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Sunday, February 11, 1968
3:30 p.m.

Mr. President:

This is the military-political assessment of probably the best (or one of the two best) Vietnamese Corps commanders.

As in the U.S., the lower house is O.K.; the Senate is giving trouble.

W. W. Rostow

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COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM
DOI 11 FEBRUARY 1968
SUBJECT III CORPS ANALYSIS OF GOALS
OF VIET CONG TET OFFENSIVE AND OF THE GOVERNMENT'S
HANDLING OF THE PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM THE ATTACKS

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SOURCE

VIETNAM, SAIGON (11 FEBRUARY 1968)

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SUMMARY: AS OF 11 FEBRUARY, III CORPS WAS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE GENERAL SITUATION AND DOBUTED THERE WOULD BE A SECOND VIET CONG (VC) ATTACK ON SAIGON. HE FEELS VC LOSSES WERE HEAVIER THAN STATISTICS WOULD INDICATE, SINCE MANY OF THE VC WHO WERE LOST WERE OFFICERS, CADRES AND HIGHLY TRAINED SAPPERS. HE BELIEVES THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE AMONG THE ATTACKERS INDICATES VC RECRUITMENT DIFFICULTIES. ALTHOUGH THE ENEMY HAS NOT GIVEN UP HIS PLAN

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FOR VICTORY, HE WILL HAVE TO CHANGE HIS STRATEGY, IS CONVINCED THAT THE ATTACK ON SAIGON WAS NOT A DIVERSIONARY EFFORT BUT RESULTED FROM A GENUINE VC BELIEF THAT THEY COULD TAKE OVER THE CITY AND SET UP A PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH THE VC WERE CORRECT IN THEIR BELIEF THAT THE PEOPLE DISLIKE THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) AND THE LEADERSHIP IS DIVIDED, THEY FAILED TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF VARIOUS COMPENSATING FACTORS; INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: (1) DESPITE THEIR DISLIKE OF THE GVN, THE PEOPLE STILL PREFER IT TO THE VC; (2) THE MILITARY STANDS BEHIND THE GVN AND IN TIMES OF CRISIS THE MILITARY IS UNITED. THE VC WERE ALSO MISTAKEN ABOUT THE MORALE OF ARVN, WHICH FOUGHT VERY WELL. IN FACT, THINKS THE FIGHTING MAY HAVE SERVED AS A TURNING POINT, SINCE ARVN NOW KNOWS IT CAN DEFEAT THE VC IN BATTLE. IS LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PRESENT STATE OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND IS DUBIOUS ABOUT THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS OF THE NEW TASK FORCE

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BECAUSE OF ITS DOMINATION BY CIVILIANS WHO, IN HIS OPINION, ALWAYS HAVE DIFFICULTY IN GETTING THINGS DONE AND ARE HOPELESSLY LOST IN A CRISIS. ALTHOUGH HE HAS NO PLANS TO TAKE STEPS TO ACCOMPLISH SUCH A THING, THINKS THE BEST SOLUTION TO THE GVN'S PROBLEMS WOULD BE TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW VICE PRESIDENT KY TO SERVE ALSO AS PRIME MINISTER. APPROVES OF THE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GVN OF THE LOWER HOUSE SINCE THE CRISIS BEGAN BUT IS VERY CRITICAL OF THE SENATE'S ATTITUDES, INCLUDING

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ITS PRETENSION OF BEING COMPETENT TO INVESTIGATE AND DETERMINE IF THE ARMED FORCES DEFENDED THE PEOPLE PROPERLY. END SUMMARY.

1. ON 11 FEBRUARY 1968, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] III CORPS [REDACTED] WAS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM (SVN). HE FEELS THAT THE ENEMY MADE AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO CAPTURE SAIGON AND THAT HIS DECISIVE DEFEAT HAS SHORTENED THE WAR BY AT LEAST SIX MONTHS AND WILL BRING AN ALLIED MILITARY VICTORY IN 1968.

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2. [REDACTED] CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE A SECOND ATTACK, SIMILAR TO THE FIRST, ON SAIGON, IF AN ATTACK SHOULD COME IT WILL BE ESSENTIALLY AN ATTACK BY FIRE, IN WHICH THE ENEMY WILL UTILIZE HEAVY MORTARS AND PROCKETS BUT NO MAJOR GROUND FORCES. THE HEAVY LOSSES SUSTAINED BY THE ENEMY DURING THE FIRST ATTACK WILL MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO MOUNT ANOTHER MAJOR OFFENSIVE AGAINST SAIGON FOR AT LEAST THREE OR FOUR MONTHS AND POSSIBLY NOT BEFORE THE WAR ENDS.

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(FIELD COMMENT. [REDACTED] 7 FEBRUARY, ALSO REPORTED THAT [REDACTED] CONSIDERED IT HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT THE VC WOULD LAUNCH A SECOND ATTACK ON SAIGON.)

3. [REDACTED] FEELS THAT, IN SOME RESPECTS, ENEMY LOSSES ARE EVEN HEAVIER THAN THE STATISTICS INDICATE. THE ENEMY NOT ONLY LOST OVER HALF OF HIS ATTACK FORCE, BUT SUFFERED AN ESPECIALLY SERIOUS BLOW IN HEAVY LOSSES AMONG THE OFFICERS AND LEADER CADRES. A LARGE NUMBER OF SAPPERS, WHO WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT TO REPLACE, WERE KILLED. MORALE OF ENEMY TROOPS UNDOUBTEDLY HAS DROPPED SHARPLY DESPITE EFFORTS BY THE VIET CONG (VC) AND THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTH VIETNAM (DRV) TO KEEP THE CADRES AND TROOPS FROM LEARNING THE FULL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEFEAT.

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4. [REDACTED] SAID THAT THE FACT THAT ENEMY TROOPS WHICH ATTACKED SAIGON WERE, ON THE WHOLE, VERY YOUNG AND POORLY TRAINED AND THAT MANY WERE NEW RAQLACEMENTS IN THEIR UNITS DID NOT INDICATE THAT THE ENEMY HAD COMMITTED POOR TROOPS WHILE HOLDING THE GOOD ONES IN RESERVE. A REPRESENTATIVE CROSS SECTION OF THE ENEMY TROOPS KILLED AND CAPTURED IN THE SAIGON CAMPAIGN DOES NOT DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THOSE CAPTURED IN OTHER MAJOR ENGAGEMENTS. HOWEVER, THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY (NVA) REPLACEMENTS IN VC UNITS IS SIGNIFICANT. THE VC ARE FINDING IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO GET INDIGENOUS REPLACEMENTS AND ARE BECOMING MORE DEPENDENT ON NVA PERSONNEL.

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5. [REDACTED] SAID THAT THE ENEMY OBVIOUSLY HAS NOT GIVEN UP HIS PLAN FOR VICTORY BUT WILL CHANGE ITS STRATEGY. THE ACTIVITY WILL BE DESIGNED TO WORSEN THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE; ESPECIALLY THE REFUGEES, IN THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL CAUSE ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS FOR THE GOVERNMENT. [REDACTED] EXPECTS THAT THE ENEMY WILL:

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A. MAKE A MAJOR EFFORT TO CUT ROUTES LEADING INTO SAIGON IN ORDER TO DISRUPT THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE CAPITAL.

B. LAUNCH A MAJOR POLITICAL OFFENSIVE DESIGNED TO SOW DISUNITY AMONG THE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE REFUGEE CENTERS IN THE CAPITAL.

C. POSSIBLY LAUNCH TERRORIST ATTACKS ON

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6. SAID THAT THE NUMBER OF ENEMY TROOPS REMAINING IN SAIGON PROPER IS VERY SMALL AND THAT ENEMY ACTIVITY DURING THE NEXT FEW DAYS WILL BE MAINLY LIMITED TO SNIPER AND POSSIBLY TERRORIST ACTIVITY. HOWEVER, FEELS THAT THE PRESENT CURFEW SHOULD, AND WILL, BE EXTENDED FOR AT LEAST ONE MONTH OR LONGER. THE HOURS OF CURFEW WILL BE REDUCED GRADUALLY, BUT IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE THE MORE LIBERAL HOURS OF THE PRE-CURFEW IS JUSTIFIED BECAUSE SECURITY IS PREDOMINANT IN THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE AND THEY FIND IT REASSURING TO SEE SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN, SIDE-BY-SIDE, WATCHING OVER THE EMPTY STREETS AT NIGHT.

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7. IS CONVINCED THAT THE VC ATTACK ON SAIGON WAS NOT SIMPLY A DIVERSIONARY EFFORT OR DESIGNED TO PRODUCE A PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY ONLY HE IS CERTAIN IN HIS OWN MIND THAT THE VC GENUINELY BELIEVED THEY COULD TAKE OVER SAIGON AND SET UP A REVOLUTIONARY "PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT" HE HAS, FOR EXAMPLE, SEEN A NUMBER OF CAPTURED DOCUMENTS AND PROCLAMATIONS WHICH THIS PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT WAS TO PROMULGATE AFTER IT TOOK OVER. FEELS THE VC BASED THEIR HOPES FOR SUCCESS ON THREE IDEAS:

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- A. THE PEOPLE HATED THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) AND WOULD RISE UP AND OVERTHROW IT IF THE MEANS TO DO SO WERE AT HAND.
- B. GVN LEADERSHIP WAS SO SERIOUSLY DIVIDED THAT IT WOULD COLLAPSE COMPLETELY IF CONFRONTED BY A SERIOUS AND CONTINUING CRISIS.
- C. THE MORALE OF ARVN OFFICERS AND MEN WAS VERY LOW, AND THE TROOPS WOULD GIVE UP OR FLEE WHEN CONFRONTED WITH A DETERMINED ENEMY FORCE.

8. SAID THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF TRUTH IN THE ENEMY ANALYSIS. THE ENEMY'S MISTAKE WAS TO OVERLOOK A NUMBER OF COMPENSATING FACTORS. WHILE MOST PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE OR AT BEST ARE INDIFFERENT TO THE GVN, MANY STRONGLY DISLIKE THE VC. IF COMPELLED TO MAKE A CHOICE, A MAJORITY WOULD CHOOSE THE GVN OVER THE VC. HATRED OF THE VC INVOLVES A NUMBER OF FACTORS. CATHOLICS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO ANY COMMUNIST REGIME AND WILL TAKE ACTIVE STEPS TO AVOID ONE. ALTHOUGH THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN SAIGON MAY NOT LIKE THE GVN, THEY DO LIKE THE STANDARD OF LIVING IT PROVIDES. A CYCLO DRIVER, FOR EXAMPLE, MAY BE POOR BUT HE ENJOYS A HIGH STANDARD OF LIVING COMPARED TO THAT OF A NORTH VIETNAMESE.

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9. NOTED THAT THE ENEMY ALSO ERRED IN PLACING TOO MUCH IMPORTANCE ON THE REPUTED FRICTION BETWEEN PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU AND VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN CAO KY AND THE INCOMPETENCE OF PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN VAN LOC. IN DOING SO, HE OVERLOOKED THE FACT THAT THE MILITARY INSTITUTION LENDS BEHIND-THE SCENES COHESIVENESS TO THE GVN APPARATUS AND THAT IN TIMES OF CRISIS THE MILITARY IS ALWAYS FIRMLY UNITED. ALSO FEELS THE ENEMY PUT TOO MUCH CREDENCE IN FOREIGN PRESS

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ACCOUNTS ABOUT THE UNWILLINGNESS OF ARVN UNITS TO FIGHT. IN THE ACTUAL EVENT, BOTH OFFICERS AND MEN FOUGHT WELL EVEN WHEN FACING SUPERIOR FORCES. [REDACTED] FEELS, IN FACT, THAT THE RECENT VC ATTACKS MAY BE A TURNING POINT SINCE MORALE IS NOW HIGH AND THE OFFICERS AND MEN KNOW THEY CAN DEFEAT THE ENEMY EVEN IN AN AL-OUT ATTACK. [REDACTED] ADDED THAT HE WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE. THEY DID NOT PANIC, THEY GAVE SURPRISINGLY GOOD COOPERATION TO THE MILITARY, AND THEY SHOWED NO INTEREST WHATEVER IN A "PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT."

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10. ALTHOUGH HE EXUDED CONFIDENCE OVER THE MILITARY SITUATION, [REDACTED] WAS RATHER PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE PRESENT STATE OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS. HE FELT THIEU HAD NOT DISPLAYED DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP. HE HELD LITTLE HOPE FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE'S RELIEF (JOINT GVN/U.S. TASK FORCE) BECAUSE IT WAS DOMINATED BY CIVILIANS. HE NOTED THAT MAJOR GENERAL NGUYEN DUC THANG, THE COMMITTEE'S CHIEF OF STAFF, HAD ANNOUNCED HE WAS RESIGNING BECAUSE THE CIVILIANS WERE "ALL TALK AND NO ACTION." [REDACTED] ADDED HE HAD BEEN ADVISED BY THANG THAT MORNING THAT THE LATTER HAD NOT ATTENDED THAT MORNING'S COMMITTEE MEETING. [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD ARRANGED TO SEE THANG LATER IN THE DAY IN AN EFFORT TO RESOLVE HIS PROBLEMS. [REDACTED] FELT THAT ONE POSSIBLE SOLUTION WOULD BE THE APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF GENERAL CAO VAN VIEN AS DEPUTY TO KY, WHO CHAIRS THE COMMITTEE. VIEN COULD THEN ISSUE THE NECESSARY ORDERS ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE TO THE MILITARY WHICH, IN [REDACTED] VIEW, IS THE ONLY GRUP EQUIPPED TO GET A JOB DONE IN A HURRY. CIVILIANS, [REDACTED] SAID, HAVE DIFFICULTY GETTING THINGS DONE AT ANY

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TIME AND ARE HOPELESSLY LOST IN A CRISIS. AS AN ILLUSTRATION, [REDACTED] NOTED THAT SINCE HE HAD SUPPLIES OF A NUMBER OF COMMODITIES IN LONG AND HE HAD TELEPHONED THE HEAD OF THE GVN SUPPLY DIRECTORATE AND OFFERED TO MAKE THESE SUPPLIES AVAILABLE FOR THE RELIEF OF THE PEOPLE. IN REPLY, THE DIRECTOR GENERAL HAD GIVEN HIM NUMEROUS EXCUSES AS TO WHY HE WAS UNABLE TO PICK UP AND USE THE FOODSTUFFS. [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD THEN CALLED THE DIRECTOR OF FARVN COMMISSARIES, WHO IMMEDIATELY MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO BRING THE SUPPLIES TO SAIGON.

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1. [REDACTED] INDICATED HE FELT THE ANSWER TO THE PRESENT DILEMMA IS TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT THE VICE PRESIDENT TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AS PRIME MINISTER. WHAT IS NEEDED IS TO CONCENTRATE GOVERNMENT POWERS IN THE HANDS OF ONE MAN WHO CAN GIVE ORDERS AND CUT THROUGH THE EXISTING MAZE OF REDTAPE. THUS, REMOVAL OF LOC WOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT IN ITSELF SINCE THERE WOULD STILL BE DIVIDED AUTHORITY. [REDACTED] SAID HE DID NOT THINK THE APPOINTMENT OF A MILITARY MAN--THANG OR VIEN, FOR EXAMPLE--AS PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE AN ANSWER. THE NEED IS FOR UNIFIED LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP AND, UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS COULD BEST BE ACCOMPLISHED BY VESTING POWERS IN KY. [REDACTED] EMPHASIZED HE DID NOT PLAN TO TAKE STEPS TO BRING ABOUT THIS CHANGE. HE SAID HE KNEW

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VIEN AND DIRECTOR GENERAL OF NATIONAL POLICE BRIGADIER GENERAL NGUYEN NGOC LOAN ALSO FAVORED THIS SOLUTION.

12. [REDACTED] EXPRESSED APPROVAL OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE LOWER HOUSE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE VC TET OFFENSIVE, BUT HE WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF MANY SENATORS. HE SAID HE WAS PARTICULARLY DISTURBED BY THE SENATE'S PRETENSIONS TO HAVING SUFFICIENT COMPETENCE AND KNOWLEDGE TO INVESTIGATE THE VC ATTACK AND DETERMINE IF THE ARMED FORCES HAD DONE A GOOD JOB IN DEFENDING THE PEOPLE. HIS SUBORDINATE OFFICERS, [REDACTED] CONTINUED, FEEL THAT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD VOTE THEM AN UNQUALIFIED EXPRESSION OF THANKS. INSTEAD, THE SENATE APPEARS TO BE SAYING THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAVE ITS THANKS AS LONG AS THE FIGHTING CONTINUES BUT THAT AS SOON AS THE CRISIS SUBSIDES IT WILL CHARGE INCOMPETENCE ON THE PART OF MANY ARMED FORCES LEADERS. KHANG SINGLED OUT SENATORS TRAN VAN DON, TON THAT DINH AND TRAN NGOC NHUAN FOR PARTICULAR CRITICISM. [REDACTED] ADDED THAT THIEU HIMSELF WAS SURPRISED BY THE ENEMY'S ABILITY TO LAUNCH SUCH WIDESPREAD COORDINATED ATTACKS, IT WAS NOT TRUE THAT THE ATTACK ON SAIGON WAS A SURPRISE. IT HAD BEEN KNOWN THAT SUCH AN ATTACK WAS POSSIBLE, AND A NUMBER OF STEPS TO CUT OFF THE ENEMY'S ACCESS TO SAIGON HAD BEEN TAKEN SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE THE OFFENSIVE BEGAN.

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13. FIELD DISSEM: STATE (AMBASSADOR BUNKER, DEPUTY AMBASSADOR, POLITICAL COUNSELOR) USMACV (GENERAL WESTMORELAND, GENERAL ABRAMS, AMBASSADOR KOMER, CHIEF OF STAFF, J-2) 7TH AIRFORCE (GENERAL MOMYER) DIR/JUSPAO (MR. ZORTHIAN ONLY) CINCPAC PACFLT ARPAC FACAF

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