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The Intelligence Background of the
Current Communist Offensive

Evidence has been building up for the past several weeks that the Communists intended to launch a major and widespread offensive in South Vietnam in connection with the Tet season. Indications of this were plentiful in the Ist and IInd Corps areas along the coast, and in the provinces of the central highlands. Evidence of enemy offensive preparations was also apparent, but less plentiful, in the IIIrd Corps provinces around Saigon and in the Delta.

It was clear that the offensive would include attacks on some of the smaller provincial and district seats--as have major Communist campaigns in the past. It also appeared that the attacks might include strikes against some major urban centers such as Hue, Pleiku and, possibly, Saigon. The fact that the attacks would involve near simultaneous assaults against over three-fourths of the province capitals and other major cities, however, was not anticipated, nor was it probably possible to do so on the basis of the available intelligence. The growing ability of the enemy

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to better coordinate both the movement of his forces and the timing of his assaults had been apparent, particularly since the advent of his current "winter-spring offensive."

During the past several weeks, the publications of the Central Intelligence Agency that are distributed throughout the US Government have regularly reported on and warned of the enemy intentions within the scope I have described. On 8 January, for example, one of our publications took note of the step-up which had already occurred in coordinated attacks by enemy forces "against government administrative centers and allied outposts" throughout the country. Between 5 and 10 January, our publications directed particular attention to the increase in enemy actions against strongpoints and population centers in the Saigon area. On 8 January one of our publications described an attack on a provincial capital near Saigon and stated that "this type of enemy activity may continue. It would include mortar and rocket attacks on Saigon" and other nearby targets.

By 20 January, we were stating that Communist forces in the northern Ist Corps area "may intend to carry out simultaneous attacks against both the Khe

Sanh area and population centers along the coast." We noted at least five North Vietnamese regiments in position to conduct attacks near the coast. On 24 January, we described the expansion of the threat into the Quang Nam - Quang Tin Province area where the positioning of Communist units "has increased the threat to other allied positions ranging from Da Nang to Tam Ky." By 26 January, we reported that a "widespread coordinated offensive by enemy forces throughout the northern part of South Vietnam appears imminent."

Our publications during this period also indicated the possibility that enemy offensives in the northern provinces might be coordinated with attacks in the western highlands. The present positioning of enemy forces, together with the material in captured documents, we stated on 23 January, point to an "impending Communist effort against US and South Vietnamese forces in Kontum and Pleiku." In the Delta area, our publications noted during January that the "intensity of enemy activity has increased markedly" and that the Communists have evinced an ability to launch "coordinated mortar and ground attacks" in several provinces at one time.

The intelligence upon which we based our reports of the impending enemy military activity was a combination of that collected by the US and South Vietnamese |

I might note that publications of the US military command in South Vietnam contained many of the same warnings concerning enemy intentions as did our own.

Evidence as to the exact kickoff time of the enemy offensive was conflicting. There were indications beginning around 20 January |

| which suggested that a "D-day" type of date had been chosen by the enemy for sometime during the period between about 27 January and 5 February. By 29 January, analysis of this intelligence led us to warn in our publications that D-day "may be set for as soon as 30 January." This had to be regarded as very tenuous, however, since the enemy in the past, although he had taken advantage of truce periods to improve his tactical position and to launch scattered attacks, had refrained from a general offensive.

Fragmentary material on the political objectives of the current Communist offensive has, in retrospect, been available for some months in captured enemy documents, agent reports, and prisoner interrogations. The information, however, has been extremely ambiguous, and somewhat contradictory. Much of it appeared too grandiose and unrealistic to be taken seriously as a guide to future Communist intentions. I speak in particular of hints that the Communists intended to launch a "general uprising." We simply did not, and still do not, give them the capability for doing so. We were thus reluctant to believe that they would risk potential disaster to their military machine by staking their future on a bid to spark such a revolution. It will probably still be some weeks before we can ascertain with any certainty whether this was their basic objective, or whether they really sought more limited political goals.