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JANUARY 1969

The Viet Cong in Saigon: Tactics and Objectives During the Tet Offensive

Victoria Pohle

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE/INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS
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FOREWORD

This report is one of a series of Rand studies that examine the organization, operations, motivation, and morale of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that fought in South Vietnam.

Between August 1964 and December 1968 The Rand Corporation conducted approximately 2400 interviews with Vietnamese who were familiar with the activities of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. Reports of those interviews, totaling some 62,000 pages, were reviewed and released to the public in June 1972. They can be obtained from the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce.

The release of the interviews has made possible the declassification and release of some of the classified Rand reports derived from them. To remain consistent with the policy followed in reviewing the interviews, information that could lead to the identification of individual interviewees was deleted, along with a few specific references to sources that remain classified. In most cases, it was necessary to drop or to change only a word or two, and in some cases, a footnote. The meaning of a sentence or the intent of the author was not altered.

The reports contain information and interpretations relating to issues that are still being debated. It should be pointed out that there was substantive disagreement among the Rand researchers involved in Vietnam research at the time, and contrary points of view with totally different implications for U.S. operations can be found in the reports. This internal debate mirrored the debate that was then current throughout the nation.

A complete list of the Rand reports that have been released to the public is contained in the bibliography that follows.

(CRC, BJ: May 1975)

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PREFACE

This Memorandum is one in a series of studies prepared by The RAND Corporation on the Viet Cong movement, with the continuing interest and support of the Advanced Research Projects Agency and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs). The present study deals with the political activities of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces among the population in Saigon and its environs during the Tet offensive of February, 1968, and with some of the popular reactions to Viet Cong behavior at this time and subsequently.

The work derives from 425 specially designed interviews conducted by RAND teams in and around Saigon from February 5 to April 15. It also makes brief mention of a subsequent set of interviews with 50 Saigon residents during and after the Viet Cong's May offensive against that city, which deal in part with local reactions to changes in the pattern of U.S. bombing in North Vietnam and to the beginning of the Paris talks between representatives of the United States and North Vietnam.

Now a RAND consultant, the author was a member of the analytical staff of The RAND Corporation at the time this work was completed. She gratefully acknowledges the substantial analytical and critical contribution of Ralph Strauch throughout the planning, research, and writing stages of this study, and also wishes to thank Leon Gouré, W. A. Stewart, Konrad Kellen, Richard Rainey, Douglas Scott, and Anthony Russo for their many helpful comments and criticisms.

SUMMARY

This study is based on 425 RAND interviews with local residents of Saigon and Gia Dinh province, conducted from February to mid-April, 1968, concerning the Viet Cong's recent Tet offensive. It focuses on Viet Cong political tactics during, and popular reactions to, the offensive against Saigon, and presents several conclusions.

(1) Accompanying the VC/NVA troops' major military activities against Saigon during Tet were a variety of political activities at the local level apparently aimed at (a) arousing fear and eroding the confidence, morale, and cohesion of the local population and of the GVN, ARVN, and police members; (b) neutralizing the local GVN security structure; (c) compromising members of the population with the GVN and eliminating future sources of active local support for the government; and (d) seizing administrative control of some hamlets surrounding the city. Tactics ranged from open propaganda, verbal threats, forced draft, destruction of GVN-issued identification cards, and terrorism to the systematic arrest and assassination of GVN officials, police personnel, and ARVN officers. In contrast, Viet Cong efforts to induce participation in the Tet offensive and popular support for their cause in general appeared far more limited and sporadic.

(2) Although some popular support for the Viet Cong was demonstrated in Saigon during the Tet offensive, most interviewees of the lower and middle classes seemed more concerned with their own personal welfare than with the issues of conflict between the two sides, and they behaved accordingly. Although fearful of the consequences of any

confrontation with the Viet Cong and seeking to avoid the VC as much as possible, the interviewees complied with Viet Cong minimal demands, notably for food and shelter. Generally, they did not offer active support, such as fighting or volunteering information, to either the VC or the GVN forces. In contrast, many upper-class citizens, those of the Catholic religion, and persons connected with the GVN, ARVN or the United States, avoided any contact with the Viet Cong through fear of arrest or assassination. The only element of the general populace somewhat consistent in seeking to resist the Viet Cong actively or aid the GVN was the Northern Catholic refugee population living in groups under strong local leadership.

(3) During the Tet offensive and the months following, Saigon was alive with political speculation as to why the Viet Cong had attacked, when they might attack again, and whether the United States had collaborated with the Viet Cong in allowing the offensive to occur. The content and widespread existence of this false rumor, along with its seeming plausibility to many persons, indicate the population's surprise at the Tet offensive and its awareness of such issues as the disagreement of Americans about the war, current policy alternatives open to the United States in Vietnam, and the possibility of peace negotiations between the United States and Hanoi. It is also an indication of some groups' extreme political sensitivity and fear of the possibility of coalition government in South Vietnam, or of American troop withdrawal -- what they consider a U.S. "sellout" to the Viet Cong.

(4) The interview data indicate that persons particularly sensitive to, or fearful of, the above possibilities and the likelihood of Viet Cong control of South Vietnam are most likely to belong to one of the following groups: (a) Northern Catholic and Buddhist refugees; (b) upper-class wealthy citizens; (c) middle-class Catholic citizens; (d) Hoa Hao and Cao Dai; and (e) present or former members of the GVN, ARVN, or police, and their relatives, and U.S. employees.

* * *

In the author's opinion, the implications of this study for future political events in South Vietnam are several. First, it appears likely that the general populace in Saigon (and perhaps other urban areas) will remain passive in the conflict -- neither the GVN nor the VC can expect to receive the populace's active and sympathetic support. If the Viet Cong can effectively eliminate the local GVN security structure or otherwise terrorize the residents into submission, however, they might be able to turn the population into an active political force working against the GVN or the United States during subsequent military offensives, during peace negotiations, or during a future election.

It is also possible that, as VC/NVA pressure against the cities and the ongoing Paris peace negotiations continues, some members of the above groups might become more aware or fearful of the possibility of Viet Cong rule in South Vietnam, and such perceptions might lead them to reevaluate their political position and so "accommodate" in some fashion to the Viet Cong. At least 45 additional RAND

interviews with members of the above-mentioned five groups concerning reactions to the U.S. bombing halt of March 31 and the beginning of the Paris peace talks between the United States and Hanoi confirm the political sensitivities and suspicions of such persons. The interview data suggest that those persons least likely to consider accommodation as realistic or desirable and therefore most firmly committed to continuing the fight against the Viet Cong are those who believe that the Viet Cong would eliminate them at some point, and those who harbor an intense hatred of the Viet Cong. These persons include most Northern Catholics, many Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, many wealthy citizens with a history of close contact with the French and GVN or a history of resistance to the Viet Cong, and GVN, ARVN, and police personnel of similar backgrounds or high rank. The position of other persons (including some of those connected with the Vietnamese government or armed forces), however, may not be so firm in this regard. And, particularly following a sudden negotiated change in U.S. policy and the present political and military situation in the South, they might be led to accommodate with the Viet Cong movement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study is centered on the events of the Viet Cong's offensive against Saigon during Tet, 1968. It is based on 425 interviews with local residents of Saigon/Cholon and surrounding hamlets of Gia Dinh province conducted by RAND from February 5 through mid-April, and offers descriptive and analytical insights into several aspects of the situation in the Saigon area at this time. Against the background of the large-scale military activities of the Viet Cong and NVA troops throughout South Vietnam during the Tet offensive, Sec. II analyzes some of the enemy's political tactics directed at the local population and the lower-level GVN, ARVN, and security personnel in Saigon. Section III examines the actual behavior of various groups of the population in response to the Viet Cong's presence and activities during Tet, and Section IV summarizes the kinds of issues and rumors widely discussed in Saigon at this time. Section V is mainly an analysis of the reactions and concerns of those interviewees who appeared most politically sensitive to or fearful of Viet Cong success or eventual victory. In summary, Sec. VI briefly outlines some of the author's opinions and conclusions about the effects that continued Viet Cong pressure against the capital city might have on the political attitudes and behavior of various subgroups of the population, and the possible implications of these effects for peace negotiations between the United States and Hanoi.

THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

The 425 local residents interviewed were selected by a non-random process. First, a relatively short and somewhat informal interview was administered to 160 persons in the Saigon area from February 5 through February 15. These were mainly persons whom the RAND interviewers sought out in the streets, in temporary refugee quarters, and in private homes. Though this interview was conducted only in those areas where no heavy fighting was continuing, and thus includes a high proportion of middle- and upper-class citizens in "secure" areas of Saigon, some interviewing took place in local areas that had recently witnessed much street fighting or GVN artillery or strafing. After February 15, a slightly longer and more detailed questionnaire was administered to 265 persons living in temporary refugee shelters located throughout Saigon/Cholon and Gia Dinh province. Interviews were conducted in schools, churches, pagodas, hospitals, first-aid centers, parks, official buildings and other sites designated by the GVN Social Welfare Ministry after the offensive as "temporary refugee areas." During February, March, and April, some of these camps were subject to harassment or terrorism by small units of the Viet Cong. It is not known how many persons throughout this period refused to be interviewed by the RAND teams. The second questionnaire, which incorporates most of the questions of the first interview, is included in Appendix B.

Given the prevalence of interviewing in temporary refugee camps, the interview sample contains a very high proportion of persons who were greatly affected, often tragically, by the events of the Tet offensive. For

example, about one-half of the interviewees said that they had had some contact with VC/NVA personnel and an equal number said they had been caught in the cross-fire between the two sides. In addition, over 72 percent said that their residential area had been subject to shelling or bombing by the US/GVN forces or (in the smaller number of cases) by the VC/NVA troops, or else had been damaged by the fires caused by the fighting. As a result, not only were most of this number forced to flee their homes, but 43 percent of all the interviewees said that their residential area had been completely destroyed; 29 percent said their homes had been partially or lightly damaged; and 19 percent stated that some of their neighbors or relatives had been wounded or killed.

How these experiences might have affected the interviewees' answers to particular questions is not entirely clear. At least 14 percent of the sample appeared so absorbed in their personal tragedy, however, that they were uncooperative or resentful toward the interview itself. The bitterness of others toward the activities of the Americans, the GVN, or the Viet Cong is revealed in some of their responses. For example, some such persons tended to give answers unfavorably biased against the side that had harmed them the most, and favorably biased toward the other side. Finally, it is reasonable to assume that some refugees who suddenly found themselves in positions of total dependence on the government were hesitant to discuss the situation freely or to offer objective evaluations of the GVN's performance and programs. The topics most likely to be affected by such biases have therefore been avoided in this study.

Although the interview sample is probably not representative of the Saigon population as a whole, the RAND interviewing teams did make substantial efforts to obtain a diverse and variegated sample.* For example, approximately 40 percent and 5 percent of the 425 interviewees were, respectively, members of the middle and rich classes engaged in such wide-ranging occupations as trading, teaching, professional or governmental services; and 46 percent and 6 percent, respectively, were members of the poor and "very poor" classes employed as skilled and unskilled laborers, or self-employed as taxi or pedicab drivers, small tradesmen, handicraft makers, farmers, peddlers, and so forth. Over 20 percent of the interviewees were connected in some way with the Vietnamese government or armed forces (veterans, soldiers and officers, "politicians," police, civil servants, RD cadres, or wives and parents of these) or, in a few cases, worked for the Americans. Over 24 percent of the sample said they were Catholics, 38 percent were Buddhists, and the remainder followed one of several other religions and cults, or stated none. Finally, 24 percent were women (usually housewives),

*As the following brief statistical summary shows, the interview sample probably contains an unusually high proportion of upper-class citizens and Catholics -- to mention a few characteristics. For example, while 24 percent of the sample are Catholics, other data indicate that only 15-20 percent of the Saigon area population are Catholic. It is clear also that Saigon contains a much higher percentage of poor citizens of all religions (including Chinese) than represented in the sample. Unfortunately there is not much other data available on the population of Saigon for comparison with the interview sample.

almost 30 percent were over 45 years of age (and often unemployed) and 11 percent were 25 years or under (and were often students). The interview sample is described in detail in Appendix A.

As described in Table 1 below, the interviewees also came from many different areas of Saigon/Cholon, the surrounding suburbs, and hamlets and towns of Gia Dinh province. The sample is not representative of Gia Dinh province as a whole, however, since it contains a large proportion of interviewees from Go Vap district to the north of Saigon -- a district that contains many predominantly Catholic hamlets and resettlement camps. But the inclusion of villagers living outside of Saigon was regarded as desirable because of the additional evidence they could give concerning the offensive. A description of the population characteristics of each area and a listing of suburbs and hamlets included in the sample are given in Appendix A, Table 5.

Table 1

HOME AREA OF INTERVIEWEES

Districts of Saigon/Cholon		Districts of Gia Dinh	
1st District -	21	Tan Binh District -	30
2nd District -	12	Go Vap District -	144
3rd District -	46	- Gia Dinh, Binh Hoa & Go Vap Suburbs	(33)
5th District -	85	- Hanh Thong Village	(25)
6th District -	44	- An Nhon Village	(48)
7th District -	8	- Other villages	(38)
8th District -	21	Hoc Mon District -	10
	237	Other Districts -	4
	(56%)		188
			(44%)

METHODOLOGY

The interviews themselves were translated from recorded tapes, handwritten dialogues, or in a few cases written summaries of the interviews by Vietnamese members of the RAND teams in Saigon. They were then typed and roughly edited in Saigon before being forwarded to RAND, Santa Monica. A code for recording the interviewee responses numerically on computer tape was designed for the interviews by the author in collaboration with others of the RAND staff. The interviews were then read and coded, with research-assistant aid in checking the coding process. All the quotations used in the Memorandum were taken directly from the interviews.

Most of the numerical examples and statistical summaries presented throughout are an attempt to give the reader a sense of the amount of evidence available on any particular subject, the distribution of interviewee responses, and a familiarity with the characteristics of the interview sample. Because of the nature of the sample, no statistical significance may be attached to these numerical explanations, nor to the differences in frequency of responses outlined in the various charts and tables. In spite of this, it is this author's belief that the patterns exhibited by some of the responses, such as the responses of different types of interviewees to various "political" questions analyzed in Sec. V, do reflect differences that are operationally (as distinct from statistically) significant.

In addition to almost three years of intensive work on the Viet Cong and South Vietnamese population, my analysis of the 425 interviews was aided by the study of

other contemporary data sources not directly cited in this study. These include: a computer summary of all officially reported VC/NVA-initiated incidents in Gia Dinh province ranging from propaganda-making and terroristic activities to larger military engagements; the summaries of 859 interviews conducted in temporary refugee camps in Saigon and Gia Dinh province during February and March by the Center for Vietnamese Studies; almost 100 RAND interviews with Viet Cong and NVA defectors and prisoners conducted in South Vietnam in April, May, and June concerning the Tet offensive and its aftermath; captured enemy documents covering various aspects of the planning, tactics, and assessment of the Tet campaign, as well as activities planned for the future within the Saigon area (through May, 1968); and approximately 50 RAND interviews with Saigon residents conducted during May and June concerning reactions to the U.S. change of bombing tactics against North Vietnam in April and the Paris peace talks with Hanoi.

II. VIET CONG URBAN POLITICAL TACTICS

Within a brief 24-hour period, beginning in the early morning of January 31, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops launched attacks against targets in and around Saigon, including the U.S. Embassy, Independence Palace, the Vietnamese Joint Staff compound, the Vietnamese Naval Headquarters, the National Police Headquarters, the Saigon Radio Station and Tan Son Nhut airport, as well as logistic, military and government installations throughout Gia Dinh and 31 other provinces of South Vietnam. In the subsequent days of Tet, members of the enemy's military and civilian forces appeared openly in many districts and suburbs of Saigon and hamlets of Gia Dinh province. In addition to large-scale assaults against military installations and personnel, targets during February included Vietnamese armed forces training centers, officer barracks, homes of military dependents, village council and security facilities and, significantly, police stations throughout the city and province. Attempts were also made to seize administrative control of a number of outlying towns and hamlets of Gia Dinh province.*

The contact of the local residents with the enemy forces that penetrated and fought within their home areas during the Tet period varied greatly. Clearly a large proportion of the Saigon population never saw any Viet Cong or

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*An account of the major events of the Tet offensive in Saigon, along with a map of Saigon and Gia Dinh province, is contained in Appendix C.

NVA members during the entirety of the Tet offensive, and many others saw them in only a limited "military" context. Typical interviewee reports describe how groups of fighters ranging from three-man cells to squads and platoons suddenly appeared in the streets. Walking sometimes silently or talking among themselves, they disappeared or took up positions within the area by occupying houses or setting up their guns on someone's front porch or rooftop. In some sections of the city and in many outlying hamlets, guards were stationed along the streets and the people forcibly prevented from leaving. Although demands for food, shelter, and intelligence were frequent, the population was often simply ignored. As one farmer living in Ben Cat village north of Saigon described the soldiers' preoccupation with fighting: "The Viet Cong came from the other side of the river and walked through the area to get to the ammunition and fuel storage dump nearby [on February 8].... They didn't take time to tell the people anything. And the people avoided them like they did disease." In other words, his neighbor exclaimed summarily: "They came, fought, and ran." But even in some sections of Saigon/Cholon, which the Viet Cong forces reportedly occupied for several days or more during Tet and were accompanied by civilian cadres, little effort was made to mingle or talk with the people. And in some cases their behavior was, in an atypical fashion, notably impolite. Said one Cholon resident of the troops that lived in his area for three days: "When they were hungry they came into the houses and searched for food. They cooked, they ate, and left without a word to the heads of the families."

The reports of other interviewees, however, indicate that throughout the offensive the Viet Cong devoted considerable energy to the more traditional "political" type of activities aimed at certain segments of the population. As discussed below, these ranged from open propaganda-making, the spreading of rumors, recruitment, verbal threats, destruction of ID cards, and terrorism to the systematic arrest and assassination of local GVN officials and police. During the first days of Tet the Viet Cong did make some efforts to gain popular participation in the offensive within limited areas of the 5th and 6th districts of Saigon, but the main thrust of such political activities more closely resembled the typical rural "takeover" strategy. They seemed to be largely aimed at (1) arousing fear of the Viet Cong, undermining confidence in the GVN and eroding government morale; (2) neutralizing the local GVN administrative and security presence; and (3) eliminating future sources of active popular support for the South Vietnamese government and the continued allied war effort.

Kidnapping, arrest, assassination and other forms of terrorization of GVN-connected persons at the local level constituted one of the primary activities of the Viet Cong during the Saigon Tet offensive. As the interview data suggest, local GVN security personnel appeared to be most systematically the targets of the Viet Cong assassination and sniping squads. These included local inter-family or inter-house leaders responsible for gathering local intelligence on Viet Cong activities, various hamlet officials and, most importantly, local police and security

officers. Other targets were sometimes more random and included: ARVN officers and often their wives and families, lower-ranking Vietnamese soldiers, veterans, American employees and aides, and, on occasion, civil servants, journalists, priests, teachers and other local leaders, and young men of draft age. Interviewees from different areas confirm 45 separate incidents of Viet Cong arrests, kidnapping and/or assassination of anywhere from one to seven persons. And many others said they heard that the Viet Cong were looking for GVN and ARVN personnel or that they themselves had been questioned and searched by the Viet Cong. Reports of various Viet Cong incidents contained in the interviews are summarized by area in Table 2.

Some of the victims, particularly police and ARVN officers, were probably proscribed by the Viet Cong bureaucracy, and their homes were visited or they were otherwise sought out by special assassination teams. As at least five interviewees from the Saigon area conjecture, the Viet Cong probably had a detailed list similar to the one used in Hue, which contained descriptions of the persons they were seeking to eliminate during the offensive.* Said one Catholic policeman from the 8th district, who indicated that he was thinking about "taking refuge in a foreign country":

> I read a document in my office saying that the VC had a name list of about 2,000 people whom they wanted to arrest.... It is not necessary to be an important man. Anyone who works for the GVN can be on the VC name list.

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*Detailed "blacklists" were also used by the Viet Minh assassination teams participating in the Saigon urban offensive in 1950.

Table 2

DESCRIPTIONS OF VIET CONG TERROR AGAINST GVN PERSONNEL
(Number of Incidents Interview Reports)[a]

Area	Reports of VC Searches for GVN or ARVN Personnel[b]	Reports of Arrests or Kidnappings	Descriptions of Assassinations
Saigon			
1st and 2nd districts	2	1	2
3rd district	15	1	7
5th district	13	4	9
6th district	6	4	3
7th and 8th districts	9	4	5
Go Vap District	1	-	1
Gia Dinh City	1	1	-
Binh Hoa City	1	1	-
Thanh My Tay	3	1	3
Thanh Loc	10	5	11
An Nhon	2	-	1
Villages in Tan Binh District	1	2	2
Villages in Hoc Mon District	64	24	44
Total			

[a]Each column represents the total number of interview reports in that category. One interview may be represented in more than one column, but is represented only once in each column even if it reported more than one incident. Separate incidents are reported separately even if they described the same incident.

[b]Searches are not "terror," of course, but they do frighten people, and are therefore included.

Sometimes victims were shot immediately. Sometimes they were reportedly tied up and paraded down the streets before they were killed, or dragged in their homes and beheaded in front of their families. The wife of an ARVN major living in Co Loa barracks north of Saigon has related this story of how her husband and three other officers were kidnapped on January 30, and then shot several days later behind a church. She also was threatened:

> After they took my husband outside, a young fellow about 18 years old aimed a scimitar at my neck. He was about to chop it, but I begged him for my life.... My children saw what happened, and they screamed and screamed. The leader was waiting outside; he yelled in: "What are you waiting for, just liquidate her so we can go now; don't waste time talking." But it was a blessing for me because the young fellow said, "Run into hiding at once; I would kill you if I saw you again."

In other instances terror appeared to be more randomly applied. Within most districts of Saigon the Viet Cong conducted house-to-house searches during the first days of Tet inquiring about the existence and whereabouts of GVN, ARVN, and police personnel. It was soon rumored among the population that the Viet Cong were looking for, and would arrest or shoot, anyone in uniform or wearing a gun. A laborer from the Cau Tre area in the 6th district of Saigon gave this typical report of the wide-scale search for persons connected with the GVN:

> It was on the third day of Tet when the VC came to our area. They guarded the street, checked houses and ID cards, and forbade us to leave. Soldiers on leave were arrested

> and shot on the spot.... All I know is that they would search the people, and they would shoot at any secret police, capture any GVN soldiers. Ordinary people weren't arrested, but weren't allowed to leave the area. Veterans and disabled veterans were tied up and kept prisoners.

Often the Viet Cong advertised their purpose by leaving the corpses out on the streets of Saigon as "examples" for all to see, sometimes with notes pinned on the bodies. A taxicab driver living in the 5th district of Saigon, for example, offered this description of Viet Cong tactics:

> The VC came to my area a few days before the engagement with ARVN [February 2]. They killed three people and left their corpses and heads lying at a coffee shop nearby. In the next night they killed three civilians. I don't know what crimes these people committed. I only saw the VC throw their corpses in the street and forbade anyone's passing that place.

Not all persons arrested by the Viet Cong during the Tet period were killed. Probably many of the young men (including ARVN and Popular Force members) reportedly kidnapped were drafted into the Viet Cong service. Other persons were held prisoner or hostage for a limited time. For example, a number of veterans living in Saigon were tied up and interrogated at the beginning of the offensive but released later -- a tactic probably designed in part to prevent such persons from warning or aiding the GVN. Several Catholic parish priests in Saigon and in surrounding suburbs and hamlets were held hostage for several days, during which time they were forced to urge

the people to give food to the Viet Cong and to stay in their homes and not leave the area, and told to request the GVN not to shell the area.

The Viet Cong may also have sought to reach some agreement or "accommodation" with the persons they arrested -- or provide an incentive to accommodation for those not yet arrested. Perhaps for this purpose, and perhaps also as a propaganda tactic to gain popular sympathy, they often publicly announced their intention of releasing all those captured ARVN members who appeared to be government "draftees." As a poor peddler living near Co Loa barracks north of Saigon said:

> A great many Viet Cong sat in front of my house. They arrested soldiers belonging to the armored unit and took them to my house. They asked them why they joined the ARVN forces for a living and the soldiers replied that they were all draftees. The VC let them go because they decided they had nothing against draftees.

The Viet Cong also frequently announced they would spare GVN personnel who had not mistreated or committed "crimes" against the people. Upon entering Phu Binh parish in the 6th district on January 31 and seizing the parish houses and police station, for example, a platoon of Viet Cong went to each house and announced that "those who have done harm to the people will be arrested. Others will stay back here. There is nothing to be scared about." Another tactic employed during the Tet offensive in Saigon was the by now well-known "People's Courts." Two persons from the predominantly Catholic resettlement camp of Binh Dong in the 7th district have provided this typical account of these courts. As one begins:

> A group of VC led by a man who wore a red arm badge came to my house to search for the interfamily group leader. I read the letter X-3 on his arm badge. Later on, after I had left my area, the people told me that the VC arrested all GVN soldiers, policemen, and Government representatives living in my area. The VC formed the People's Court to try these men. The VC addressed the people: "If you say these men are guilty, we shall punish them; if you say they are not guilty, we shall release them." The people said not guilty, so the VC did not kill anyone yet.

One of his neighbors added that the people pleaded loudly for the life of the interfamily group leader, whose three sons also happened to be ARVN members. They said to the Viet Cong:

> Living in GVN-controlled area, if this man did not accept the job as interfamily group leader, another man would have to. This man could not keep his sons at home because they were drafted to service. So finally the VC released the man.

Although GVN civil offices and buildings were apparently not subjected to the same degree of military pressure and destruction as ARVN, police, and village administrative facilities were, lower- and middle-level civil servants and American employees were also subject to kidnapping, arrest, and assassination. Often, however, threats against such persons were enough, the apparent intent being to weaken the GVN bureaucracy by frightening or compromising officials into slowing their pace of work. One interesting story of the Viet Cong's effort to prevent civil servants from returning to work during or after the

offensive comes from an interviewee living in the province capital city of Gia Dinh. As this witness relates it, after the GVN called upon all officials to return to work on February 1, a group of armed Viet Cong stopped a large number of them on the way to their offices, examined and destroyed identification papers, and then tied them up and left them in a nearby building.

The Viet Cong also made more direct efforts to urge desertion or defection. The interviews offer several descriptions of the Viet Cong making public appeals to ARVN members or their families to "come over." Such appeals were often made by megaphone in the streets before or after fighting had occurred. As the wife of a pedicab driver in Cholon described an instance of this tactic:

> There were just a few of them. They weren't armed. They used loudspeakers to call on the people, urging us to join them and fight against the GVN. They said any family who had children serving in ARVN should report to them immediately, and they would try to bring the boys home for the people.

And in An Nhon village the Viet Cong reportedly entered early in the morning of January 31.

> By megaphones they told the people to dig trenches and to call their family members who were ARVN members to come back to the village. They only came and shouted on the streets and then left right away.

Several interviewees in outlying hamlets also reported being visited privately during Tet by military-proselytizing personnel who urged them to induce their relatives in the GVN or ARVN to defect.

DEMONSTRATIONS OF POWER TO THE POPULATION

Viet Cong activities targeted at the population in and around Saigon were often of a similar "strong arm" type, and as such seemed to represent a concentrated effort to demonstrate power, to shock and instill fear, to erode confidence in the GVN's ability to provide protection and, consequently, to reduce popular inclination to give support to the GVN or to remain passive to the Viet Cong. Thus, for example, instead of conducting propaganda sessions in some areas, the Viet Cong were more likely to gather the people in a group to make public some threat or to demonstrate their "brand new modern weapons," as one interviewee described the new guns and rockets. After such a gathering in the vicinity of An Quang Pagoda, the people "were advised to join them [the VC] if they wanted protection," while the people along one street in Cholon were called to a meeting and told that they must now decide which side to support in the conflict. The Viet Cong stopped all the people along Ly Thai Tho street in the 3rd district on the afternoon of February 2 and, as one middle-class housewife reports, conducted an "integrated" group criticism session: "They made them [the people] sit together in front of our neighbors' homes.... The students sat together, the GVN soldiers sat together and the policemen and security people sat together." The topic of discussion during this and other such criticism sessions was past "crimes" against the Front and future activities which might be carried out on behalf of the Viet Cong during Tet.

It was also common for the Viet Cong to make public their intention to attack Saigon again. As a number of

interviewees indicate, upon entering or retreating through an area, the VC/NVA troops frequently announced by megaphone that they would return to the area to visit the people or that they would attack again and again until the city was "liberated." Such threats were particularly numerous in some sections of the 7th, 8th, and 9th districts in which, reportedly, "some people had never before seen a VC." One housewife in Cholon described how the NVA troops claimed they would stay around for at least six months and wore signs saying, "Born in the North; died in the South."[1]

The most widely reported kind of prolonged face-to-face contact with Viet Cong members during the Tet offensive was the house-to-house search, a tactic described by interviewees from many hamlets in Gia Dinh and all sections of Saigon except the more wealthy 1st and 2nd districts. A typical interview description of such an encounter relates how a platoon of Viet Cong entered an area, posted guards at either end of the street, and stopped everyone to examine identification cards and ask questions (who they were and where they were going). The people were then informed not to leave the area, and systematic house-to-house searches were conducted along the street by groups of three to ten armed or unarmed Viet Cong who knocked on doors or entered forcibly, and searched for guns, uniforms, and persons hiding. The occupants were usually asked to show their personal identification cards and family registration books. They were also asked if they knew any GVN, ARVN, or police members, who the interfamily chief in their area was, and which

families on the block had relatives working for the GVN or Americans. Sometimes these searches were carried out in a polite, almost friendly manner. But they were rarely accompanied by any propaganda speeches or by even brief explanations of their purpose. The examination of the government-issued ID cards typically ended in their destruction. All these tactics -- the attempt to establish face-to-face contact with the population, to involve them personally in the search for GVN-connected persons, to sow suspicion among neighbors by asking questions, to place persons in a compromising position vis-à-vis the GVN by destroying the government-issued identification cards -- have been typical Viet Cong activities in contested rural areas since the early 1960s.

Typical accounts of such searches are the following. As a tanner living in the 3rd district of Saigon reported:

> On the second day of Tet, around about 10:30 p.m., as I was having a beer in front of the house with a friend of mine, we suddenly saw that something was unusual: many people were going up and down the street. They were all dressed like ordinary citizens, and I didn't know they were the VC then. We rushed inside the house, and they followed us, asking to see the Family Registration Books.... They asked for these books so that they could tear them up. Only then did I know they were from the NLF.... Outside the street there were a lot of them. Using the megaphone, they exhorted the people to tear up their Family Registration Books. After that, they withdrew.

An older man living several streets away in the 5th district described the Viet Cong's actions similarly:

> I saw three VCs; two were young men about 18 or 20 years of age, and a young woman about 19 or 20 years of age. They came to our place and asked for the Family Registration Card, then tore it up.... They went to our neighbors' homes and also asked for their Family Registration Cards and tore them all up. They made threats to the Railroad Employee Building's supervisor. They took out their guns and forced him to give up his Family Registration Card, and then tore it up too. And on and on like that they went from house to house.

A student in the 7th district described how the Viet Cong "searched all over the house, even the kitchen and the toilet."

> Afterwards, some of them looked carefully at the pictures we hung on the wall trying to find whether any of my family was a soldier. Near my house four persons were killed by the VC when they came to check their family registration books and identification cards because these victims were ARVN soldiers. The VC also tried to stop us from leaving.

In spite of these many subtle threats to the population and the widespread brutality against government personnel, apparently acts of terror against the general populace were <u>not</u> randomly carried out. They seemed to occur only against selected groups of people -- usually those known to be hostile to the Viet Cong. For example, in the more wealthy and government-occupied 1st and 2nd districts of Saigon, which witnessed little actual street fighting during the Tet offensive, some sporadic sniping occurred and there were several reports of bombs and grenades placed in the central marketplace. Obvious terrorist

activities were also conducted against the population of various Catholic hamlets in Go Vap district north of Saigon, and in the few Catholic resettlement sections along Phan The Hien Road in the 7th and 8th districts of Saigon. One resident of the Northern Catholic resettlement camp on Xom Moi in An Nhon village reported this story of Viet Cong terror on January 31:

> Some of them sneaked into the area. They fired into the houses on the two sides of the main road while running, and thus inflicted a lot of damage on the people.... The VC knew very well that the people in Xom Moi were very anti-Communist, and that they wouldn't be able to use the people for their purpose.

The Viet Cong also reportedly burned one entire section of the hamlet and shelled the marketplace. Some of the civilian residents were threatened with guns and, as several interviews confirm, "all the young men in the area" were tied up and left in a church, which was later set on fire by the retreating forces. Finally, in answer to question 7 of the interview -- "Why do you think the Viet Cong attacked your area?" -- the administrative secretary of the rich farming village of Phu Lam gave this explanation for the Viet Cong burning almost half the houses in the area:

> From 1952 until the Tet offensive my area had always been a peaceful area; no fighting and no attacks, and it was easy to make a living there. I think the reason the VC attacked my area was that our fields and gardens were fertile and the people were prosperous, and the VC wanted to collect taxes from the people, but first they had to intimidate them by a show of force. There were no other ways that the VC could convince the people that they should pay taxes to them.

THE LIMITED USES OF PROPAGANDA

On occasion the VC/NVA troops announced their presence in an area by declaring themselves members of the National Liberation Forces come to liberate Saigon, destroy the Thieu-Ky regime, and drive out the Americans, and urged the people to remain calm and stay where they were. Sometimes a ceremony of pulling down Vietnamese flags and putting up NLF ones ensued. But such instances were few and scattered compared to the many interviewees reporting that the VC/NVA troops were neither preceded nor accompanied by propaganda or other political or civilian cadres, that they themselves said nothing and, indeed, often seemed unprepared to even state the purpose of the offensive when approached by the local residents.

What open propaganda-making there was during the Tet offensive thus seemed to be typically limited to three types. First, it appears that the Viet Cong did make a somewhat systematic attempt to enlist popular participation in the offensive in limited areas of Saigon. As the interviewees indicate, this effort occurred during the first days of Tet in the 5th and 6th districts, areas which contain a variegated but large poor working class population and include parts of Cholon. For example, at least 16 of the 85 interviewees from the densely populated 5th district stated that the Viet Cong openly announced their purpose as "liberation" of the capital or conducted more vigorous efforts to enlist support. These latter included the distribution, beginning February 1, of leaflets and pamphlets explaining the offensive, and efforts to get the people out on the streets to participate in the GVN flag pulling-down ceremony. Two interviewees also

reported that local underground cadres in their area "surfaced" by declaring themselves Viet Cong and calling upon the people to voluntarily destroy their identification cards. Two other interviewees from the 5th district said that on the evening of February 1 they were visited by propaganda cadres, who gathered the family together to talk about the American imperialists and what "liberation" meant. Although there were no other reports of similar propaganda meetings at any time or place nor any description of the Viet Cong actually distributing arms or crude weapons to the people or urging them to join in the fighting, three interviewees from the working class areas of the 5th and 6th districts did report that the Viet Cong cadres urged, on one or more occasion, what may be termed a "popular uprising" against the GVN. Viet Cong activities on Ba Hat Street from February 1 to 4 were described by one citizen as follows:

> Nightly they came to every house and exhorted the people remaining to take to the streets and go for demonstrations. They told the people to take the GVN flags down and hoist the NLF ones because they had already liberated the capital.

"Compatriots, arise and give us a hand in getting Ky and Thieu down," a student from the same area quotes the Viet Cong at this time. But either because the effort was poorly carried out or because the people were too frightened or unsympathetic to respond, or because of the confusion caused by the bombing and flow of refugees, this attempt did not meet with much success. Said the above-quoted interviewee: "Nobody responded to their callings, nobody

took to the streets, and nobody hoisted the NLF flags. NLF flags were hoisted in places already occupied by the VC themselves."

A second systematic propaganda effort occurred in a number of hamlets surrounding Saigon. Here the effort during the Tet campaign was of the more traditional rural "takeover" kind -- hamlet officials and security personnel were kidnapped or assassinated; Viet Cong cadres appeared openly; sympathizers announced themselves; civilians were conscripted to serve as fighters, porters or laborers; propaganda meetings were held daily among the villagers; and, in two instances, "liberation governments" were elected. The general offensive appeared to give the Viet Cong some aid in consolidating control. Not only was it the subject of frequent propaganda meetings and, occasionally, the impetus for local elections, but the liberation of Saigon was often presented to the population as a fait accompli. It may thus have served as a subtle threat to induce the villagers to give more substantial support to the Viet Cong, to join the "winning" side while there was still time.

A third type of Viet Cong propaganda activity may explain the origin of the rumor circulating throughout Saigon and the province during and after Tet concerning possible American collaboration with the Viet Cong leaders in allowing the attacks to occur and, ultimately, in the formation of a coalition government in South Vietnam.* Although there is no firm evidence to indicate

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*The substance of this rumor and its variations are discussed in detail in Sec. IV below.

that the Viet Cong propaganda agents actually initiated this rumor, it is entirely consistent with other VC political tactics -- such as pre-Tet propaganda concerning internal American dissent over the war and the NLF's desire for peace and a coalition government, the alleged "alliance for peace" campaign during Tet, and the subsequent formation of the Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces. The rumor about American collaboration might thus have been set afoot precisely for the purpose of arousing fear among lower- and higher-level GVN and ARVN personnel and among the general populace concerning the possibility of a U.S. "sellout" and future Viet Cong rule in the South.

III. THE BEHAVIOR OF THE POPULATION DURING TET

The first reaction of many interviewees to the initial Viet Cong Tet attacks against Saigon was described as one of surprise, shock, bewilderment, and sometimes disbelief and panic. For example, a number of interviewees whose first awareness of the offensive came with the sound of gunfire recognized above the firecracker explosions and marketplace din of the Tet celebrations said they thought this simply signalled another internal coup d'état, probably a Ky-initiated move. "Nobody really thought at first that it could be the NLF," commented one upper-class merchant living in the 1st district of Saigon. Others paid little attention to troops in the streets until the Saigon Radio announced the "offensive" or until GVN forces deployed against them. As one middle-class housewife living in the 5th district described what appeared to be a common experience and reaction: "I only know that suddenly, from nowhere at all, they came and took us by surprise.... On the second day of Tet, as I went out, I saw them but I thought they were our soldiers. Only when they hoisted that flag did I realize that they were VC."* Many interviewees expressed surprise that the Viet Cong had chosen the traditional Vietnamese holiday and cease-fire

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*That many interviewees did not recognize or react to the Viet Cong's appearance was sometimes due not only to the unexpectedness of the situation, but also to the fact that some VC/NVA units personnel were wearing ARVN or other South Vietnamese uniforms or dressed in civilian clothes.

of Tet to launch this offensive and, of course, that enemy troops had even been able to enter Saigon in such force.

The actual behavior of the interviewees in response to the Viet Cong's presence varied with subsequent events in each area and with the individual concerned. For many interviewees the offensive was a series of fast-moving, confused events which ended in personal tragedy, and they related little else in the interview except this sequence of events: the Viet Cong entered the area, the two sides fought, the GVN dropped bombs, and they fled. Other interviewees who lived in "secure" areas throughout the offensive (notably the 1st and 2nd districts), or who did not witness any fighting in their areas until after the first week of February, spent the intervening time discussing the situation with their friends, listening to Radio Saigon's speculations about what the Viet Cong were doing, trying to gather food or locate their families -- but, probably mainly because of the curfew imposed by the GVN after the first attacks occurred, rarely venturing outside of their areas for any reason. Other persons, notably upper-class or GVN-connected citizens living in areas of diversified population, locked their houses and did not venture out. "We didn't know what our neighbor's feelings about the NLF might be," said one Northern Catholic refugee from the 3rd district whose sons were in the ARVN. The few interviewees who were active ARVN members made immediate

efforts to get back to their units,* although it was reported that some soldiers and police personnel in the 6th through 9th districts of Saigon hid their uniforms and weapons before going out. Several interviewees who were higher ranking GVN civil servants or police officials fled from their homes to those of friends or relatives elsewhere in Saigon as soon as they learned about the first attacks because, as one senior tax official put it, "We had no doubts that the Viet Cong would be after us all."

Interviewees in outlying hamlets not attacked during the first several days of the offensive behaved similarly. They were, in particular, very much worried as to what was going on in Saigon -- why the fighting was lasting so long, where the Viet Cong were, why the U.S./GVN were using bombs in the city. In the words of a Catholic school teacher living in Ben Cat hamlet north of Saigon: "Before the ammunition dump battle occurred in my area [on February 10], I and the others couldn't move out of the area and had no news whatever about the general situation. All this made us believe that the VC were very strong, and we became perplexed at this."

SOME SYMPATHY AND UNCONCERN

The behavior of the interviewees comprising 45 percent of the sample who observed or had more prolonged contact with enemy personnel during the offensive was similarly varied. As the interview data suggest, at one end of the spectrum were those who appeared unafraid

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*They apparently had been on home leave, although one interviewee was suspected to be a "deserter."

or unconcerned about the Viet Cong's presence, and at the other those who were apparently openly sympathetic to the Viet Cong. For example, there were four descriptions from 5th through 8th districts of Saigon of groups of people -- old women and children in particular -- treating the infiltrating or occupying Viet Cong forces with extreme curiosity. A small Catholic merchant living in the 5th district told this story of how the people stood around, watched, and finally approached and questioned a squad of Viet Cong who had been "camped" in the area since February 1:

> I saw them right in my area. Here there were about 10 to 15 of them. They were sitting together and eating and smoking. I saw they were very calm, and they didn't show any signs of fear or fright at all, although right at that moment there were some MPs and policemen surrounding the area.... A number of curious adults and children were standing around them to see what they were doing. Seeing this, I came near to look at them, too. They said that they had obeyed their superior's orders to come and take over Saigon, and that they were not attacking anyone or doing any fighting at all. But if GVN forces hit them, they would fight back.

Almost identical stories about local residents observing at a distance and then slowly approaching and talking with VC/NVA personnel also came from two villages north of Saigon, including the predominantly Catholic village An Nhon. In these cases some of the children, women, and young men even argued with the propaganda cadres, and subsequently refused to give them food and assistance.

In sections of the 3rd through 8th districts of Saigon, some of the residents reportedly sat on their doorsteps or peered out of their windows at enemy soldiers passing by. As a Buddhist housewife in Cholon reported, staring openly and fearlessly at the Viet Cong drew the retort: "What do you open the door and look out for? Aren't you afraid of death?"

According to at least 17 interviewees, mainly from scattered sections of the 5th through 8th districts and from suburbs west of Saigon, there were also some citizens who, by their actions, appeared obviously pro-VC. Not only did such persons reportedly greet and talk in a friendly manner with the VC/NVA troops who appeared on the streets, but, in the subsequent days, invited them to their homes and offered them food and a hiding place from the ARVN. In addition, some residents reportedly volunteered to serve the VC as guides, and there were five descriptions of women turning their homes into medical centers and acting as nurses. Many of the interviewees who described such situations* said they were much surprised. Others were not. Exclaimed one hired laborer from the 3rd district: "It is untrue that the working class population in Saigon supported the VC. But we all know that they had their sympathizers. It wasn't much secret who they were, and the Tet offensive proved this."

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*Some from hearsay only.

THE PREDOMINANT PATTERN OF FEAR, ACQUIESCENCE, AND AVOIDANCE

The behavior of the majority of interviewees who had even limited contact with the VC/NVA personnel suggests that their primary and first reaction was fear and concern for their own personal safety and that of their families and belongings. Some were clearly afraid for their lives at the hands of the Viet Cong. But the majority were simply afraid of getting involved in the situation -- afraid of being forced to cooperate with the Viet Cong, afraid of GVN or ARVN reprisal if they appeared suspicious or friendly to the Viet Cong, afraid of the government's military reaction against their area if it should be learned that enemy personnel were there, or afraid of getting caught in the cross fire between the two sides.

Typically, the majority acquiesced in the Viet Cong's minimal or easily-met demands, but tried to avoid and ignore them as much as possible and rarely complied with more substantial requests involving a risk to themselves. Thus they handed over food as requested; but they did not offer any, and usually accepted money that the VC/NVA personnel sometimes offered in return. They answered most of the questions put to them; but they did not volunteer any intelligence and frequently covered up for GVN- or U.S.-connected persons and families in their neighborhoods. They greeted the enemy troops silently, with "calm and polite faces" as one interviewee put it; and they tried to get out of their way as quickly as possible by going into their houses or leaving the area.

Finally, they did not respond to urgings, however limited, for a "popular uprising," and then aided the Viet

Cong's military efforts (by constructing barricades, for example) only when forced at gunpoint. As the wife of a pedicab driver in the 5th district summarized in words similar to many other interviewees: "This is a war between the two sides, and it is their business. We will obey both sides when asked."

The situation changed slightly when the people saw the GVN forces deploying nearby, or when the fighting actually started. Most interviewees then became concerned to get out of the way as quickly as possible.* They either sneaked around the VC guards who had previously ordered them not to leave, or else moved openly in groups, in which case "it was impossible for the Viet Cong to stop us without killing everyone," said one laborer from Cholon. A few citizens risked face-to-face confrontation with the Viet Cong, arguing that it was only proper that the innocent civilians be allowed to leave before the fighting or bombing started.

A number of interviewees, however, made significant attempts to avoid <u>any</u> contact with the enemy. For example, some refused to open their doors to the Viet Cong when they knocked or, upon learning of the Viet Cong's presence, locked their doors, barricaded the windows, and prepared shelters or hiding places for themselves. In explanation of this some upper-class citizens said they wanted to avoid having to leave their homes and belongings unprotected, while a number of Northern Catholic refugees

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*Or in some cases obeyed the GVN's request to evacuate as promptly as possible, since the area was to be strafed.

or persons with families or relatives in the GVN or ARVN said their motive was self-protection.

More commonly, however, interviewees who actually feared punishment, arrest, assassination or other confrontation with the Viet Cong simply fled as hastily as possible. At least 12 percent of the interviewees said that this was their main reason for taking refuge and 44 of these 53 persons were in some way connected with the South Vietnamese government -- civil servants, local intergroup leaders, ARVN or police officers and soldiers, veterans, or wives and parents of such persons -- or members of the strongly anti-VC Northern (and sometimes Southern) Catholic, Cao Dai or Hoa Hao population, or upper-class citizens. As one Hoa Hao woman explained her family's flight the moment the Viet Cong began conducting house-to-house searches along her street in the 5th district: "We had to leave because we were Hoa Hao people. The Viet Cong would surely never tolerate us." One veteran of the war against the Viet Minh explained: "I knew the Viet Cong had no sympathy with people like me." This number also included several interviewees of the poor class who stated that they left because they didn't want to have to pay any taxes to the Viet Cong, to be asked to join the Viet Cong service, or to have their families drafted. And, interestingly, five recent refugees to Saigon from Viet Cong-controlled villages in other provinces said they "knew from experience what the VC were like. We want nothing at all to do with them." Finally, at least five others left because they were afraid of being arrested by the GVN as Viet Cong suspects

or sympathizers, and one "draft dodger" wanted to avoid any confrontation with the ARVN.

LIMITED RESISTANCE TO THE VIET CONG

The interview data suggest that few people spontaneously and wholeheartedly aided the Viet Cong, but they also suggest that only a few actively support the GVN forces by, for example, warning them of the presence of the Viet Cong in their area. In other words, most interviewees obeyed the requests of the various GVN personnel, but they rarely went out of their way to offer any assistance. As suggested earlier, some persons in Saigon did offer protection to individual GVN, ARVN, police, or American personnel, but others did not. In one section of Cholon, for example, a middle-class citizen refused to give refuge to a GVN police security officer who was running from a group of three armed Viet Cong. Finally, most interviewees did not attempt to actively resist the Viet Cong's pressure or demands. Many of the interviewees, in fact, appeared to resent the question asked early in February -- "Did the people in your area help the GVN at all or form self-defense groups to protect themselves?" As one poor housewife in the village of Thanh My Tay stated: "We only thought of how to take care of ourselves. It is the innocent people who always get caught in the middle in this war."

One group unusual in this regard were Catholics who had fled from North Vietnam in 1954 and were living together under strong local leadership in and around Saigon. For example, eleven interviewees from the

resettlement camp of Xom Moi in Go Vap district reported that, after the Viet Cong's penetration, many people immediately notified the ARVN and then organized and armed themselves with crude weapons to fight against the Viet Cong. By the end of February these local "self-defense" groups had already killed a number of Việt Cong. A few other interviewees from predominantly Catholic hamlets north of Saigon described similar occurrences, and a number of interviewees from the Catholic and Buddhist resettlement camps in the 7th and 8th districts of Saigon reported that their local parish priests or leaders had also taken immediate steps to organize self-defense groups.

IV. SPECULATION AND RUMORS AROUND THE CAPITAL DURING THE OFFENSIVE

Following the initial period of surprise, confusion, fear, and sometimes panic, there arose considerable speculation and discussion among many elements of the local population on a number of issues. The interviewees vented their feelings for or against the military "strategy" of one or the other side, talked about what the Viet Cong were doing at present, and speculated on how the GVN would attempt to solve the refugee problem and restore the city. But as might be expected within a city caught up in a series of fast-moving, bewildering, tragic, and clearly politically significant events, the discussion within private homes, in the streets, in restaurants, and in the refugee camps frequently touched on larger issues.

THE VIET CONG'S PURPOSE

A primary topic was why the Viet Cong had launched the offensive in the first place, and what they might have hoped to gain. Almost 35 percent of the sample answered question 7 -- "Why do you think the Viet Cong attacked your area?" -- with "I don't know" or appeared afraid, suspicious or even resentful of the question. But at least 20 percent of the sample were extremely articulate, and most interviewees advanced some opinion or hypothesis. Considered as a whole, the reactions expressed by the interviewees as to the enemy's objectives in the Saigon area display wide range and variation. The absence of much Viet Cong propaganda on this score and the expressed

rejection by many interviewees of Radio Saigon propaganda probably contributed to this wide-ranging speculation. In any event, the impression gained from the interviews is that this issue was openly discussed among small groups throughout the city and the province, and probably was a topic of more systematic and heated debate among some segments of the population -- particularly upper-class citizens, students, professionals, and government personnel.

As an indication of the range of opinions on this question, 35 percent of the interviewees ascribed limited or middle-range objectives to the Viet Cong's Tet offensive. Such persons said the Viet Cong's purpose was to terrify the people and the government, to create disturbances that would undermine the strength, morale, and cohesion of the GVN, to achieve a surprise move that would have a psychological effect on the Vietnamese population, the United States, or the GVN, or "to make a big splash in the world headlines by proving they could attack at will, anyplace, at any time" -- as one Saigon professor of law put it. Approximately 14 percent said the Viet Cong attacked Saigon in order to bring about or influence the course of negotiations between the United States and Hanoi, the ultimate aim being the formation of a coalition government in Saigon and an American withdrawal. Said one Buddhist citizen who was a refugee from North Vietnam in 1954: "I think the Viet Cong tried to weaken and disrupt our government machinery and morale so as to give the leverage over to the Americans during negotiations." Only 12 percent considered the offensive an all-out effort or desperate attempt to induce a popular uprising, topple the GVN, or liberate the city; and almost an equal number

denied that the Viet Cong had any of these cataclysmic changes in mind. In addition, approximately 15 percent of the sample attributed multiple or a range of objectives to the Viet Cong, and 5 percent said that the enemy probably was uncertain about what might happen, that the Saigon offensive was an "experiment," or that Hanoi had different plans from what was revealed to the participating VC/NVA units. Finally, a total of 30 percent either said that the Viet Cong had limited military objectives in mind, with Tet being the logical time to launch such a surprise move successfully, or described the Viet Cong's objectives in terms of the limited military context in which they themselves had contact with the Viet Cong. They said, for example, that the Viet Cong were simply on their way to attack a nearby ammunition depot or police precinct headquarters. The stated opinions of the 365 interviewees who were asked and answered the question concerning the Viet Cong's purpose are listed in detail in Table 3 below.*

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*The responses of some 35 interviewees attributing more than one objective to the Viet Cong have been recorded individually as separate responses.

Table 3

POPULAR OPINIONS CONCERNING THE VIET CONG'S OBJECTIVES IN THE SAIGON TET OFFENSIVE

Viet Cong Purpose	Number of Interviews	% of 365 Interviewees Responding
1. Urban disorder, terrorization of people, destruction of GVN military installations	60	16
2. Economic disorder and sabotage	11	3
3. Limited military objectives	53	15
4. Political-psychological aimed at impressing local population with VC strength and security threat	15	4
5. Political-psychological aimed at weakening, dividing, demoralizing the GVN	20	5
6. Psychological impact on U.S./world opinion	28	8
7. Combination of 1, 4, 5, or 6 to force GVN to accept negotiations and/or coalition government with NLF	12	3
8. Combination of 1, 5 or 6 to force U.S. to negotiate, to accept coalition government, or to withdraw; or to improve VC bargaining position with U.S. during negotiations	12	3
9. Linked with general offensives against SVN urban areas and new "phase" of war	27	7
10. Generate popular uprising in Saigon	12	3
11. Topple GVN and seize control of Saigon	23	6
12. "Last gasp" or act of desperation	10	3
13. Interviewee doesn't know and doesn't understand VC purpose	106	29
14. Interviewee hesitated or refused to answer the question	11	3

THE SECOND AND THIRD WAVES

Regardless of what the interviewees considered the Viet Cong's purpose, most seemed aware that the capital city was a target of great political and military significance to the Viet Cong and Hanoi. And although there was surprisingly little discussion in the interviews of the events and effects of the Viet Cong's offensive against other targets throughout South Vietnam during Tet, there were very few interviewees who, after the continued fighting in the Saigon area in February, expressed the belief that the initial attacks were planned to be a "hit-and-run" affair.

Foremost on the minds of many people after Tet was, simply, whether and when the Viet Cong might return and do the same thing all over again. At least 25 percent of the interviewees, representing very different backgrounds, stated specifically that security in the capital province would be a major problem for some time to come and that the Viet Cong would probably launch another large-scale attack on targets in or around Saigon in the near future. And 18 percent feared that there would probably be not only a second, but possibly a third or even fourth wave of attacks. In the month of February and continuously thereafter there was much talk and many predictions about the exact date on which the second wave would begin -- on February 10, 15, 21 and 27, March 15, April 1 or May 1, so the stories ran.* Some interviewees even predicted

*Some of this talk was no doubt generated by various Saigon Radio and press speculations, including Ky's speech in the second week of February that another attack "could occur at any time."

how long, and why, the pressure against Saigon would be maintained. As a Catholic school teacher expressed his opinions on March 5 about the rumor that was circulating among the people on his block near the An Quang pagoda:

> I worry about the security the most. The VC have the initiative and we are on the defensive. No one knows when the 2nd phase begins. It may be tomorrow, one week later or one year later.
>
> Phase one is the Tet offensive. The VC used local forces and guerrilla units only. In phase two the VC will use their regular troops. The attacks will be more violent and bloodier. If they fail to take over Saigon, they will attack with phase three -- they will shell our cities and populated areas with heavy mortars and modern rockets. By all means, they will try to harm us as much as possible.

It is noteworthy that not only did such speculations continue right up until the Viet Cong's "May offensive" against Saigon, but almost an equal proportion of interviewees expressed such concerns during April as expressed them during February and March. For some persons the concern over possible renewed Viet Cong attacks against Saigon after March was the result of the continued Viet Cong harassment of the area (including some refugee camps), while others seemed to feel that the U.S. "bombing halt" announced on March 31 by President Johnson in combination with the then-probable beginning of peace talks between the United States and Hanoi would give the enemy added incentive to begin another large-scale offensive against the capital city.

THE RUMOR OF U.S./VC COLLABORATION

Perhaps most interesting was the surprisingly widespread discussion of the rumor arising immediately after the first Tet attacks and continuing for several months that the United States had collaborated with the Viet Cong in some way in allowing the offensive against Saigon. Of 280 interviewees who responded to some part of question 19 (see Appendix B), which was designed to elicit information about the rumor of collusion between the United States and the VC, half said they had heard the rumor or variations of it discussed. Eight percent also indicated that the rumor was widespread within their home areas.

As an indication of the seriousness with which this rumor was taken, approximately 11 percent of the total number of interviewees who were asked one or both of these questions said they believed the rumor; 25 percent said they considered the rumor plausible but were uncertain whether to believe it or not or that they had believed it at first but now were in doubt; and 53 percent specifically denied any validity to the rumor because, they said, the United States could not possibly collaborate with the Viet Cong. The remainder either were suspicious of the question and refused to answer, or answered the question in another way -- frequently by describing how the United States did not fully support the GVN's military efforts against the Viet Cong. The

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*Approximately 12 percent of this number indicated that they had heard about the rumor only through Ambassador Bunker's broadcasted denial of its validity on February 2.

incidence of hearing and believing the rumor in different sections of the city and Gia Dinh province is described below in Table 4. Although most interviewees did not give any opinion about the origin of the rumor, 20 persons did indicate that they considered it a typical Viet Cong propaganda trick to increase feelings of anti-Americanism among the population or "to scare us into thinking the United States might stop fighting," as one Northern Catholic refugee put it.

Table 4

EXISTENCE OF THE RUMOR IN SAIGON AND GIA DINH PROVINCE OF U.S./VC COLLABORATION DURING THE TET OFFENSIVE

Area	Heard Rumor	Believed Rumor	Did Not Believe Rumor	Uncertain	Did Not Hear Rumor
Saigon					
1st district	5	1	0	4	0
2	4[a]	1	1	2	0
3	16[a]	6	14	7	8
5	30[a]	3	37	10	34
6	14[a]	2	21	5	16
7	2	0	3	2	4
8	6[a]	0	9	4	8
Suburbs/Cities North of Saigon	10[a]	5	3	3	2
Villages:					
Go Vap District	43[a]	8	55	28	47
Hoc Mon District	5	3	4	3	4
Tan Binh District	4[a]	3	1	1	0
Thu Duc District	1	0	1	1	1
Total	140 (50%)	32 (11%)	149 (53%)	70 (25%)	124 (44%)

NOTE: This table includes the responses of 280 interviewees, but the various columns do not always add up because not all of the interviewees answered all parts of the question.

[a]Indicates that one or more interviewees said that the rumor was widespread in their areas.

As variously spun out, the rumor was often based on suspicions or fears that the United States government had recently decided that it should pull out of Vietnam. This was considered plausible because of the past record of official U.S. pressure on the GVN to accept the NLF as a negotiating partner, the existence of factions within the American political scene which favored a VC/GVN coalition government in South Vietnam, the enormous cost of the war to the United States in terms of men, materiel, and domestic morale, and the inability of the massive American presence to defeat the Viet Cong -- views about which a variety of Saigon residents were surprisingly knowledgeable and articulate. Thus after Tet at least 30 percent of the interviewees who either believed the rumor or suspected that there was some truth in it advanced the hypothesis that the United States had met with the Viet Cong and had agreed to allow them to attack Saigon so that, if the GVN were sufficiently weakened or collapsed, the United States would have an excuse to begin negotiations, to form a coalition government in Saigon, and to withdraw American troops in short order. A 40-year-old Catholic physician living in Cholon had this to say about the rumor of U.S./VC collaboration:

> The above hypothesis could be true because the VC have been for a long time requesting the GVN and the American government for a formation of a coalition government which will be composed of many representatives of the National Liberation Front.

And the Americans, he thought, now wanted this also. A rich merchant living in the 1st district said he believed the rumor because:

> The Americans are tired of having to send troops to South Vietnam to fight especially when the U.S. government encounters the opposition of its people. Now the Americans want to turn South Vietnam into a neutral country like Cambodia. That way they won't have to send as many troops and aid to Vietnam.

Variations on these hypotheses included such stories as: a Bunker-Thieu-Viet Cong collaboration in order to force Ky to negotiate with the NLF; a U.S./VC collaboration with the neutralist and peace groups within Saigon in order to force the GVN to accept a coalition government; U.S. agreement with the VC that if the GVN didn't fall within 24-48 hours, the United States would be forced to counterattack and defend the GVN. Some persons who said they believed in the "collaboration" rumor but refused to believe that this represented the beginning of the end of the war and a U.S. "sellout" of the GVN, reasoned that the U.S./VC agreement could be an American trick to draw the VC forces into the open in order to soundly defeat them. Still others said that the United States allowed the VC to enter and attack Saigon in order to test the reaction of ARVN or, as a few interviewees believed, to test the reaction of the Vietnamese populace. If ARVN maintained its morale and fought well (or if the people refused to cooperate with the Viet Cong), such people argued, the U.S. government officials would be able to assure the American politicians, press, and general public that the present government of South Vietnam was a worthy ally. And there were other rumors about the United States' and Hanoi's motives, intentions, and actions which continuously arose throughout February, March, and April. As one well-to-do Buddhist businessman living in the 2nd district

commented on the numerous and at times far-fetched stories circulating throughout the city after Tet:

> There have been plenty of rumors, among them: It could be that because the GVN had been afraid that the United States would cut the military and economic aid to Vietnam, it had to allow the attacks to occur so that the United States had to pay more attention and give more aid.
>
> It could be that the United States wanted to end the war and to form a coalition government, for if not, then why did Ambassador Bunker have to deny the rumor many and many times?
>
> It could also be that the U.S. had made a trap, inviting the VC to come and enter many cities so that they would be destroyed more easily, for normally the VC have always been hiding, and the ARVN and Allied Forces have had many difficulties in trying to engage them and hit them.

As he concluded: "These are only rumors and the things discussed by the people. Personally, I give up; I don't know how true they are."

The majority of people who believed the rumor of U.S./VC collaboration, or didn't disbelieve it, were not exactly certain why they felt this way. It seemed logical, they thought, because how else could the VC get into Saigon and cause such destruction? Of all those who considered the rumor wholly or partly plausible, 35 percent reached this conclusion, they said, because U.S. troops did not help the ARVN fight within the first several days of Tet, but came to the "rescue" only later. At least 20 percent thought that the rumor was probably true because the United States had adequate intelligence in advance to know the attack was coming but didn't do anything to stop it, and 10 percent placed some belief in the rumor because the VC attacked only the GVN troops and installations but, aside

from the U.S. Embassy, no American targets.* As one resident of the predominantly Catholic village of An Nhon described the sometimes far-fetched stories of his neighbors who found the fact of the Viet Cong's surprise offensive "difficult to understand":

> People used to lancer canards [spread false rumors] and then invent facts to make other people believe. For example, the people did not see any American troops participating in the counterattacks against the VC in Saigon; some people even said that they saw the VC aiding the U.S. military trucks...and then they concluded that the Americans had secret agreements with the VC.

What the widespread existence and belief in this rumor suggests is the need of much of the Saigon population for clear explanations and a focus for blame during a time of shock and devastation. It also highlights the propensity of many to interpret events in incorrect ways, ways which seemed to coincide with their own hopes or fears. And although this and other rumors died, other similar ones arose after events such as those of March 31, the agreement of the United States and Hanoi to pursue peace negotiations in Paris, and the Viet Cong's second offensive against Saigon in May.

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*Some interviewees offered more than one of these reasons for believing or suspecting the rumor's validity. It should be remembered that some of these explanations are partially true accounts of events. For example, there were no U.S. forces in Saigon during the first two days of the Tet offensive except Military Police.

V. LONGER RANGE POLITICAL CONCERNS

Although interviewees of all classes, religions, occupations and locations discussed some of these larger political issues during and subsequent to the Tet period, the majority answered question 17 at the end of the interview -- "What do you worry about most?" -- in such a way as to indicate an immediate practical and overriding concern with their own personal problems and future livelihood. For example, almost 94 percent of those 232 interviewees (mostly refugees) responding to this question said they were mainly concerned with having enough food for their families or adequate temporary or future living quarters, or else that they thought primarily about how long it would be before the situation was normalized so that they could return to their homes or jobs. In contrast, only 42 percent even mentioned continuing insecurity around the capital city as a major problem. The concerns expressed by these 232 interviewees are summarized in Table 5 below, Column B. This table records the responses of only those interviewees who explicitly specified a "most important" concern in answer to the question. In addition, 72 percent of 215 interviewees who discussed some of the negative effects of the offensive on the GVN considered the economic problem of refugee handling and restoration of the city as primary; and half of this number -- or 71 interviewees -- said these were clearly the most important effect of the Viet Cong's offensive. Many such persons were also surprisingly articulate in describing the type, and sometimes the details, of programs the GVN should undertake to restore this situation.

Table 5

PERSONAL CONCERNS OF THE INTERVIEWEES AFTER THE TET OFFENSIVE

Type of Concern	A Mentioned by Interviewees (%)	B Specified as "Most Important" (%)
Short-run food supply and living quarters for families	22.4	10.8
Restoration of situation and return to homes or jobs	27.2	16.9
Relocation and rebuilding of homes destroyed	44.0	26.3
Continuing insecurity or another large-scale attack against Saigon	41.8	25.0

NOTE: Percentages are based on the responses of 232 interviewees. Multiple concerns are calculated as individual answers.

POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES AND CONCERNS

Some persons, however, showed great concern and fear about the effects the surprise Tet offensive might have on the Viet Cong's position in the war and, in particular, about the possibility of eventual Viet Cong control of the South. As one might expect, these appeared to be mainly persons who -- by virtue of their past history, present political convictions, or present political position and actions -- may be considered to be (or have been) among the most actively "anti-VC" segments of the population. Within the interview sample such persons seem most likely to belong to one of the following five groups.

1 - Catholic and Buddhist refugees from North Vietnam (in 1954-55)
2 - Upper-class (rich) citizens
3 - Middle-class Catholic citizens
4 - Hoa Hao and Cao Dai members
5 - Present or former GVN, ARVN, and police members, and their relatives, and U.S. employees

The total number of interviewees belonging to one or more of these five groups, which for convenience may be labeled most "politically sensitive" to the possibility of a Viet Cong victory, is 176, or 41 percent of the sample. It is to be noted that these are not necessarily cohesive groups. Not all GVN employees, for example, expressed the same types of political concerns and convictions. And in addition to these five groups, a sizeable portion of the remaining Catholics and the non-Catholic middle-class interviewees expressed similar opinions and concerns, as did a smaller portion of the Buddhists and others.

The political concerns of interviewees of these particular five groups were demonstrated during the course of the interview in several ways. Sometimes they were explicitly stated; but in other cases they were more implicitly revealed by the manner and tone in which interviewees responded to various questions. For example, it is interesting that the interviewees who responded to open-ended questions by offering scenarios of what they considered possible or probable negative political effects of the offensive on the course of the war were more likely to belong to one of these five groups. Given their tone and content, these particular answers may be taken as an indicator of personal concern with the likelihood of Viet Cong success. Looking at responses to questions 7-9 concerning the Viet Cong's purpose and the outcome of the Tet offensive, we

find that the preponderance of interviewees who discussed its purpose and impact within such a context belonged to one or more of the above-listed five groups. At least 19 out of a total of 30 interviewees who said the Viet Cong's purpose was to weaken the cohesion and morale of the GVN and ARVN or to have a psychological impact on the population belonged to one of these five groups, as did 24 out of 35 interviewees who said the Viet Cong's purpose was to bring about or influence the course of negotiations between the United States and Hanoi.* The interviewees who viewed the outcome of the Tet offensive pessimistically by saying that the Viet Cong had gained something "politically" were also more likely to belong to one of these five groups.** At least 42 out of 64 persons who said the Viet Cong had gained one of the above-mentioned political goals belonged to such groups.

Another way in which concerns and fears about the political effects of the Viet Cong's offensive were revealed was by answers to question 17 of the interview -- "What do you worry about most?". Interviewees who at least

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*In contrast, those persons who attributed more limited objectives to the Viet Cong's offensive were more likely to belong to groups other than these five. For example, only 17 out of 53 who said the Viet Cong had only limited military objectives in mind, and 26 out of 106 who said they didn't know, were of these five groups.

**It should be noted, however, that in answer to these questions a sizeable number of these 140 persons, notably Northern Catholics, appeared so bitterly "anti-VC" or blindly optimistic that they would not attribute any larger "political" purpose or success to the Viet Cong's offensive. And a small proportion of the ARVN interviewees and their relatives appeared suspicious or hesitant to discuss such matters openly.

mentioned some aspect of the security problem in Saigon as one among many or a major personal concern after Tet were more likely to be members of these same five groups -- even though the majority of interviewees who answered question 17 were refugees and many, with the notable exception of some upper-class citizens from the 1st and 2nd districts, had undergone similar personal experiences and tragedies during the offensive. At least 60 out of 97 interviewees who stated that the security situation or the possibility of a renewed Viet Cong offensive against Saigon was one of their primary concerns after Tet belonged to one of these five groups. And 37 of the 53 persons who explicitly stated that this was clearly their "most important" concern were also members of one of these five most "politically sensitive" groups.* It is interesting that concern with security against the Viet Cong continued to be manifested over time. Looking at the responses of the GVN, ARVN, and U.S.-connected persons in particular, we find that in March and April such persons cited "security" as their most important concern with almost the same frequency as did interviewees of similar backgrounds in the month of February. In addition, the interviewees who expressed pessimism about the GVN's ability to contain or defeat the Viet Cong were also most likely to belong to one of these five previously defined groups

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*In comparison, approximately 63 percent of 95 interviewees of these five groups answering question 17 mentioned security as a problem and 39 percent stated it was their "most important concern," while only 27 percent of 137 interviewees of other groups answering question 17 mentioned security as a concern, with 12 percent putting it as their "most important" problem.

of people. For example, 18 of 29 interviewees who said continuing insecurity around Saigon had become the most important problem for the GVN forces after Tet belonged to one of these five groups, as did 45 or 62 percent of 73 interviewees who answered question 20 -- "In your opinion, which side is winning the war?" -- by saying that the Viet Cong might win or that, after Tet, the outcome was more ambiguous or cast in doubt.*

Finally, 50 percent of those 102 interviewees who said they believed or did not disbelieve the rumor of U.S.-VC collaboration were members of one or more of these five politically sensitive groups, and over 20 percent were others of the middle class or were Catholics. The large majority of those 31 persons who said they considered the rumor plausible because the United States wanted to form a coalition government in the South and withdraw were also of these groups. In addition, 14 rich or Northern Catholic interviewees said during February and March that they thought the impact of the Tet offensive would be to hasten the United States into peace negotiations with Hanoi, and another 17 such persons said they didn't think the United States fully supported the GVN's military effort against the Viet Cong. This latter point was judged to be the case mainly because of alleged "continuous" peace appeals made privately by the United States to Hanoi (which such persons felt had undermined ARVN morale), because of the "poor" U.S. equipment given ARVN, or because the United

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*These answers included some statements to the effect that, after the Tet offensive, the Viet Cong appeared stronger than before and thus the war could be expected to last much longer than was previously thought.

States consistently refused to increase its bombing activities in the North -- a step which these persons considered the only way to relieve the pressure in the South and convince Hanoi that the GVN would never give up. After March 31 at least six rich, Northern Catholic, or GVN-connected persons said they thought that the U.S. "bombing halt" in North Vietnam and forthcoming peace negotiations with Hanoi represented the beginning of a U.S. "sell-out." However, it is clear that some such persons, including a number of ARVN soldiers and middle-ranking officers, were among the most articulate in firmly denying the validity of many of these kinds of rumors. Said one ARVN major of the "collaboration" rumor:

> The Americans could never collaborate with the Viet Cong. Everybody knows that the United States is against the Communist world, and has been a long time fighting here and elsewhere for this reason. Why else would they send their soldiers to fight and die in South Vietnam?

POLITICAL CONVICTIONS AND BELIEFS

The interview data provide only limited insights into the political convictions or sympathies that governed individual behavior during the offensive, that influenced present fears and suspicions, and that might influence behavior in the future. And these convictions appeared to vary greatly. The concern of many members of the wealthy class engaged in commercial, financial, or professional activities was probably related to their belief that, should the Viet Cong become too strong or eventually become the governing force in the South, their wealth, position in society, and perhaps their lives might be

threatened. Many active and former GVN, ARVN, and police personnel of all levels -- particularly those of higher-level positions or those with a history of cooperation with the French against the Viet Minh -- and many Catholics expressed fear for their own lives at the hands of the Viet Cong. For example, at least 18 such persons explicitly stated that their major concern after Tet was that they might be executed if the Viet Cong returned. Finally, most of the Northern Catholics and Northern Buddhists and the three Cao Dai and Hoa Hao interviewees in the sample, as well as a number of recent refugees from VC-controlled territory, based their concerns about the Viet Cong's strength and possible victory on their strong, historically based and well-known hatred of the Viet Cong.

For these various reasons 77 interviewees, or almost 44 percent of those 176 previously described as most politically sensitive to the possibility of Viet Cong victory in South Vietnam, stated during the course of the interview that they did not favor peace (or peace negotiations) with Hanoi or the NLF at this time -- but rather that the GVN, and hopefully the United States, should and must continue the war against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese at the same or an increased level of intensity. The most common opinion expressed in support of this view was that, once started, such negotiations would eventually lead to a United States agreement at the conference table to the principle of a coalition government with the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, and the beginning of American troop withdrawal. And these processes, because of the internal pressures and divisions they would create within the GVN and ARVN, would eventually and inevitably result in Viet

Cong domination and rule of the South. Most of these 77 interviewees also indicated in some way their firm personal commitment to continue fighting against the Viet Cong. And the impact of the enemy's sudden show of strength in planning and executing the Tet attacks led some interviewees to express their increased willingness and determination to fight all the harder. Said one upper-class student who indicated his intention to join the ARVN immediately: "The Viet Cong surely have gained something politically by these surprise attacks. But, on the other hand, they lost a great deal. By this brutal offensive some people in Saigon have now come to realize the Viet Cong's strength and 'true face,' and have rallied together with the government to resist them."

In contrast, at least 31 other interviewees explicitly indicated after the offensive that they wanted a negotiated peace as soon as possible.* Some of these, mainly poor and middle-class Buddhists, said they really didn't care which side won because the continued fighting between the "two governments" was pointless and destructive. Over 20 of this number, however, said that the GVN should agree to or enter into peace negotiations soon because it could not really hope to defeat the Viet Cong militarily, or because after Tet the costs of the war and level of destruction in the South -- particularly in the cities -- had become too high. Significantly, this latter group

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*This does not include a number of other interviewees not represented by the five groups who, in the author's opinion, implied indifference to both the VC and GVN, and to the outcome of the war.

included two lower-level GVN civil servants, two ARVN veterans, one Northern Catholic who worked for the Americans, and ten upper-class Buddhists who said that the GVN should agree to peace because it was incapable of fighting the war intelligently or because, with the possibility of U.S./VC collaboration and imminent U.S. troop withdrawal, the GVN couldn't defeat the Viet Cong.

VI. CONCLUSION: POSSIBLE ADVERSE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Analysis of the political tactics of the Viet Cong during the Tet offensive and the reactions of various segments of the Saigon population has led the author to advance several hypotheses concerning some possible adverse political developments in South Vietnam in the future.

First, the generally passive behavior of many interviewees -- particularly those from the lower classes -- during the Tet offensive and their focus on their personal welfare suggest that a substantial segment of the Saigonese might in the future remain passive in the contest between the VC and the GVN. For a variety of reasons, including fear, they might withhold certain kinds of active or sympathetic support from either the VC or the GVN in the future. At least, this would probably hold true during future Viet Cong offensives, particularly if these campaigns -- such as that of the 1968 May offensive against Saigon -- relied heavily on terror and military harassment, and if they provoked allied military response similar to that elicited by the Viet Cong's Tet and May offensives. Such passivity would, at the minimum, deny the GVN an important source of intelligence, and perhaps at a later time, more important kinds of political support. If the Viet Cong continue, however, and are successful in their apparent systematic attempt to undermine and eliminate the local GVN security structure, they might, by use of threats or force, be able to organize the local population politically against the GVN during subsequent military offensives, during peace negotiations, or during political elections. The Viet Cong might, for example, seek to

organize popular demonstrations against the presence or activities (including the negotiating positions) of either the United States or the GVN, or create other urban disturbances that would place serious demands on the time and energy of the GVN and perhaps result in the use of repressive and unpopular measures against the local Saigon population. The Viet Cong might also be able to ensure their own command of a significant portion of urban votes in any subsequent elections. Viet Cong administrative control of the hamlets and villages surrounding Saigon would contribute to these possibilites.

The interview data have also shown that some persons feel extreme concern or fear about the larger political implications and effects of the Viet Cong's Tet offensive and, in particular, the possibility of eventual Viet Cong rule in the South. Within the interview sample, such persons are most likely to belong to one of the following five groups: (1) Northern Catholic and Buddhist refugees, (2) upper-class (wealthy) citizens, (3) middle-class Catholics, (4) Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, and (5) present or former members of the GVN, army, and police, and their relatives, and U.S. employees. At least 45 additional RAND interviews with members of these five groups concerning reactions to the United States bombing halt of March 31 against the North and the beginning of the Paris peace talks between the United States and Hanoi confirm the political sensitivities and suspicions of such persons.

It is thus possible that, as VC/NVA pressure against the cities and negotiations between the United States and Hanoi continue, some members of these groups might grow more aware or fearful of the possiblity of Viet Cong

victory. As they might perceive it, this could occur either through a military upset, a unilateral U.S. decision to withdraw troops, or -- as an outcome of a peace settlement -- through Viet Cong control of the electorate or control of a coalition government in Saigon. Although such perceptions and fears might induce some people to fight harder against the Viet Cong, others might at some point be led to reevaluate their political positions and so to "accommodate" in some fashion to the Viet Cong.

The interview data suggest that persons least likely to consider such accommodation as a realistic or desirable alternative are those who believe that the Viet Cong would seek (or are seeking) to assassinate them at some point and those who harbor an intense hatred of the Viet Cong. The most cohesive groups expressing these sentiments appear to be the Northern Catholic refugee population, adherents to the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects, wealthy citizens with a history of close contact with the French and GVN or a history of resistance to the Viet Cong, and GVN and ARVN members of similar backgrounds or of high rank now engaged in the conflict against the Viet Cong.

The position of many others, however, does not seem so unambiguous. A concern for their economic well-being might lead some members of the upper classes to seek to make monetary or other arrangements with the Viet Cong. Political figures newly incorporated into the Thieu-Ky constitutional government, as well as political aspirants outside the government, might decide their political futures would be more assured with the Viet Cong. Some low- or middle-level members of the GVN, ARVN, or police forces might also be vulnerable to Viet Cong political

overtures, as might some of the local population convinced of current Viet Cong strength and the inevitability of a VC victory.

For persons connected with the government, accommodation could conceivably occur in several ways: ARVN "draftees" might be persuaded to desert or defect following contacts by Viet Cong military-proselytizing personnel with them or with their families. Civil servants, security personnel, and some members of the ARVN officer corps also might be induced to desert or defect, but they also might defect "in place" -- that is, while remaining on their jobs they might slow their work pace or use their position to help the Viet Cong. It is also conceivable that high-level officials might defect, or that defections en masse might occur.

The extent to which an accommodation within the GVN's ranks might occur depends partly, of course, on how actively the Viet Cong seek it. Recent captured documents indicate that the Viet Cong have planned for this, at least, and that they are capable of using a variety of means -- ranging from threats to promises of political rewards -- to achieve these ends. But the types of concerns and speculations expressed by some groups of interviewees after the Tet and May offensives and the beginning of the Paris peace talks suggest that the political suspicions and fears that form the basis for accommodation with the Viet Cong might be sharply intensifed only when and if any sudden and large negotiated change in U.S. policy in South Vietnam occurs. Given no change in the current military balance, the likelihood of accommodation on any significant scale probably depends on the shape

and substance of any settlements reached in the near future between the United States and Hanoi at the Paris negotiating table, particularly any that appear to alter the present allied political and military policy and position in South Vietnam. Examples of such qualitative changes might be: a radical shift of the burden of the active fighting to the ARVN and removal of American troops to defined base areas in the South; an agreement to the formation of a coalition government in Saigon; or the beginning of American troop withdrawal from the country. The responses of Saigon residents interviewed by RAND teams in late April, May, and June indicate that a cessation of all U.S. bombing in North Vietnam or agreement to cease fire might produce some change, although a less significant amount, in political perceptions and behavior.

When and if the process of accommodation to the Viet Cong begins it would probably constitute a progressively greater motivation for others of the GVN and ARVN to act similarly. Any amount of public or private accommodation, however, would not only be politically embarrassing to the South Vietnamese government, but might also make it more difficult for the GVN to contain the Viet Cong's military threat and carry out its own programs of political and social change. At a minimum, disintegration "from the bottom" of the government or army would strengthen the Viet Cong's position of political leadership in the South. At the worst, it might create intolerable pressures on the GVN, thereby weakening its bargaining position in any negotiations, and lead to the collapse of the present government.

Appendix A

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Table 1

DISTRIBUTION BY AGE AND SEX

Age	Male (by %)	Female (by %)
15-25 yrs	8	3
26-35 yrs	15	8
36-45 yrs	29	7
Over 45 yrs	24	6
Total	76	24

Table 2

RELIGION/BACKGROUND OF INTERVIEWEES

Religion	Number of Interviews	% of Total
Catholic	103	24
(Refugee from North Vietnam in 1954)	(43)	(10)
Buddhist	16	38
(North Vietnamese origin or refugee)	13	(3)
Ancestor Worship	28	6
Cao Dai or Hoa Hao	3	> 1
Chinese origin	10	2
Cambodian origin	2	> 1
No religion	10	2
Stated no religion	108	25

Table 3
SELF-STATED ECONOMIC CLASS AND OCCUPATION OF INTERVIEWEES

Occupation	Very Poor	Poor	Middle	Rich	Stated No Class	Total
Unskilled laborer	4	16	0	1	--	21
Skilled laborer	0	39	12	0	5	51
Farmer	0	8	1	0	--	9
Small tradesman or handicraft maker	1	14	8	0	1	24
Driver, odd job, or service (often self-employed)	6	33	18	0	1	58
Student	0	6	15	0	1	22
Teacher, clerk, or professional	0	5	16	4	1	26
Politician, "intellectual" or religious leader	0	2	6	2	1	11
Merchant or businessman	0	0	9	6	--	15
Housewife	3	23	15	2	--	43
GVN civil servant or official	0	6	7	2	3	18
ARVN or police	0	14	11	2	1	28
Veteran	0	11	5	1	1	18
Wife or parent of ARVN members	1	8	10	0	1	20
Retired or jobless	5	3	5	0	1	14
Worked for Americans	1	0	6	0	--	7
Stated none	4	7	6	3	--	30
Total	25 (5.8%)	195 (45.9%)	170 (40%)	23 (5.4%)	12 (3%)	425

Table 4

SELF-STATED ECONOMIC CLASS AND RELIGION OF INTERVIEWEES

Religion	Very Poor	Poor	Middle	Rich	Stated No Class	Total
Catholic	1 (1)	28 (4)	27 (2)	1	3 (1)	60 (8)
Catholic refugees from North Vietnam	2	22 (6)	16 (4)	2 (1)	1 (1)	43 (12)
Buddhist	5	84 (14)	49 (12)	8 (1)	2 (2)	148 (29)
Buddhist refugees from North Vietnam	2	6 (2)	4 (1)	1	--	13 (3)
Ancestor worship	2	20 (4)	5 (2)	0	1	28 (6)
Cao Dai or Hoa Hao	1	1 (1)	1	0	--	3 (1)
Chinese origin	2	3 (1)	5	0	--	10 (1)
Cambodian origin	0	2 (1)	0	0	--	2 (1)
No religion	4	4	2 (1)	0	--	10 (1)
Stated no religion	6 (1)	25 (7)	61 (17)	11 (3)	5 (2)	108 (29)
Total	25 (2)	195 (39)	170 (39)	23 (5)	12 (6)	425 (91)
	6%	46%	40%	5%	3%	

NOTE: The number of interviewees connected with the GVN or the U.S. are shown in parentheses.

Table 5

HOME AREA OF INTERVIEWEES AND DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH AREA

Area	No. of Interviewees	Predominant Economic Class	Predominant Religion/ Background	Comments
Saigon	237			
1st District	21	Middle and rich	Catholic and Buddhist	Wealthy residential area
2nd District	12	Middle	Catholic and Buddhist	Residential, govt, financial area
3rd District	46	Mixed (middle class and working class)	Catholic and Buddhist	Residential
5th District	85	Mixed (middle class and working class)	Catholic and Buddhist	Residential, partly in Cholon
6th District	44	(Mixed (rich, middle and poor working class)	Chinese and Buddhist	Colon area; residential and business
7th District	8	Poor	Catholic and Buddhist	Partly in Cholon
8th District	21	Very poor and poor	--	Several new resettlement camps (Catholic and others)
Go Vap District	144			
Gia Dinh City	6	Poor	--	Residential and service
Go Vap Town	8	Middle	Buddhist	Dist GVN offices
Binh Hoa Village	18	Poor	Buddhist and	
(Binh Loi Hamlet)	13	Poor	ancestor worship	--
Hanh Thong Village	25	Poor	Catholic and	--
(Ben Cat Hamlet)	18	Poor	Buddhist	
Thanh My Tay Village	18	Poor	Buddhist	--
Thong Tay Hoi Village	6	Poor	Buddhist	--
An Nhon Village	48	Poor and middle	Catholic	--
(Xom Moi Hamlet)	16	Poor and middle	NVN Catholic refugee	Resettlement camp
(Dan An 5 Hamlet)	17	Poor	Buddhist	--
Thanh Loc Village	5	Poor	Catholic	--
An Phu Dong Village	3	Poor	Buddhist	Farming village
Nga Ba Cay Thi Village	3	Poor	Buddhist	Farming village
Other	3	--	--	Rich farming village
Hoc Mon District	10			
Trung My Tay Village	6	Poor and middle	Catholic	Farming village
Other	4	--	--	--
Tan Binh District	30			
Phu Nhuan Suburb	13	Middle	Mixed	Near VN Gen. Staff Hq
Phu Tho Hoa Village	5	Poor	Buddhist	--
Tan Son Nhi Village	12	Poor and middle	Catholic	Near airport
Thu Duc District	3 --	--	--	--
(Hiep Binh Village)	--	--	--	--
Binh Chanh District	1 --	Poor	Buddhist	--
(Binh Tri Dong Village)	--	Middle	Buddhist	--

Appendix B

QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO REFUGEES IN SAIGON/GIA DINH (February 15 - April 15, 1968)*

1. Where were you located during the VC Tet attacks?
2. Did any fighting take place in your area?
3. (For refugees) When did you leave your area? Why?
4. Did you observe any VC troops during the fighting? What were they doing?
5. Did you observe any GVN forces in your area? What were they doing?
6. Were there any air or artillery attacks in your area? (If yes) Were they effective against the VC? What damage was caused? What did you think about these attacks? What did other people say? (Explain)
7. In your opinion, why did the VC come into your area? What did other people say? (Discuss)
8. Do you think the VC gained anything by these attacks? (Militarily, propaganda, economically, etc.)

   Do you think the VC lost anything by launching these attacks? (Militarily, propaganda, economically, etc.)
9. Do you think the GVN and the allies gained anything from the VC attacks? (Militarily, propaganda, economically, etc.)

   Do you think the GVN and the allies lost anything because of the VC attacks? (Militarily, propaganda, economically, etc.)
10. Since the fighting, have you been able to get enough food for your family and for yourself? How do prices now compare with prices in December 1967?

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*The questionnaire administered by RAND to local residents in Saigon and its environs from February 5-15, 1968, is an abbreviated form of this one.

11. In your opinion, what should the GVN do to aid the refugees?

12. What should the GVN do to provide security?

13. (For refugees) Have the GVN or allies provided any help to you? Do you plan to return to your home? When? If not, what do you plan to do?

14. What has been done to provide refugees with food and other necessities? Are you satisfied with the measures the GVN has taken?

15. What has the GVN done to aid in reconstruction?

16. What problems and difficulties do you think the GVN faces in aiding the victims and restoring the situation?

17. What do you worry about the most?

18. During the fighting did you observe any American troops in your area? What were they doing?

19. Do you think the U.S. Government fully supports the GVN against the VC? Why or why not? Have you heard anything about American collaboration with the VC against the GVN? Where did you hear this? Do you believe it?

20. In your opinion, which side do you think is winning the war?

Appendix C

CHRONOLOGY OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN THE SAIGON AREA, JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 8, 1968

January 31 -- Viet Cong launch pre-dawn (approximately 3:15 a.m.) attacks on American Embassy, Presidential Palace, Tan Son Nhut Airfield, Vietnam Naval Headquarters, Vietnam Joint General Staff compound, Radio Saigon, National Police stations, U.S. and Vietnamese officer and enlisted men's billets.

Various ARVN, and RF/PF outposts, village council facilities, police stations, and logistics targets throughout Gia Dinh province attacked also.

President Thieu delcares martial law at 5:30 p.m. and a 24-hour curfew and press censorship proclaimed.

February 1 -- Main fighting near Tan Son Nhut and in Cholon area (6th district), An Quang Pagoda (5th district), near U.S. PX and in other sections of predominately Chinese community. ARVN rangers reportedly take An Quang Pagoda at 5:00 p.m.

Terror and sabotage incidents throughout city and province including power plants, police headquarters, and officer billets. Viet Cong distribute propaganda leaflets, visit homes, and urge uprising mainly in the 5th and 6th districts of Saigon.

Council of Ministers issues communiqué affirming martial law, curfew, and press censorship, and appeals for public order.

February 2 -- Continued heavy fighting in densely populated area of Saigon (3rd, 5th and 6th districts). Clashes at Tan Son Nhut, Newport Bridge, and

other sites. Scattered sniper fire and minor incidents reported, including sabotage of roads, and attacks against logistics facilities throughout province.

Heavy fighting near populated urban areas and villages of Go Vap district north of Saigon and western suburbs of the city. Helicopters, tanks, and armored personnel carriers used by allied forces.

NFL announces formation of "people's alliance" in Saigon and Hue.

Ambassador Bunker issues statement denying reported VC broadcasts and rumors that U.S. forces were assisting in VC takeover of Saigon in order to bring about establishment of coalition government.

February 3 -- Viet Cong cling to strongpoints in Cholon, the Saigon racetrack Tan Son Nhut, and nearby districts of Gia Dinh province despite steady pounding by allied helicopter gunships and tanks. Viet Cong effort to mortar the Cholon power plant fails.

Lower House of National Assembly meets in closed session for situation briefing and they organize committee to aid the refugees. Both Houses issue communiques denouncing the VC, pledging cooperation with Thieu-Ky, and urging united effort of the people.

Curfew lifted from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. to allow people to move about for essential purposes.

February 4 -- Fighting in Saigon subsides into isolated skirmishs, mainly in Cholon, but activities continue at Tan Son Nhut and in suburban Gia Dinh. ARVN forces move in to screen the 5th, 6th, and 7th districts of Saigon. Allied shelling and bombing of some sections of this area begins.

February 5 -- Sporadic firefights in populated areas of Saigon, continued allied bombing and shelling of the area. Number of refugees in city and suburbs rises steadily. VC stage night attack on USAID warehouse in Cholon.

Officials of U.S. intelligence community warn of a second offensive.

February 6 -- Fighting continues in Cholon. VC overruun one police station, attack another one as well as a power plant. Activity near Saigon race track and on Plantation Road. VC sabotage Highway 4 again.

February 7 -- Fighting continues, as VC hold positions in Cholon. New VC infiltration into the 7th and 8th districts reported. Police station near race track hit. ARVN makes contact with enemy at Tan Son Nhut and outskirts of Saigon.

Nine Saigon newspapers resume publication, and Upper House meets. Foreign Minister Tran Van Do makes TV appearance to comment on VC attacks, bombing of NVN, and coalition government.

February 8 -- Fighting still in progress in Cholon. Enemy pocket holds out at race track. Firefights in city. Phu Lam telephone relay station mortared by VC.

February 9 -- Saigon radio announces that new attack may occur on February 10. Viet Cong reported to continue to be hiding in Cholon. NLF flags put up near 6th district police station. Viet Cong attack Nha Be district town.

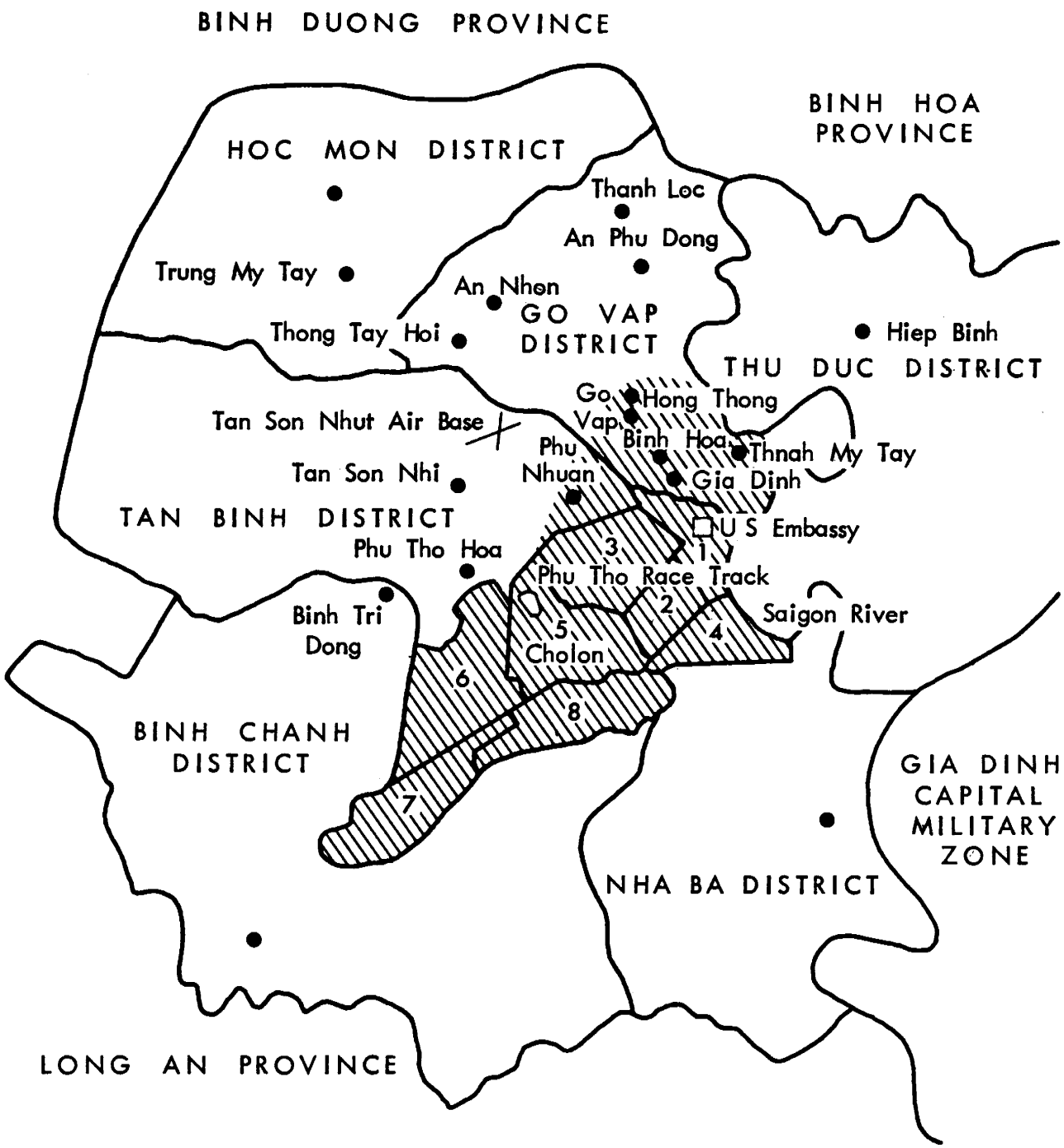
February 10 -- Scattered action in Saigon. South Vietnamese rangers, airborne troops, and marines continue house-to-house search of 5th district.

February 11 -- Approximately 217,000 refugees in Saigon and the surrounding villages reported. About 118 centers erected in Saigon over last week to aid refugees.

Heavy fighting in Go Vap district north of Saigon near ammunition dump.

February 13 -- Clashes between U.S. infantry and VC in suburbs of Saigon.

February 13 -- Scattered incidents of terror and sabotage.
29 Small unit VC attacks on ARVN and RF/PF outposts, training centers, and refugee camps. Firefights throughout province. Viet Cong shell Tan Son Nhut again (February 18, 19), and attempt to slip antiaircraft guns into outskirts of Saigon. National Police Headquarters in Saigon and MACV headquarters on outskirts of city mortared again (February 18). United States and GVN forces continue sweep northwest of capital.



Map of Saigon/Gia Dinh Province