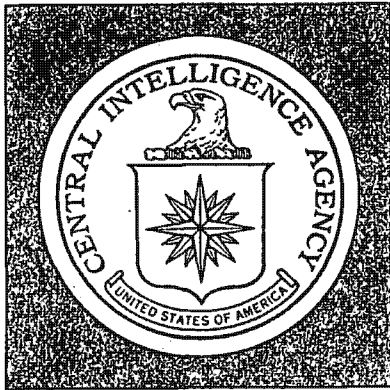
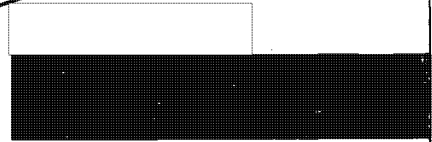


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MCD

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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28 January 1968

ARCHIVAL RECORD
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Information as of 1600
28 January 1968
[redacted]

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HIGHLIGHTS

Widespread fighting and numerous enemy attacks continued over the weekend despite the Viet Cong - announced truce period which began on 27 January.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Fighting and shellings continued through the weekend in widely scattered areas of South Vietnam (Paras. 1-5). The Communists may have attempted to improve their antiaircraft capabilities in western Quang Tri Province with the possible introduction of 37-mm. antiaircraft artillery (Para. 6).
[redacted]

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Lower House blocs are realigning and assessing loyalties in preparation for formal registration of the blocs (Paras. 1-3). The Lower House's special committee on illegal detainees is reviewing dossiers of prisoners and intends to seek passage of an amnesty bill for some detainees and prompt action in the case of others not yet charged (Paras. 4-6). The National Assembly will begin consideration of the national budget in early February after its Tet recess (Paras. 7-8). Tran Van Don's Freedom Fighters' Association is expanding rapidly and may be intended as the nucleus for a national political party (Paras. 9-12).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Widespread fighting and enemy attacks continued over the weekend in almost total disregard of the Viet Cong - announced truce which began on 27 January. The most serious incident occurred on 27 January when three US Marine companies engaged a well dug-in force of North Vietnamese troops while patrolling Route 9 just north of Camp Carroll. Some 150 Communists were killed in the fierce 2 1/2-hour battle and there were 109 American casualties--19 killed and 90 wounded.

2. Sporadic shelling of American positions throughout South Vietnam's northernmost Quang Tri Province was also reported over the weekend. US positions in and around the Marine strongpoint at Khe Sanh received numerous rounds of mortar and rocket fire, while American positions near Dong Ha and Gio Linh were hit by mortar and large-caliber artillery fire.

3. The Communists launched a two-pronged attack on a South Vietnamese artillery base some 12 miles northwest of Dak To with small arms, machine guns, and bazooka-type rockets. The attack was believed to have been launched by a battalion of enemy troops and a multibattalion enemy force was used in the final attack. Friendly losses totaled 11 killed and 44 wounded while the enemy left 30 bodies behind upon their withdrawal. Another 90 fresh graves were found nearby.

4. Other Communist-initiated activity over the weekend included a 30-round mortar barrage directed at the airfield at Chu Lai in coastal Quang Tin Province. This resulted in five American casualties and two aircraft damaged. At the same time, in an engagement near Tam Ky, a US Army patrol was hit by heavy enemy fire. Reinforcements drove off the attackers after four hours of fighting in which one American was killed and six wounded while 21 of the enemy were killed.

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5. The limited allied cease-fire period begins on 29 January and will run for 36 hours. It is expected that the Communists will not completely stand down in their military actions as evinced in the recent Christmas and New Year's cease-fire periods.

Possible Enemy Antiaircraft Artillery Sighted Near Khe Sanh

6. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] four 37-mm. antiaircraft weapons located some 12 miles northwest of Khe Sanh. A strike was directed at the site and two of the weapons were believed destroyed. There have been reports of larger antiaircraft weapons south of the DMZ, but there have been no reports that pilots have sighted airbursts from a weapon this large. The largest antiaircraft weapon the enemy is known to use is the 12.7-mm. heavy machine gun. The introduction of this type of weapon into western Quang Tri Province, if confirmed, would significantly increase the enemy threat to tactical aircraft, which have been striking Communist targets at record levels in recent days.

Possible Large-scale Communist Offensive Planning Continues

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8. 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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[redacted]

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[redacted]

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11. 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 current enemy military posture throughout the country, however, suggests that at least limited attacks on US and South Vietnamese forces and installations will be staged in several areas.

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[redacted]

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The various Lower House blocs are realigning and reorganizing in preparation for the formal announcement of bloc formations. The blocs must be officially recognized by the house before standing committee membership can be selected, as this is apportioned on the basis of bloc size. No blocs had registered as of 27 January and, since the National Assembly has recessed for Tet until 6 February, there will probably be no registrations until then. In the meantime, there will probably be much shifting of loyalties before final alignments are decided on.

2. The progovernment Democratic Bloc, [redacted] has elected new officers because most of its former officers were elected to Lower House positions. The new president is Ba Xuyen Province deputy Tran Huy Tu, replacing Nguyen Ba Luong, now Lower House chairman. The bloc now claims 42 members, but [redacted] this number will change within the next few weeks. The bloc reportedly does not plan to merge with the Catholic-dominated Independence Bloc, but does hope to maintain a policy of cooperation with it. The two groups had formed a temporary alliance for the purpose of electing their deputies to permanent Lower House offices. 3.3(h)(2)

3. The Independence Bloc is having its difficulties, [redacted]. Several members who lost election to house offices are reportedly bitter and accuse their colleagues of not supporting them. These deputies have apparently gained some sympathy and, as a result, the bloc may split into two factions. Bloc leaders, who if necessary will align against the disaffected members, are attempting to avert a split and hope that tempers will cool during Tet.

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Lower House on Prisoner Amnesty

4. The Lower House's special committee on illegal detainees held a press conference on 23 January to explain its purpose. The committee's intent, according to chairman Ly Qui Chung, is to review the cases of all prisoners, particularly political detainees, held illegally since the fall of the Diem regime in 1963. Chung announced that the committee would specifically seek passage of a general amnesty bill for political detainees and fugitives. It would also attempt to force a legal decision in the cases of others who have not been tried and against whom no charges have been brought. Chung emphasized, however, that serious law breakers and Communists would not benefit by the proposed amnesty law.

5. The committee, according to Chung, has received about 100 complaints from, or on behalf of, prisoners and will review cases as the complaints come in.

The committee will recommend appropriate action in each case but does not, according to Chung, intend to infringe on the ministry's responsibilities.

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6.

Thirty-three political and nonpolitical detainees were recently released from the Thu Duc Reformatory Center, and Prime Minister Loc has promised to review the cases of 61 prisoners granted amnesty in 1965 but never released from Con Son Island. In addition, President Thieu has announced the release of 53 prisoners and a reduction in sentence for 334 in commemoration of Tet. The Upper House has also established a committee to consider the prisoner issue, but this committee will apparently work independently of, although parallel with, the Lower House committee.

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~~TOP SECRET~~Other National Assembly Developments

7. The National Assembly will begin consideration of the national budget for the calendar year 1968 when it reconvenes on 6 February--a process which may prevent adjournment of either house until just before the next regular session is scheduled to begin in April. The budget will go first to the Lower House's budget and finance committee, where

it will be under consideration for at least ten days. This will be followed by Lower House plenary debate which may take three weeks. The Upper House will therefore probably not begin its consideration of the budget until early March, and it too is expected to consume a month in deliberation.

8. Both houses will probably be active on other matters as well. The Lower House must still clear up some administrative matters, including arrangements for elections to replace two deceased deputies. It is also possible that the house will begin consideration of some nonbudget legislation. While waiting to receive the budget, the Upper House will hear briefings from several of its standing committees and may submit some draft legislation to its committees for consideration.

Tran Van Don and the Freedom Fighters

9. Senator Tran Van Don's Freedom Fighters' Association appears to be expanding rapidly. The group's Saigon chapter recently met to present the association's platform, and it was announced at the meeting that the organization now numbers more than 20,000 throughout the country. The Saigon chapter alone claims a membership of 2,000.

the association has chapters in four provinces and two cities and has plans to form an additional six provincial and one city chapter by the end of February.

10. Senator Don claims the association is not a political party although its activities are political. As stated in its platform, the group is an anti-Communist organization devoted to "independence"

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[redacted]

and social reform. The platform calls for the formation of a "unified national front" to struggle against "international powers which are threatening our survival," and briefly outlines the group's policy on labor, agrarian reform, and corruption.

11. The association was originally formed in July 1967 as a veterans' group. It now disclaims any military orientation, although its executive committee is composed primarily of retired military officers. Senator Don, [redacted]

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[redacted] regards the Freedom Fighters as "his" organization, rather than the Farmer-Worker-Soldier Bloc, which he also heads. The two groups are financed separately and, although Don would like to work actively throughout the country to promote the bloc as well as the Freedom Fighters, he is hampered by several of his bloc colleagues who feel the bloc should be organized first in the National Assembly before nationwide efforts are begun. For that reason, [redacted] Don is recruiting into the Freedom Fighters a number of people who want to work for the bloc but are prevented from doing so.

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12. Although the Freedom Fighters' Association and the Farmer-Worker-Soldier Bloc appear now to be working at cross purposes, much of their leadership already overlaps. Don may be planning for the day when the two groups can merge to form the basis for a broadly based political party. The reference in the Freedom Fighters' platform to a "unified national front" seems to point to this end, and Don's intention to begin publication of a newspaper should be useful in any attempt at forming a party. The mere size of the Freedom Fighters should also be an advantage.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi's announced decision to release three captured US airmen held in North Vietnam appears designed for propaganda purposes. In a 27 January broadcast, the North Vietnamese stated that the men would be released in honor of Tet, due to Hanoi's "humanitarian and lenient" policy. The broadcast also noted that the three have displayed a "repentant attitude." North Vietnam has not yet stated when or where they will be freed.

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