

INFORMATION

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Wednesday, March 27, 1968
4:30 p.m.

Pres file

Mr. President:

You may be interested in this evaluation of the effects of the Tet offensive, done by Dr. Dan, a distinguished Vietnamese political figure and a man quite independent of the government.

I am querying Saigon to see if we cannot get it released for the Congressional Record; meanwhile, using it on a background basis.

W. W. Rostow

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HANDLING INDICATOR

NO.

TO : Department of State

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POLITICAL SECTION STATE

INFO : Amembassies BANGKOK, VIENTIANE; Amconsulate DANANG; CINCPAC

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FROM : CINCPAC FOR POLAD

RS/AN
ANALYSIS BRANCH

SUBJECT : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: March 21, 1968

REF :

Transmitted as an enclosure to this airgram is an assessment of the Viet Cong attacks and their aftermath, prepared by Dr. Phan Quang Dan. Dr. Dan gave his paper to Embassy Officers on March 14 for presentation to the Ambassador and Political Counselor. In an attached note, Dan expressed the view that, after having read a great many American reports on recent events, "you might be interested in glancing through the enclosed paper by a Vietnamese."

Dr. Dan gives a generally optimistic interpretation of the Tet offensive and the present situation. However, he faults the GVN for "lowering its guard" at Tet, understandable though that might be on the basis of past experience. Dan also expressed concern that the allied intelligence apparatus, operating without "popular participation" was unable to detect Communist planning. The absence of popular participation, mass organization, also made it difficult to dislodge Communist guerrillas after they had infiltrated population centers, "causing greater destruction than needed." However, despite severe losses inflicted by the Communists, it is "highly erroneous to conclude that the Communists have scored a major victory, that they are growing stronger, and that the fight for freedom in Viet-Nam is doomed to failure." The Tet offensive was in fact "the worst defeat the Communists have ever experienced," much worse than that suffered by the Viet Minh in their January 1951 push against French positions in the Red River Delta, when they lost only 6,000 dead. Dan notes with satisfaction the good performance of ARVN and National Police, and the absence of popular support for the Communists. In addition, "the political situation in South Viet-Nam remained surprisingly orderly and stable" in the wake of the Communist attacks; "the legality of the constitutionally elected government was contested by nobody," and "there was widespread realization that national unity should crystalize

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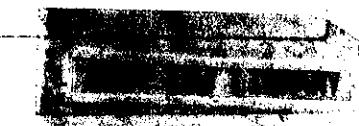
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POL: JACalhoun

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around the constitutional government."

Dan asserts that there is a "tremendous opportunity to turn a temporary military success into a decisive political victory if it is forcefully seized upon by the South Vietnamese government to move forward fast, reorganize the ARVN and the administration, wipe out corruption, carry out sweeping land reforms, mobilize active popular participation and achieve national unity."

Dan draws the following conclusions from the Tet offensive:

- 1) The Viet Cong are growing weaker, and played only a secondary role in the offensive.
- 2) North Vietnamese forces "have been moving steadfastly into the center of the stage to replace the VC," they are invading South Viet-Nam, while allied forces continue to respect the boundaries. "Opinions might differ on the propriety of such a policy. The good will and restraint of Washington and Saigon cannot, however, be doubted."
- 3) The nature of the war has changed to a more conventional form. Communists realize they cannot fight a protracted war because of "economic ruin in North Viet-Nam and the political bankruptcy of the Viet Cong in South Viet-Nam."
- 4) The allied response to Tet attacks, borne primarily by GVN and US forces but with effective help from other allies as well, was reassuring. Proven effectiveness of this alliance constitutes "a major diplomatic achievement."
- 5) "South Viet-Nam, with all its weaknesses, is emerging from the Lunar New Year storm as a definitely viable state with a basically loyal army and police and a population firmly committed to freedom."

Finally,

- 6) People of South Viet-Nam want peace, but are determined to resist Communist enslavement.

In aftermath of Tet offensive they are skeptical of "hints at peace casually made at cocktail parties and echoed by their minor diplomats, which are no more than "soap bubbles, while overt (Communist) aggression weighed like rocks." Dan hopes that "after a few more unsuccessful military ventures, Hanoi will realize that aggression no longer pays and will consent to sit down to the conference table to discuss future relationships between the two Viet-Nams."

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Enclosure: "Assessing Viet Cong Attacks",
by Dr. Phan Quang Dan

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