

346

SANITIZED

Authority NLS/CBS 8
By is, NARS, Date 12-16-83
DCH ✓

Copy of MAC 6526 18 May 68

1. This is a MACV projection of major actions the enemy will initiate through the remainder of 1968 -- his probable target areas, the magnitude of his activity, their duration, and our estimate of his timing. Supplement to J2 MACV Weekly Intelligence Estimate update (WIEU) No. 20-68.

2. The form enemy action will take is largely rooted in plans he laid early on by the middle of last year -- plans to cope with 1968 -- a year he viewed as crucial. As we all know, he had been losing the war of attrition, and was forced to make a major change -- reverse an unfavorable trend. Growing anti-war sentiment and impatience in the U. S. offered opportunities for him to exploit. He decided on a broad expansion of his force structure and a significant intensification of his military operations in South Vietnam.

3. We have ample evidence of his expansion intentions. First, the broad logistics improvement effort on which he embarked last October -- the construction of new roads -- particularly in-country -- a major effort to enlarge and speed-up the movement of men and supplies and support introduction of more sophisticated weaponry. Second, of special importance, we have seen his growing emphasis to support his new offensive plans with artillery and armor moving along his new in-country road complex which feeds from his trans-border base areas. We have evidence both confirmed and possible -- of tube artillery, tanks, and trucks on or near these highway systems. Obviously he intended to create a modernized, mechanized, highly responsive system over which to move and support vastly increased fire power on key targets deep in South Vietnam.

4. |

5. |

45 (duplicate of 45-30)

COPY EBL LIBRARY

COPY LEL LIBRARY

6. Just listed are the unmistakable signs of his expansion intentions -- but how well has he done? We must credit him with several successes. He has intensified his action -- for example, Khe Sanh, Tet, and the recent attacks on Saigon and the Hue to Dong Ha area. His coordination has improved, expansion of his artillery support started early last year, with an increase in fire support throughout South Vietnam. For example: 122mm rockets were first used last year in the top three corps, and there has been a growth in 122mm rocket battalions to support this weapon. This year we have captured tube artillery in I Corps, indicating 85 and 122mm weapons in South Vietnam. Of special importance is the increase of total artillery battalions countrywide employing large caliber weapons -- from the third quarter of 1967 to the present, the enemy has doubled these units from 13 to 26. He has improved his out-country logistics. Truck sightings in Laos have nearly quadrupled over last year. While this somewhat reflects an increase in our reconnaissance effort and some multiple sightings of the same vehicle, we nevertheless believe it attests to a large increase in the volume of truck movement in Laos.

7. On the other hand, the enemy has had significant failures. First, the pattern of previous years has continued -- he has been defeated in every major engagement. Second, his improved logistics have failed to keep pace with his ambitions; he still cannot sustain combat for long and he has been unable to repeat the intensity of his attacks by fire conducted during Tet. Our operations uncover his caches. He has been unable to employ tube artillery other than across the DMZ and around Khe Sanh, and armor has made but a brief appearance and only in I Corps. Third, his forces have shown a deterioration in fighting quality. We have recent documentation indicating large losses in cadre particularly at the company and platoon level. Prisoners of war tell us more and more of abbreviated training times and we see the very young and the older recruit. Infiltration packets are known to have been committed directly to battle in the Saigon area without integration into established units. Most significant is the degradation of his battlefield discipline -- there are a growing number of incidents of

hurriedly abandoned bodies and material -- far different from his previous practices. Our growing favorable kill rates over a less skilled enemy, and weapons loss rates show a similar trend -- the last quarter nearly doubling over the rate last year. Most important, however, his replacements have been unable to keep pace with his losses. We estimate his monthly replacement input through August of this year will average more than 15,500; however, when we project his losses based on date since initiation of his winter-spring campaign, we find these will be close to 22,000 monthly -- nearly a 7000 man per month loss, despite his surge of infiltration the beginning of this year. The net effect has been that his present in-country strength is even lower today than it was when he set his expansion schemes in motion last year. If it had not been for these failures, the enemy would have realized an expanded force structure -- quantitatively and qualitatively -- he would have reversed 15 months of steady decline and by the end of April his forces could have grown -- additionally, he probably anticipated ARVN defections to add appreciably to this strength -- his revitalized force would have been supported by increased firepower and modernized weapons fed by a mobile supply system all the way from Hanoi -- indeed a formidable enemy for the allies to face. It is quite possible that his Tet attacks were premature vis-a-vis his planned build-up and thus pulled the props from his long range plans -- starting their collapse. His road work was far from complete and his replacements were just arriving. We have evidence that the attack on Hue was scheduled for late March and accelerated at the last moment to match the lunar new year and the factor of surprise they hoped it would afford.

8. Whether or not Tet brought it on, the enemy's hoped-for expansion did collapse; what then of the future? Despite the failure of his plans in the larger sense, their residue still gives him certain capabilities. Expanded infiltration has partially offset his losses and will allow him to carry out intensified operations in short surge bursts in spite of the huge losses they will cost him. He has a more responsive command and control structure substantially easing manipulation from Hanoi. The improved roads will permit increased movement of supplies during the monsoon. Finally, the enemy can add to his infiltration by reinforcement with one or possibly two divisions from the North. While we have no current indications of his intention to do so, it is a possibility we cannot ignore.

9. Within this framework of capabilities, we expect his chief objective through the remainder of 1968 will be to improve his bargaining position at the negotiating table. His strategy to achieve this objective will consist of three, closely linked aspects -- he will fight while talking -- he will continue

COPY LBJ LIBRARY

COPY LBJ LIBRARY

his effort to convey an overall impression of strength and flexibility to shake Vietnamese faith in the Government of Vietnam and their future, and to aggravate U. S. impatience and anti-war sentiment. He will seek means to show apparent control over a large area of South Vietnam in order to give him an on-the-soil position for barter and to provide a base for his troops in the event of a cease-fire.

10. Within this context we expect his likely target areas to be these: to engender the image of strength, he will strike those points which will give him maximum psychological gain -- Saigon, and Hue. His emphasis will be on Saigon where, if he could find even a modicum of success, we would expect him to surface his shadow administration and proclaim his government over South Vietnam. To show apparent area control, his objective areas will be more widespread. They will probably be in those regions with relatively sparse population, and close to his border resupply bases and sanctuaries -- most likely [REDACTED] we have seen a recent ominous build-up of his forces, the top two provinces of I Corps which he has long sought to annex, and scattered, isolated Special Forces camps and outposts in the wilderness where he can make maximum gain for minimum effort.

11. Regarding timing, there are a number of factors at play here -- two of which are imponderable. No doubt a major influence will be the political climate, and, of course, the developments of negotiations. There will also be the effect of allied operations in pre-empting him. However, there are three factors which do give us clues as to timing: The effects of the southwest monsoon and his previous patterns of operation during this period, the arrival of infiltration packets in various parts of South Vietnam, and what is beginning to emerge as an enemy effort to stagger his attacks -- an effort to sustain pressure throughout South Vietnam and keep us reacting to his initiative. His 5 May country-wide offensive was notable by its absence of activity in the [REDACTED] where the posture of his forces is at its strongest -- now the growing threat there seems to promise follow-on to his third phase efforts.

12. Taking a closer look at these factors, we have examined the period of heavy rain associated with the monsoon in the various enemy objective areas -- these are the periods where the rainfall exceeds 8 inches, bringing mud conditions and, in some cases, flooding. We have also examined the history of enemy initiated actions during this period in 1967 to see what effect the monsoon had on his plans. From this, it appears that the monsoon inhibits him the most in the DMZ area with its very heavy rains and in the Delta where severe flooding varies with the accumulated rainfall there as well as the condition of the Mekong in Laos. While last year he avoided large [REDACTED]

operations during the worst part of the monsoon in each of the various areas, he did launch several one-day attacks in [REDACTED] -- apparently wet conditions in those two regions have somewhat less restrictive effect on his activities there.

13. We have also considered his present infiltration which, according to our estimate, has already peaked in the DMZ, [REDACTED] and III Corps. It will peak again in [REDACTED] during June, in MR-5 during July, and again in III Corps between July and August. Applying all these timing factors we estimate the following major enemy initiatives are most likely to occur between now and late summer: we expect his third phase which has just tapered off in Saigon and in the Hue to Dong Ha coastal area, to be followed up by a major effort in [REDACTED] which now appears to be getting under way -- this will possibly be of much greater intensity than we have just witnessed, with a real effort on the enemy's part to seize and at least temporarily hold his objectives -- by early or mid-June, we anticipate a renewed effort in northern MR-5 with the Danang area the major target -- somewhat concurrently, we might see a renewed offensive in the eastern DMZ -- possibly a repeat of last year's episode at Con Thien [REDACTED] reinforcements from the North -- during mid or late July -- infiltration has again peaked in III Corps, we believe another attempt on Saigon is likely -- probably in conjunction with fresh attacks in the Hue area -- the enemy will probably again concentrate his efforts on Saigon where he will plan an even stronger phase than this last one -- however, his need to maintain force integrity by prepositioning supplies and massing and moving his units will expose him to allied operations and spoiling tactics -- possibly forcing him to commit his units piecemeal.

14. At his point the variables exert greater influence on the future. Variables such as the progress of negotiations, his ability to reinforce and our success in pre-empting him. If he continues to pour people down the trail, and we have some doubt about this circumstance, then we may see these as the finish of his summer operations and the start of his next winter-spring campaign. He would follow up the next Saigon attempt with new adventures in the Western highlands, after which there would probably be a lull during the period of greatest monsoon influence throughout the Republic -- after the monsoon, end of October or November, we might see still another strike at Saigon and Hue and by the end of the year a round of attacks in IV Corps and a return to the western DMZ.

15. In summary, we feel we have good intelligence as to the motives now impelling the enemy and the factors that will influence his plans and timing for future initiatives. These lead us to believe that we will see a series of enemy military offensive actions to support his political posture

in the sequence just outlined. We further believe he plans to employ increased fire power, rockets, tube artillery and armor where he can support such an effort, and this year he will try to launch large operations during the monsoon, a venture not characteristic of his previous patterns but pressured by political necessity. While we view these as his intentions, we do not have the same confidence that he will be able to support this effort nor are we sure that his capabilities can match his aspirations.

####