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Tuesday, February 6, 1968

Pres file

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

We have gone through the accumulated materials resulting from interrogation of prisoners and documents captured last week, and sought the answers to three questions:

1. Did the VC/NVA troops expect the Vietnamese populace to rise up and support them in their attacks?
2. Did the VC/NVA have any known plans for retreat or withdrawal?
3. What is the VC/NVA evaluation as to success or failure of the campaign?

In general, the answers are as follows:

1. Yes, they did expect assistance and uprising as evidenced by the following responses to interrogation.

A prisoner captured on January 31 in Chau Doc City stated that the attack was to create conditions which would bring the U. S. Government to negotiate in order to proceed with peace. The time was ripe for an uprising. He said that the VC realized that they were committing everything and every person they had in this assault. It was obvious to all that the assault was a "go for broke" matter. He believes that few of the participants expected success, although most of them hoped that they would succeed.

Prisoners captured in Nha Trang (II Corps) state that they were told they could take Nha Trang because of the VC organization in the city. The NVA officers did not believe this but went on with the attack in order to support the nation-wide effort and make success possible elsewhere.

According to one of these who was captured on the morning of February 4, "The current general insurrection campaign will extend for the duration of the Winter-Spring Campaign. Many attacks will continue because the order has been given and cannot be countermanded." He stated that "when the VC/NVA attacked Nha Trang, they expected to be defeated; however, they believed in the general insurrection campaign of South Vietnam."

The Executive Officer of the VC Zone Committee II, Gia Lai (Pleiku), who was captured on January 30, stated that the aim of the present action is to achieve the goals set forth in Resolution 13 of the Lao Dong Party, that is, guide people to strike and demonstrate and to liberate all areas. He also advised that the present offensive was scheduled to last seven days and would end on February 5, 1968.

Three prisoners captured in the Bien Hoa area stated that they had believed that the population would assist in an uprising against the GVN and U. S. forces and in their opinion the anticipated support from the population has not been forthcoming.

2. All evidence points to the conclusion that orders were received to "hold at all costs." Prisoners captured on January 30 in the attack on Pleiku revealed that they had orders to "take Pleiku City or not return." Three prisoners captured in the Bien Hoa area apparently were not provided with withdrawal plans since there was no question about achievement of victory. The prisoners said their orders were to continue fighting until victory. (Lack of a withdrawal plan and unfamiliarity with the local terrain may account in part for the large enemy losses.)

Four prisoners captured in the attack on Saigon provided the following: Casualties were to be left behind. After Saigon had been occupied, there would be a special detachment to take care of wounded. The Battalion was not to retreat. The objective was to be held indefinitely. Supplies would be brought in later. Troops were ordered to fight until Saigon was taken. A prisoner who died of wounds on February 1 revealed before his death that the major objectives in the attack on Saigon were the Presidential Palace, the radio station, and the Tan Son Nhut Airbase, with orders to hold at all costs, with no thought of retreat.

Another prisoner (believed to be a VC General and currently undergoing more intensive interrogation) revealed that the VC planned to take over Chau Doc Province at any cost. If this failed, then taking over the Province was to be completed before the end of the "Spring Phase," that is, before the end of March 1968. This all came about because of an order from COSVN to use the Tet period as a "unique opportunity to make sacrifices of their lives for the survival of the fatherland." There was no plan of retreat or withdrawal as the VC were convinced of success. This was part of a general uprising throughout South Vietnam, which would reduce the number of U. S. or GVN troops which could be sent in as reinforcements. Thus, if their first attack on Chau Doc City failed, they planned to keep attacking until they achieved success.

Approximately 100 VC prisoners captured in the attack on the city of Rach Gia, Kien Giang Province, with an average age being between 15 and 18 years, revealed during interrogation that the soldiers were given no contingency plan and were directed simply to take the town and hold it until a coalition government could be formed.

3. There is little hard evidence in the form of response to interrogation or captured documents which give feel for their assessment of success or failure. However, the following does show that plans did not progress as anticipated.

A prisoner captured in Chau Doc City indicated that his troops had been told that the conditions were now right for an uprising of the population and that an aggressive and rapid assault would bring the people to the side of the VC and make untenable the positions of the GVN and American defenders. The uprising in fact did not take place during the attack and the prisoner said that it is likely that this lack of all-out popular commitment to the campaign is having a bad effect on the morale of the VC attackers.

A prisoner captured during the attack on Nha Trang stated that there would be a second attack on the city and that the Special Forces Headquarters, the 62nd Aerial Squadron, and the airfield

would be shelled. Shelling had been intended during the first attack but the element in charge of transporting ammunition did not arrive on time.

W. W. Rostow

This is from the first batch of documents.
We will keep this analysis running.

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