

~~TOP SECRET~~

For: The President
From: Walt Rostow

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sent Ranch 2/27/68
CAP 80504

Jim Jones told me last evening you wished a daily Vietnam summary from me. I came in early this morning to summarize yesterday.

I shall do so under three headings: fact, opinion, and action.

Fact:

- The enemy is preparing to strike in the Western Highlands (Pleiku, Kontum, Dak To);
- He is apparently bringing major units in towards Saigon;
- He is, of course, positioned to attack at both Khe Sanh and Quang Tri;
- He has forces around Hue and Danang; degree of readiness less certain; although Westy reported a major contact Northwest of Hue;
- In the Delta especially, but elsewhere as well, he is moving rapidly exploit the relative vacuum in the countryside to recruit in an effort to make up recent losses, to expand rural control, and exert pressure on towns.
- The effort to close off Route 4 to deny food supplies to Saigon continues, as well as the effort to keep Route 1 closed between Danang and Hue, to limit military supplies to I Corps.
- Diplomatically, the enemy is establishing a whole range of diplomatic ^{contacts} ~~contacts~~ "to explain his victories" and to keep lines open for a later negotiating offensive.
- We now estimate that more than 60,000 were used in the first wave of attack at Tet made up roughly as follows: 37 percent North Vietnamese units; 29 percent VC main forces; 34 percent VC local forces. CIA estimates that main force units (North Vietnamese and VC), estimated by MACV at 115,000 in December were higher than that at Tet. "Over half" of main forces are available for follow-on major attacks.
- There is the suggestion in intelligence that additional North Vietnamese regulars are being brought south -- perhaps two additional divisions.

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By icw, NARS, Date 6-25-84

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Action:

1. After going over all this with General Taylor we agreed that on Saturday he would have in the CIA and DIA order of battle experts to determine the enemy forces now ^{available} engaged for the main force battle and, especially, to see whether Hanoi is now bringing in - or has brought in - an extra two divisions. This would be a critical factor in making our case to the Congress, if you so decide.
2. I took the occasion of my 10:30 AM meeting with Secretary Rusk and Clark Clifford to review the picture and underline the diplomatic problem we might face if they tried, having expended their capital, to force us to negotiate before our power could be brought to bear. Secretary Rusk observed we might work to modify the San Antonio formula in the light of large North Vietnamese movements and let them know we wouldn't negotiate until North Vietnamese regulars are out of I Corps.
3. I shall bring Harry McPherson up-to-date on the whole picture, at his request, this morning, to prepare him for drafting, if necessary.
4. I saw a number of newspapermen in the past two days: Rowlie Evans, Hugh Sidey, Jack Leacocos, Dick Wilson, and Bob Kleiman. I reviewed the first wave; ^{imposed} updated as we have from the beginning, that we expected I Corps and other main force attacks; used Ellsworth's cable of yesterday for background purposes to suggest the present balance sheet. Evans was in a hand-wringing mood of near despair. He, Sidey, Leacocos, and Wilson all asked about whether we'd send more troops. I flatly said I would make no comment whatsoever. Kleiman wanted to know if we looked on the new National Congress as an instrument for negotiating a settlement with the NLF. I told him that was not why they came together; but if the Communists ever wanted to negotiate a one-man -one-vote settlement, along the lines of your TV statement, just before Canberra, there were many ways. Right now they appeared to be trying to take over South Vietnam lock, stock, and barrel.

Opinion

General Taylor and I went over all this at length yesterday. He believes ^(they) they will make a total effort, with all their capital soon. They will then try to lock us into a negotiation at their peak position before we can counter-attack. He agrees with Napoleon that ^{providence} ~~providence~~ is on the side with the last reserves. Therefore, right now we should be moving out to Westy all the ready forces we have and calling up reserves for:

- a Vietnam counter-attack;
- Korea contingency;
- general purposes, for our world posture.

at a number of places

I agree. I believe we face the decisive battle of the war. They will try to dissipate Westy's reserves by simultaneous attacks and take Khe Sanh if possible.

I am uncertain about timing; but they are so obsessed with memories of 1954 I suspect they will hit soon, get a maximum position, and then force a negotiation, perhaps via the San Antonio formula before the weather opens up in I Corps and at Hanoi-Haiphong. The Geneva Conference of 1954 opened on April 26. Dienbienphu fell on May 7/8.

for us

I suspect Bus will report considerable anxiety in Saigon.

- Westy reported yesterday that "for the first time General Abrams was permitting himself to be somewhat encouraged."
- Ellsworth's cable contained this key passage after ~~reviewing~~ reviewing Thieu's and Westy's views:

"If these views are correct, and they seem to me quite logical, then it appears they will involve a Major effort on the part of the enemy. How long he can sustain such an intensive effort, given the losses which he has already taken and which such an effort will inevitably entail, is problematical, especially if we have the means and material to meet and frustrate him at every turn. I think there is no question about the will."