the enemy's attacks, considerably exceeded expectations, as did his tenaciously held lodgement in Hue. In general, however, his assaults were easily thrown back.

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13. In II CTZ, allied forces in the coastal lowlands were for the most part attacked on the night of 29-30 January by MR 5 units. They did not have the advantage of forewarning which these attacks provided units farther south, nor were they in the "alert" posture of Allied forces in I Corps. The Allied forces were on a higher than normal state of alert, which was, however, directed against the inevitable cease-fire violations rather than attacks on the cities. In the highlands, singularly unlike any other area, [redacted]

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[redacted] prisoners, and documents reflecting specific plans for attacks during Tet. For instance, Communist plans for attacking Dak To, Pleiku, and Kontum were known well in advance, and the US 4th Division was able to correlate them with enemy deployments. This provided one of the few opportunities for US forces to take active measures against the enemy; Pleiku was the most successful US operation of the offensive. Elsewhere in the highlands intelligence was not as good, but there was enough information to lead two of the three ARVN division commanders in II CTZ to cancel all leaves on their

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own initiative. We do not believe, however, that these orders were totally effective in recovering personnel who had already departed.

14. It has been noted above that US redeployments in III Corps began before mid-January. These movements were triggered by the concentration of three enemy divisions along the Cambodian border north and northwest of Saigon and by indications that these units were beginning to deploy southward toward the city. In addition, US and ARVN intelligence officers had earlier deduced from a reorganization of the enemy command structure in MR 4, which surrounds the Saigon area, that its purpose was to improve command and control for the coordination of an attack on that city. III Corps and II Field Force were put on a general alert on 30 January (General Westmoreland's actions resulting from the attacks in MR 5 the previous night), and during the course of the day began to receive more specific information that Saigon was to be attacked that night. In most ARVN units in III Corps the troops appear to have been in their normal Tet condition.

15. In IV CTZ, the nature and extent of the enemy's attacks were almost totally unexpected. Allied forces were aware that Viet Cong capabilities had improved.

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The supply of modern weapons had increased and the VC had shown an ability to conduct a series of coordinated attacks throughout the Delta. To some degree however, this could be interpreted as reactions to a more aggressive allied posture in the area. In the Delta cities the presence of the VC during Tet was so traditional as to be accepted as routine. General Eckhardt, Senior Adviser, stated that the only warning he received was General Westmoreland's alerting message of 30 January. General Eckhardt was able to alert the US support and logistic units in the Delta, but was unable in the time available to restore the readiness of ARVN units. The ARVN Corps commander and his three division commanders were present at their headquarters when the offensive struck, but their units were far below strength.

E. Responses to Specific Questions

16. The preceding paragraphs have been responsive to General Taylor's questions a, b, f, and g. Our preliminary findings on questions c, d, and e are as follows:

c. (Provision of information by civilians)

Prior to the offensive there were very few cases of civilians volunteering information on the impending attacks. This is not necessarily, however, a measure of the degree of civilian cooperation with the regime. The enemy's security measures, his rapid deployments through territory much of which was under his control, and the basic difficulty of rapid communication from countryside to city would have prevented friendly villages from passing warnings in many cases. As noted above the presence of infiltrators in the cities was unremarkable during Tet. During the Tet fighting, and since, there has been a marked increase in information volunteered from the populace.

e. (Identification of units)

Most of the units engaged in the offensive have been identified. In general, there was a close correlation between US order-of-battle holdings in a given area prior to the attacks and the units identified in the attacks, although not all units deployed in any given area were actually committed in most cases, and some new provisional units were identified in the attacks. As noted above, the enemy's facade of

a "general uprising" required him to attack with his Viet Cong units wherever possible. Especially in III and IV CTZs he held back many Main Force and most NVN units for follow-up. Because of the failure of the initial attacks, in all but a few instances a follow-up never came.

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II

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Rev. Sept 12
Jan 36

COMMUNIST PREPARATIONS FOR THE TET OFFENSIVE
IN RETROSPECT

1. The overall concept of a massive attack against South Vietnam's cities and towns was probably formulated by the High Command in Hanoi at least as early as last summer. Subsequently, the outline plan for the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign was ~~forwarded~~ to various headquarters in South Vietnam by September 1967.

2. From the beginning, extreme precautions were taken to keep the Tet plans secret in order to preserve the all-important element of surprise. Need-to-know criteria were probably strictly enforced in disseminating battle plans. Possibly only the Communists' Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) and some elements of the Military Administrative Regions and major theatre commands were given a complete overview of the planned offensive.

3. At the other end of the Communist chain of command, battalion commanders probably were given the specifics only of their own missions and those of cooperating units. The country-wide character of the effort apparently was described only in the most general terms to the command staffs even at the provincial and regional levels. Thus, only the

highest echelons probably had clear knowledge that for the first time virtually every major city and town in South Vietnam was to be invaded in force.

4. The Communists began a new indoctrination program among all their party cadres and military officers in September, based on Resolution 13 of the Hanoi party central committee. The resolution called for a "general offensive" and "general uprising" which would prepare the way for a Communist-dominated coalition government.*

5. A wide variety of battle preparations for the Tet offensive had to be undertaken, many of them starting in November. Detailed operations planning commenced at each command level. Units had to be strengthened by replacements and augmented or reinforced with newly arrived units. Some effort apparently was made to infiltrate guerrillas into cities and towns to strengthen units there. Special local recruiting and new infiltrators provided some of the fresh personnel. Others were upgraded from irregular elements. Larger volumes of supplies had to be brought in and stockpiled.

*A copy of the resolution itself has never been obtained; the reflections of it in captured documents and other sources have been so general as to preclude judgments on any specific changes in strategy that the resolution might have called for.

6. Communist intelligence, security, and logistical elements probably began to reconnoiter approach routes toward each target city and town in order to assure that large forces would be able to march long distances in complete secrecy. Requirements for detailed city maps showing key control points were levied under some cover story, for example, to support stepped up terror operations, [and arrangements for special communications were made to coordinate the attack.]

7. Special training for newly organized sapper units presumably was under way by late November. All units needed special training in street fighting, but many apparently received relatively little so as to keep Hanoi's intentions well disguised.

8. By December, each command level was reviewing the tactical plans of subordinate commands and monitoring their implementation. Many coordination problems were solved along the way. By this time, all command levels of the Communist military apparatus must have had a clear idea that a major coordinated attack would be launched sometime around the turn of the lunar year.

9. By late December, preparations along the approach routes were almost certainly well advanced, since troops would begin to march in mid-January. Security arrangements were completed to assure that villagers living along the approach routes kept silent. Bivouac areas were selected, prepared and staffed. Guides were arranged. Boats were made available at water crossings. Ammunition and some of the heavier weapons were cached, and forward stations were prepared near the target cities and towns.

10. Briefings were given to commanding officers on their missions.

11. When Hanoi decided that preparations were satisfactorily advanced, attack plans presumably were given final approval for all command levels, the timing was set, and orders were issued to march at the appropriate time.

12. Thus, in mid- and late January many Communist units began to converge on the cities and towns of South Vietnam, some making relatively long forced marches and all employing the tightest possible security precautions.

13. Meanwhile, more routine operations continued in the Khe Sanh and DMZ areas as well as

further south. These operations probably were mounted partly to help screen the coming urban offensive.

14. As the troops neared their final pre-attack stations, rear services elements presumably supplied them with the previously cached weapons and ammunition. Final briefings were given to prepare the officers and troops to fight in a new environment.

15. Shortly before 30 January, Hanoi gave the attack order and the Tet offensive was launched.

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LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED IN THE FIELD

SAIGON

Ambassador Bunker
General Westmoreland
General Abrams
Ambassador Komer

CIA
Officials

CIA Chief of Station
CIA
CIA
CIA
CIA

Leo Crampsey, Embassy Security Officer

Brig. Gen. Philip Davidson, J-2 MACV

Col. Daniel Graham, J-2

[REDACTED]

Brig. Gen. Irzyk, CG Headquarters
Area Command

Brig. Gen. Keegan, DI, 7th Air Force

Col. Tarwater, 7th Air Force

Col. Hutchins, 7th Air Force

Col. Loi, J-2 JGS

Lt. Col. Thiep, Deputy J-2

Bui Van Nhu, Deputy Director
National Police

DANANG

Lt. Gen. Cushman, CG III MAF

Major Gen. Robertson, CG I Marine Division

Col. Beckington, G-2 III MAF

Col. Randall G-3 MAF

Col. Beeson, Deputy Senior Adviser,
I Corps

[REDACTED] CIA

Lt. Gen. Lam, CG I Corps

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PHU BAI

Lt. Gen. Rosson, CG, Province Corps,
Vietnam

PLEIKU

Major Gen. Stone, CG 4th Infantry
Division
Col. Barnes, Deputy Senior Adviser,
II Corps
Lt. Col. Hindaven G-2 Adviser, II Corps
Major Gen. Lam, CG II Corps

NHA TRANG

Major Gen. Peers, CG, I Field Force
Col. Duchet, G-2, I Field Force
Col. Ladd, CO. 5h Special Forces
Corps

[] CIA

LONG BINH

Col. Foulks, G-2, II Field Force

BIEN HOA

Col. Peters, Deputy Senior Adviser,
III Corps

Lt. Col. Kizirian, G-2 Adviser

[] CIA

CAN THO

Major Gen. Eckhardt, Senior Adviser,
IV Corps

Lt. Col. Carey, G-2 Adviser

[] CIA

Lt. Col. Conger, Senior Adviser,
Phong Dinh Province

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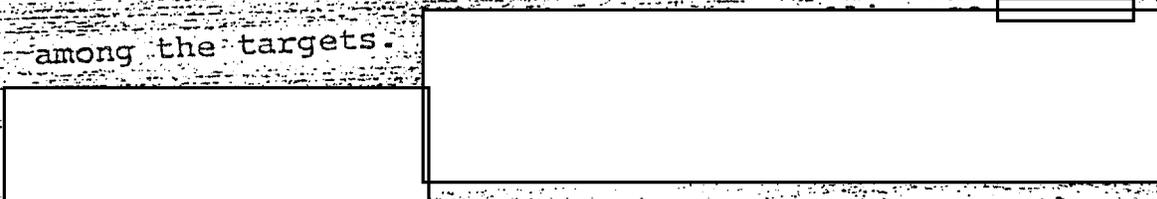
Item 3

CIA

VII

INDICATIONS RECEIVED IN CIA, 15-30 JANUARY 1968

Field reporting from South Vietnam during the few weeks prior to Tet revealed that widespread, coordinated attacks were likely some time around the holiday period. The attacks were expected to be large-scale and to include some cities and towns among the targets.



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The reporting did not, however, reflect the massive character of the preparations under way all over South Vietnam for simultaneous invasions of nearly all major cities and towns. Nor did this reporting impart a sense that "all hell" was about to break loose. There were few hints, moreover, that the urban attacks would be mass assaults in many cases, rather than the traditional affairs in which only allied facilities within the towns were hit and there was no intent to hold a major urban center.

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provided clear evi-

dence of a developing nationwide Communist campaign

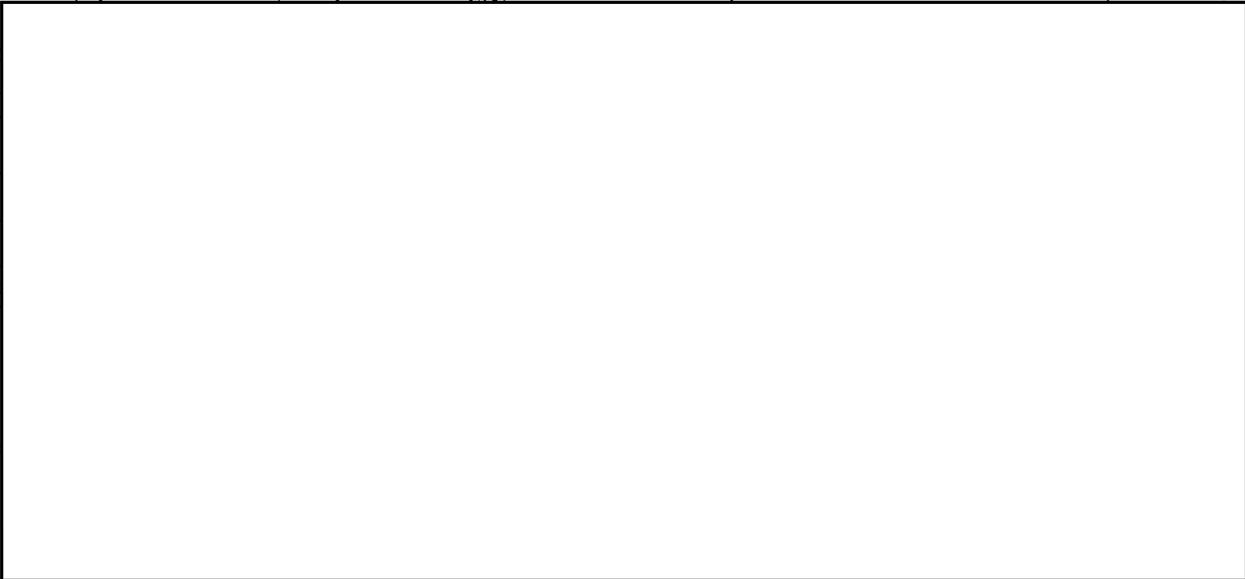
as well as specific threats to a number of population centers and military bases. In addition to giving a clear idea of the magnitude of the North Vietnamese build-up in the DMZ area, [] indicated significant pre-Tet deployments and concentrations of enemy units near such areas as Quang Tri city, Hue, Da Nang, targets in Pleiku and Kontum, certain provincial capitals along the central coast. Threats were also noted in III Corps provinces north of Saigon. [] provided only tenuous indications, however, of troop deployments toward Saigon.

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[] the enemy was making major improvements in his command and control posture, including the improvement of tactical intelligence.

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[redacted] suggested combat preparations over wide areas of the country hardly associated with a seven-day standdown.*

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[redacted]

[redacted] referred to a plan for a "final performance" that had to be reported by 0600 hours on 26 January.

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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and Communist interest in specific areas in the Nam Bo region.

[redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Some thirty provincial summaries covering December 1967 [Redacted] made frequent

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mention of increased terrorist activity in the context of the winter-spring campaign. The Dinh Tuong Province summary, for example, reported that Viet Cong planning for attacks on district towns and on the province capital were continuing.

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[Redacted]

Captured documents also contributed to this picture. Some of these contained lecture notes which represented the winter-spring campaign as of "historical importance," designed to usher in the "general offensive and the general uprising," two concepts dating from Viet Minh days, and to achieve "a decisive victory," language applied to earlier winter-spring campaigns.

One fairly specific document, reported to Washington in mid-January, referred to attacks on urban areas. According to the notes, the Headquarters of Military Region 5, had pledged to liberate its entire area during the campaign. This was said to involve "very strong military attacks in conjunction with uprisings...to take over towns and cities."

During the weeks immediately preceding the Tet offensive, the daily cable summary sent to Washington by the Combined Documents Exploitation Center in Saigon included several allusions to planned actions against urban areas.

The 12 January cable summarized a top secret memorandum captured in Quang Da which stated that "the time is ripe for all units and agencies to make every effort to regain control of rural areas, and to launch attacks on American and Puppet units, logistical installations, district towns, key posts..."

On 22 January the cable referenced a 20 November directive captured in Pleiku Province which revealed that: "All provincial and district concentrated units should maintain two-thirds of their forces in 'forward' areas for combat purposes..."

References like those above had often been seen in past years in the usual exhortative style of

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Communist documents. The number of the references
and their general format prior to Tet simply did not
arouse extraordinary concern in the intelligence
community and thus force attention on the possibil-
ity that something unique in enemy action was impend-
ing.

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*summary
item 3c
CIA4*

TR

Procedures for Handling Current Intelligence Material in CIA

A. Flow

The Office of Current Intelligence in CIA receives indications intelligence and other current information from all sources at regular intervals during every day and night. Agency traffic is routed directly from the Cable Secretariat; material from other agencies is received electrically and by regular courier runs. The precedence of incoming traffic ranges from CRITIC (the CIA Operations Center is the Washington terminal for the Critical Communications System) to the slowest pouched material. Classification of the material ranges from codeword and other sensitive top secret traffic to unclassified press ticker.

Cable traffic bearing on the situation in Vietnam is routed directly to the Indochina Division of OCI's Far East Area. Significant items are selected by the Operations Center and sent to the command echelons immediately on receipt, usually with appropriate analyst comment. Non-cable traffic is also routed

directly to the regional division (e.g., captured documents and dispatches processed both by CIA and other intelligence agencies).

OCI has the principal responsibility within the Agency for receiving, disseminating, and storing codeword material.

B. Analysis and Reporting

The Indochina Division of OCI is responsible for analyzing current information and producing finished intelligence on Vietnam.

Material from all sources is screened, digested, and filed or destroyed by desk analysts responsible for various aspects of the situation. Significant items are sifted from the large volume of daily take and selected for use in briefing and in preparing material for the daily and weekly publications.

Finished intelligence items are written for consumers at various levels of interest and are published in several daily publications:

- a. The President's Daily Brief, and supplements thereto;
- b. The Central Intelligence Bulletin;
- c. The Situation in Vietnam;
- d. The Current Intelligence Digest;

Weekly publications containing articles on Vietnam include:

- a. The Situation in South Vietnam (Weekly);
- b. The Weekly Review (codeword);
- c. The Weekly Summary (secret);

In addition to articles prepared for the regular publications, assessments in greater depth and detail are published in the form of a Directorate of Intelligence Memorandum or Report. These memos frequently are prepared at the request of a high-level policy-maker, and are given single-addressee or limited distribution; they are also produced from time to time on the initiative of the division or at the direction of senior Agency chiefs.

Informal spot reports and comments are prepared for the White House and sent by LDX.

Current intelligence material is sent regularly to the Secretary of Defense and his deputies through the CIA liaison officer in OSD.

The same range of material processed for use in the publications and informal written

briefs is used in numerous verbal briefings inside and outside the Agency. The Director of Current Intelligence is briefed by his staff each weekday morning, with emphasis on the situation in Vietnam. He in turn attends a morning executive meeting in which he briefs the Director of Central Intelligence on significant developments overnight.

Division and branch chiefs in the Far East Area participate in a variety of regular and ad hoc briefings on aspects of the Vietnam situation.

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answers
Jan 3d
CIA3

TREATMENT OF INDICATIONS IN FINISHED INTELLIGENCE: CIA

Finished intelligence produced and disseminated in Washington reflected in general terms the picture provided the field reporting described above. It warned of impending large-scale attacks, including some against cities and towns, and described the planned offensive as coordinated and widespread.

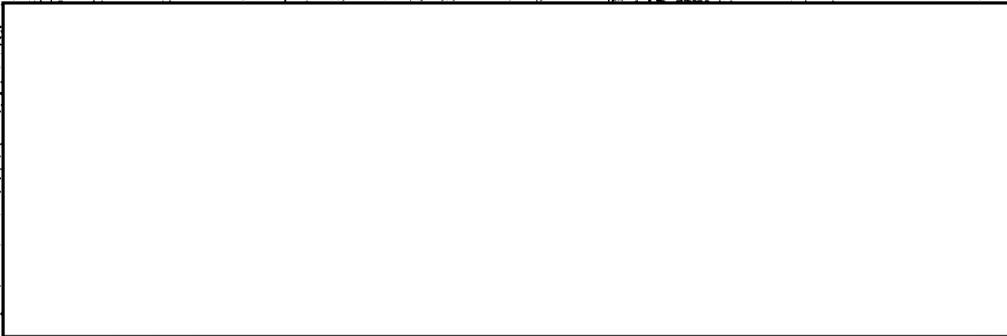
On the other hand, published intelligence, like the field reports, did not carry strong overtones of alarm. Although a powerful attack was forecast, it was not predicted to go beyond all precedent. Nor did the warnings focus on the threat to the cities.

As to timing, the predicted offensive was described as likely to occur before or after the Tet holidays in intelligence items published during the two weeks before the attack. By the day before the offensive actually began, however, readers were warned that action might begin on 30 January.

The following excerpts are taken from CIA publications circulated during the weeks immediately preceding the urban offensive. They are representative of the type of warning provided. Limited-circulation memoranda followed a similar line; they are mainly addressed to the situation developing around Khe Sanh.

"In recent months the intensity of enemy activity in the Mekong Delta has increased markedly. The initiation of widespread coordinated activity throughout the corps is in line with captured documents and interrogation reports which have provided information on the 1967-68 winter-spring campaign goals. In addition, the conduct of the enemy actions suggests that the Communists in the delta are becoming more sophisticated, receiving more modern weapons, and developing more effective command and control procedures." (The Situation in Vietnam, 11 January 1968)

"This phase of the Communist winter-spring campaign has been marked by unprecedented enemy losses--a record of 2,868 Communists were killed last week--as well as by an extremely high level of enemy aggressiveness throughout South Vietnam. It is possible that the enemy is attempting a particularly heavy show of force to gain the maximum psychological advantage with the populace prior to the Tet holiday that begins on 30 January. Communist military preparations, however, appear to foreshadow a resumption of major offensive action after Tet." (Weekly Review, 12 January 1968)



"A series of significant developments noted in Communist communications since early January in the northern area of III Corps suggest that a major shift of functions by high-level military entities may currently be under way." (Ibid.)

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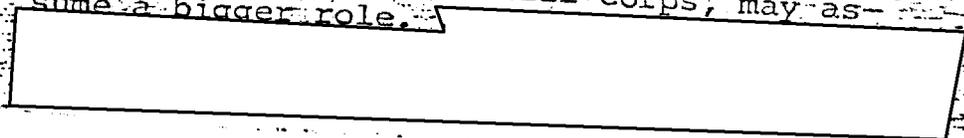
"In South Vietnam's III Corps, there appears to be a distinct chronological pattern in the enemy's current winter-spring campaign. The major attacks--against Loc Ninh, Bu Dop, and fire-support base Burt--have occurred at approximately one-month intervals. If this pattern continues, coordinated attacks--spearheaded by elements of the Viet Cong 5th, 9th, or North Vietnamese 7th divisions--could occur before the Tet holiday that begins in late January." (Weekly Review, 19 January 1968)

"Several recently captured documents add to evidence of impending enemy military action in the highlands. Many of the documents reflect an increased coordination between North Vietnamese main force units and Viet Cong forces on local levels. This closer coordination has also been observed

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Some of the captured documents include plans to attack specific targets including an ambitious assault on Pleiku city, purportedly to be staged shortly after Tet. This attack would be preceded by a series of coordinated attacks against US and South Vietnamese defensive positions in the area surrounding the provincial capital during 25-29 January." (The Situation in Vietnam, 22 January 1968)

"A new Communist headquarters complex in Binh Long Province, originally believed to be a new tactical front headquarters for enemy units in northern III Corps, may assume a bigger role."



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[Although the precise role of the "new front" is still not clear, these developments suggest that it may be in the process of assuming command authority over all enemy forces south of the two northernmost provinces." (Central Intelligence Bulletin, 23 January 1968)]

"...the 21st regiment...just moved to a position some six miles southwest of Tam Ky and reportedly is poised for a large-scale assault on the provincial capital itself." (The Situation in Vietnam, 23 January 1968)

"This increase in enemy activity further indicates that the Communist main forces together with local force units in this area are determined to initiate offensive action in central I Corps. Such an offensive may take place in conjunction with increased enemy military activity in the Hue area and possibly as part of a countrywide series of large-scale actions just preceding or closely following the Tet holiday." (Ibid.)

"...in the Quang Nam - Quang Tin province area, recent maneuvering by elements of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division and by headquarters elements of the Communist's Military Region 5 command has increased the threat to other allied coastal positions ranging from Da Nang to Tam Ky." (Central Intelligence Bulletin, 24 January 1968)

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even a chance they will start before the conclusion of the holiday period." (Central Intelligence Bulletin, 27 January 1968.



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"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. The major target areas of enemy offensive planning include the western highlands, the coastal provinces of the Communist Military Region (MR 5), the provinces immediately north of Saigon that border on Cambodia, as well as the northern Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces.



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"While some of these signs point to the initiation of enemy activity of large magnitude in the immediate future, 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..." (The Situation in Vietnam, 28 January 1968)

pleted by North Vietnamese main force units in the western highlands of Pleiku and Kontum provinces and there are indications [redacted] that the beginning of a well-coordinated series of large-scale attacks may be imminent. [redacted]

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(Central Intelligence Bulletin, 29 January 1968)

Like the field reporting cited earlier, these selections were part of a large volume of tactical reporting and--when excerpted--perhaps convey a somewhat different impression than that conveyed by the finished intelligence publications at the time. They do, however, indicate the degree of prior warning given before the Tet offensive.

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