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INFORMATION

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Friday, March 22, 1968 - 12:20 pm

Mr. President:

This report on Tang's performance
in the Delta since he assumed responsibility
on February 29, is impressive. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In
addition to the summary at the beginning,
you may wish to note the marked passages
on pages 8-11.

W. W. Rostow

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TDCS db-315/00977-68
19 March 1968

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WWRostow:rlm

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Mandatory Review

DIST 19 MARCH 1968

Case # NLJ 86-145

Document # 168a

COUNTRY

SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI

17 MARCH 1968

SUBJECT

SITUATION APPRAISAL: ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL THANG'S PERFORMANCE AS

IV CORPS COMMANDER AND OF THE SITUATION IN THE DELTA AS OF 15 MARCH 1968

ACQ

VIETNAM, SAIGON (16 MARCH 1968)

FIELD NO.

SOURCE

THIS IS A FIELD APPRAISAL OF THE

CURRENT SITUATION. IT IS NOT AN OFFICIAL JUDGMENT BY THIS AGENCY OR

ANY COMPONENT. IT REPRESENTS INTERPRETATIONS

BASED ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF

ITS PREPARATION.

SUMMARY. THE SITUATION IN THE DELTA PROVINCES (IV CORPS TACTICAL ZONE) OF

SOUTH VIETNAM IS NOT AS CRITICAL IN MID-MARCH AS IT WAS IN MID-FEBRUARY, BUT IT

IS AS CRUCIAL AND WILL CONTINUE SO FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS. MAJOR GENERAL

NGUYEN DUC THANG HAS BEGUN TO REVEALIZE IV CORPS SINCE HIS ASSUMPTION OF

COMMAND ON 29 FEBRUARY. GENERAL THANG DESCRIBES HIS PLANS AND PROGRAM WITH

THE ONE WORD, "OFFENSIVE," AND FROM THE DAY OF HIS ARRIVAL HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING

SUBORDINATE MILITARY LEADERS TO GO ON THE ATTACK. GENERAL THANG'S PROGRAM

(classification)

(dissem controls)

Approved for Release

Date 10-12-2000

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(classification)

(dissem controls)

CALLS FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF ALL RESOURCES TO DESTROY VIET CONG (VC) MAIN FORCE UNITS, PROTECT LINES OF COMMUNICATION, RESTORE THE REGIONAL FORCES AND POPULAR FORCES, PRESS FORWARD WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND PUSH THE RECOVERY EFFORT. REGARDING CIVILIAN MOBILIZATION, GENERAL THANG SAYS THAT CIVILIANS MUST UNDERTAKE CIVIL DEFENSE MEASURES INCLUDING THE BUILDING OF SHELTERS AND MUST ORGANIZE TO CARE FOR REFUGEES. DURING FEBRUARY THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM WAS LOSING THE WAR PSYCHOLOGICALLY IN THE DELTA, BUT IT NOW APPEARS THAT GENERAL THANG HAS SUCCEEDED IN REVERSING THE POST-TET TREND OF THE WAR IN THE DELTA. VC MORALE IS CURRENTLY VERY VULNERABLE TO A SUDDEN REVERSAL OF THE WAR AND COULD QUICKLY CRACK IF THE VC COULD BE PERSUADED DURING THE NEXT TWO MONTHS THAT THEY WILL NOT ACHIEVE VICTORY IN EITHER THE SHORT OR LONG RUN. TO INFLECT A PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFEAT ON THE VC THERE MUST BE AGGRESSIVE AND EFFECTIVE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE VC MAIN FORCE UNITS, ATTACKS AGAINST VC SUPPLY LINES AND PENETRATION OF THEIR BASE AREAS.

END SUMMARY.....

1. MAJOR GENERAL NGUYEN DUC THANG HAS BEGUN TO REVITALIZE IV CORPS SINCE HIS ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND ON 29 FEBRUARY. HIS IMMEDIATE PERSONAL IMPACT AND INITIAL ACTIONS WERE IMPRESSIVE, BUT THERE WAS REASON TO BE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONE

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AMONG SOUND AND SEASONED OBSERVERS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF SIZEABLE DEFECTIONS FROM THE GVN ARMED FORCES IF THE VC SHOULD ATTACK IN STRENGTH. KNOWLEDGEABLE MILITARY OBSERVERS KNEW THAT THE VC COULD TAKE OVER FEW IF ANY OF THE CITIES AND TOWNS OF THE DELTA EVEN WITH A SERIES OF MASSIVE ASSAULTS IF THE GVN HAD THE WILL TO FIGHT, BUT IT WAS OBVIOUS DURING FEBRUARY THAT THE WILL TO FIGHT WAS EBBING. GENERAL MANH PROVIDED INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND EVEN CONTRIBUTED TO THE PESSIMISM BY HIS DEFENSE-ORIENTED ACTIONS. THIS WAS THE SITUATION IN THE DELTA WHEN GENERAL THANG TOOK OVER COMMAND AT 1600 HOURS ON 29 FEBRUARY.

4. THE IMPACT OF GENERAL THANG'S TAKEOVER OF COMMAND WAS FELT ALMOST INSTANTLY IN CAN THO. WITHIN ONE HOUR, BY 1700 HOURS ON 29 FEBRUARY, THE BARBED WIRE AND BUNKER POSITIONS THAT HAD SLOKED HALF THE MAIN STREET IN FRONT OF GENERAL MANH'S WELL-DEFENDED RESIDENCE HAD BEEN REMOVED AND VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS WERE AGAIN PERMITTED TO USE THE STREET FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE TET. THIS HAD AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON THE CIVILIAN POPULATION. WITHIN TWO HOURS AFTER HE ASSUMED COMMAND, GENERAL THANG HAD ALSO ORDERED TWO RANGER BATTALIONS THAT HAD BEEN DEFENDING THE INNER PERIMETERS OF THE CITY AND

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THE ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS THAT HAD BEEN DEFENDING IV CORPS HEADQUARTERS AND THE CORPS COMMANDERS AND PROVINCE CHIEFS HOUSES TO MOVE IMMEDIATELY TO OFFENSIVE POSITIONS OUTSIDE THE CITY. THIS TOO HAD AN IMPACT ON THE CIVILIAN POPULATION AND PROBABLY EVEN MORE SO ON ARVN.

5. THE IMPACT OF GENERAL THANG'S LEADERSHIP IS, OF COURSE, BEING FELT MORE SLOWLY IN OTHER PARTS OF THE DELTA

THAN IN CAN THO, BUT HE IS FLYING DAILY TO VARIOUS PROVINCES AND BATTLE ZONES, AS ARE MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF. THE INCREASE IN OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS TESTIFIES TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE VISITS.

6. GENERAL THANG'S OFFENSIVE PROGRAM CALLS FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF ALL RESOURCES, INCLUDING CIVILIAN, TO FURTHER SIX PRIORITY OBJECTIVES AND TASKS, WHICH ARE AS FOLLOWS:
(PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS WILL BE USED TO THE MAXIMUM IN ALL SIX EFFORTS.)

- A. DESTROY VC MAIN FORCE UNITS,
- B. PROTECT LINES OF COMMUNICATION,
- C. RESTORE REGIONAL FORCES AND POPULAR FORCES,
- D. PRESS FORWARD WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM,

(classification)

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E. PROVIDE SECURITY FOR CITIES AND TOWNS AND

F. PUSH THE RECOVERY EFFORT.

7. REGARDING CIVILIAN MOBILIZATION, GENERAL THANG INFORMED SENIOR AMERICAN ADVISORS THAT THE CIVILIANS MUST BE TOLD THAT IT IS A FACT OF WAR THAT THE VC HAVE LONG-RANGE MORTARS AND ROCKETS, GVN MILITARY FORCES MUST BE DEPLOYED OFFENSIVELY, AND THE GVN CANNOT GUARANTEE THE PROTECTION OF ALL CITIES AND TOWNS AGAINST MORTAR ATTACKS. THE CIVILIANS MUST UNDERTAKE CIVIL DEFENSE MEASURES, INCLUDING THE BUILDING OF SHELTERS AGAINST MORTAR ATTACKS. HE SAID CIVILIANS MUST ALSO ORGANIZE TO CARE FOR REFUGEES AND ABSORB THEM FROM REFUGEE CENTERS INTO THEIR HOMES UNTIL DEVASTATED AREAS CAN BE CLEARED AND RECONSTRUCTION COMPLETED.

E. THE SITUATION IN THE DELTA IS NOT AS CRITICAL IN MID-MARCH AS IT WAS IN MID-FEBRUARY, BUT IT IS AS CRUCIAL AND WILL CONTINUE SO FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS. HAD THE SITUATION THAT PREVAILED THROUGHOUT FEBRUARY CONTINUED INTO MAY, THE VC MIGHT NOT HAVE WON ANY HEARTS, BUT THEY COULD WELL HAVE TURNED THE MINDS OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE DELTA POPULATION TO FAVOR AN END OF THE WAR AT ANY COST, INCLUDING A CAPITULATION OF THE GVN TO THE VC DEMANDS FOR A COALITION GOVERNMENT.

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NEITHER SIDE HAS ANY PROSPECT IN THE SHORT RUN OF WINNING THE HEARTS OF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN THE DELTA BECAUSE THEY ARE SICK AND TIRED OF THIS WAR, BUT OUR SIDE MUST GIVE FULL ATTENTION TO WINNING THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE BY CONVINCING THEM THAT THE VC CAN NOT POSSIBLY WIN AND THAT THE WAR WILL END MOST QUICKLY IF THE PEOPLE LINE UP ON THE SIDE OF THE GVN.

9. THERE IS A TIME IN EVERY MILITARY ENGAGEMENT WHEN A TURNING POINT IN THE TIDE OF WAR IS REACHED. THE VC UNDOUBTEDLY FELT THAT THIS TURNING POINT HAD BEEN REACHED IN THE DELTA IN FEBRUARY AND IN THEIR FAVOR. THE VC HAVE BEEN KEPT GOING BY A BELIEF IN THE INEVITABILITY OF VICTORY FOR THEIR SIDE. MOST RECENTLY THEY HAVE BEEN LED TO EXPECT VICTORY WITHIN A MATTER OF MONTHS. VC MORALE IS NOW, THEREFORE, VERY VULNERABLE TO A SUDDEN REVERSAL IN THE TIDES OF WAR. VC MORALE COULD QUICKLY CRACK IF THE VC COULD BE PERSUADED DURING THE NEXT TWO MONTHS THAT THEY WILL NOT ACHIEVE VICTORY IN THE SHORT RUN OR THE LONG RUN, AND THAT A VC VICTORY IS NOT ONLY NOT INEVITABLE, BUT IMPOSSIBLE. WORDS AND LEAFLETS WILL NOT CONVINCE THE VC OF THIS; ONLY EFFECTIVE OFFENSIVE MILITARY OPERATIONS WILL DO SO. OFFENSIVE MILITARY OPERATIONS HAVE

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BEEN INCREASING IN LV CORPS SINCE GENERAL THANG TOOK OVER, BUT HAVE NOT YET REACHED THE POINT OF BEING VERY EFFECTIVE. WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS, THE VC HAVE BEEN AVOIDING CONTACT: NO VC MAIN FORCE UNIT HAS YET BEEN ENGAGED AND DECISIVELY DEFEATED. THE EXPECTED SECOND CONFRONTATION IN THE CITIES HAS NOT OCCURRED AND BOTH SIDES ARE NOW MANEUVERING IN THE COUNTRY, BUT WITH VERY LITTLE ENGAGEMENT. IF THIS SITUATION CONTINUES THROUGH MAY AND INTO THE RAINY SEASON, ANOTHER STALEMATE WILL HAVE BEEN REACHED AND VC MORALE WILL HAVE BEEN IMPAIRED, BUT NOT CRACKED.

10. THIS WAR IN THE DELTA THAT COULD HAVE BEEN LOST BY MAY COULD ALSO POSSIBLY BE WON BY MAY. IF PSYCHOLOGY IS THE KEY TO THIS WAR, MILITARY POWER IS THE INDISPENSIBLE AND MOST POTENT PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPON. THE VC PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY ATTAINED IN THE DELTA IN THE POST-TET WEEKS STEMMED IN PART FROM A VC FEELING OF INCREASING POWER RESULTING FROM THE ISSUANCE OF NEW AND EXCELLENT WEAPONS BEGINNING IN OCTOBER 1967. THE VC MUST BE PERSUADED THAT THESE WEAPONS WILL NOT ONLY NOT BE ADEQUATE TO ENABLE THEM TO WIN, BUT THAT OUR SIDE CAN CONTINUALLY UP THE ANTE REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY GET MORE NEW WEAPONS OR EVEN NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY (NVA) ASSISTANCE IN THE DELTA. A PSYCHOLOGICAL DE-

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FEAT OF THE VC CAN BE ATTAINED ONLY IF WE CAN CREATE IN THE VC CAMP A HEAVY ATMOSPHERE OF DEFEATISM. THIS COULD HAPPEN IF THE VC SHOULD LAUNCH MASSIVE ATTACKS AGAINST THE CITIES AND TOWNS AND THESE ATTACKS SHOULD FAIL WITH HEAVY VC CASUALTIES RUNNING INTO THE TENS OF THOUSANDS. THIS WOULD DEPEND ON VC INITIATIVE TO UNDERTAKE THE ATTACKS AND THE WILL TO WIN OF THE GVN FORCES DEFENDING THE TOWNS, AND WE CANNOT COUNT ON EITHER OF THESE AT THE MOMENT. TO INFLICT A PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFEAT ON THE VC WITHIN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS, WHEN VC MORALE WILL BE MOST VULNERABLE TO CRACKING, OUR SIDE MUST: A. EMBARK ON AGGRESSIVE AND EFFECTIVE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE VC MAIN FORCE UNITS, B. CUT THEIR SUPPLY LINES AND C. PENETRATE THEIR BASE AREAS TO DESTROY THEIR SUPPLY DUMPS AND CACHES. IF ALL THREE OF THESE STEPS COULD BE TAKEN AT ONCE, THE SUDDEN INSECURITY IT WOULD ENGENDER AMONG THE VC JUST AS THEY THOUGHT THAT VICTORY WAS WITHIN THEIR GRASP COULD CRACK VC MORALE.

11. GENERAL THANG HAS STAVED OFF DEFEAT BY PROVIDING VERY GOOD LEADERSHIP WHERE VERY BAD LEADERSHIP EXISTED BEFORE, BUT HE CANNOT PERFORM A MIRACLE. HE CANNOT INFLICT MAJOR DEFEATS ON THE VC WITH FORCES CURRENTLY AT HIS DISPOSAL.

[REDACTED]

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12. NONE OF THE ABOVE HAS BEEN COORDINATED WITH THE IV
CORPS SENIOR ADVISOR OR WITH THE AMBASSADOR.

13. FIELD DISSEM: EXCLUSIVE FOR CINCPAC AND POLAD, EXCLUSIVE
FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER AND GENERAL WESTMORELAND.

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