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situationer 1 normass/john hughes

saigon, february 15 - south vietnam is waiting for the other communist shoe to drop.

following the surprise tet offensive by the viet cong and north vietnamese, the posture of the allies is a defensive one. though south vietnamese and american troops are trying to winkle out stubborn communist units in hue and the cholon quarter of saigon, no major offensive sweeps are under way, or apparently in early prospect.

for the moment, at any rate, the initiative appears to lie with the communists. the allies are waiting to see where and when the communists will strike next. and there is not ~~xx~~ repeat not a little puzzlement in saigon as to why the communists have not repeat not yet moved.

in the american military command, the view is predominant that the lonely marine base at khe sanh is to bear the brunt of an assault by the three north vietnamese divisions which intelligence sources say are poised around it.

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just why the base has not yet been hit by a fullscale assault, nobody is sure. the area around it, in which the communist troops are believed to be concentrated, is being ~~xxx~~ plastered daily by american b-52 bombers. military men hazard the guess that the bombing may have set the communist timetable back. if, for instance, a divisional commander has been killed in one of these raids, or a major ammunition dump destroyed, then the north vietnamese might need time to recoup.

other observers speculate that the communists' next move will not repeat not be an attack on khe sanh, but a second assault wave against south vietnam's towns and cities, especially saigon. from interrogation reports ~~xxx~~ of captured prisoners and intelligence sources it certainly does appear that the enemy has forces in reserve sufficient to launch such an attack. deployed around saigon, for instance, are units which have not repeat not yet been committed to the current offensive.

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but as each day passes without such a second wave, it seems to grow less likely. to be most effective, it should logically have been unleashed soon after the first, thus capitalizing on the confusion and shock caused by the first series of raids.

then again, there is one school which fears a communist strike neither against khe sanh nor saigon, but in the highlands where american forces are particularly vulnerable. some observers have long suspected the communists are tempted to seize ~~kankumxx~~ a town like kontum. there has been vicious fighting in the past at nearby dak to. intelligence sources place the first north vietnamese division, of about seven battalions, in the area and concede it poses a "strong threat."

many experts are convinced that the whole ~~ruthless~~ ruthless and meticulously coordinated communist tet offensive bears the distinctive stamp of north vietnam's general vo nguyen giap.

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if this be true, then it is difficult to believe that the attack on south vietnam's towns was a ~~one-shot~~ one-shot affair. it must be viewed as but one phase in the whole communist winter-spring offensive. if this, in turn, be true, then clearly more is planned to come.

but it is possible that giap is having to amend or re-schedule his plans in the wake of his tet attacks. for though there were undoubtedly gains for ~~the~~ communists, there were also ~~heavy~~ heavy losses.

the attacks made a tremendous impact on world opinion. they destroyed the credibility of much optimistic official reporting on the war in washington. they shock the confidence of many city-dwellers in south vietnam in their government's ability to protect them. they have undoubtedly set back the pacification program, which is likely to be further slowed as resources in the countryside are diverted towards reconstruction in the towns.

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yet some observers believe the viet cong and north vietnamese failed to fulfill their real objectives. this, of course, is the line of the official american establishment which, in its analysis of the offensive, is setting communist objectives high in order to underline the distance by which the communists failed to reach them.

but eschewing the ~~xxxxxxx~~ "company line," there are some grounds for belief that the communists had higher expectations than have been realized.

the viet cong attack order clearly set the neutralization of south vietnam's army as one of the offensive's goals. the organizers of the offensive had apparently been led to believe that the south vietnamese army would not repeat not fight, would be demoralized by the attacks, and that substantial portions of it might rally to the communists. it is possible that hanoi read too much into anti-american sentiment which has been mounting in south vietnam in recent months.

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this anti-americanism is certainly a fact. but it was not enough to subvert the south vietnamese army.

many units in that army had been given leave for tet in spite of recommendations to the contrary by the american military command. in the delta, for instance, the south vietnamese 7th, 9th and 21st divisions were all at around half-strength. normal combat strength of battalions in these divisions is about 450 men. but on the night of the offensive, battalions in the 7th division stood at an average of 200 men apiece, battalions in the 9th division at 300 men, and battalions in the 21st division at 250 men.

notwithstanding this, soldiers who were at their posts fought well. american military men at various levels and in various parts of the country confirm this.

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american military authorities say they have no evidence of any unit defections in the south vietnamese army, nor of any major unit being overrun.

the commanders of two divisions, the 22nd and 23rd, had in fact taken seriously the warnings of impending trouble. they canceled leave and deployed their forces and their men took heavy toll of the viet cong attackers.

the communists also appear to have miscalculated the extent to which civilians would support ~~them~~ them in cities like saigon. there was no popular uprising. there was undoubtedly submission, but most of this seems to have been in a passive rather than active sense. ninety per cent of prisoners interrogated so far say they received no aid from the public. only 2 per cent say they received unsolicited assistance.

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another factor which the communist strategists must now be pondering is their own heavy losses. american military sources claim some 30,000 viet cong and north vietnamese killed in the fighting. objective observers consider this figure inflated. but even if 15,000 were killed out of the 60,000 troops the communists are believed to have used in the campaign, this would still hit them hard.

some of these losses may have been recouped through the freeing of viet cong prisoners in south vietnamese gaols. two thousand prisoners were released in hue. some observers say the total throughout the country could run as high as 6,000. not all of these, of course, would be viet cong troops or agents, but many undoubtedly have gone to ground with the viet cong.

also lost to the viet cong are many key agents and cadres who have been infiltrated into cities like saigon over a period of years, but who now have been rooted out and killed. endit hughes.

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