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Meo



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam



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119

15 December 1967

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Information as of 1600
15 December 1967

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HIGHLIGHTS

Chinese fighters were detected for the first time on 11 and 12 December conducting low-altitude bombing exercises near the North Vietnamese border.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

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[Redacted] North Vietnamese artillery units in the DMZ area are experiencing difficulties due to winter rains (Paras. 1-2). Action in the ground war was relatively light on 14-15 December (Paras. 3-4).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Bui Quang San, a member of the Lower House from Quang Nam Province, was assassinated on 14 December by two unknown persons (Paras. 1-2). The Lower House is upset by the impending trial of 26 struggle leaders [Redacted] calling for either a postponement or a complete cancellation (Paras. 3-8). The Electrical Workers' Union is threatening a strike for 18 December if its demands for increased benefits are not met (Paras. 9-11).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Spanish refugees who lived in North Vietnam for a number of years have reported on the activities of Chinese troops there (Paras. 4-8).

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V. Communist Political Developments:

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[Redacted]

[Redacted] Former Chinese residents of North Vietnam who have fled to China apparently are causing some concern to Peking (Paras. 3-5).

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. [Redacted]

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North Vietnamese artillery units in the area of the Demilitarized Zone are experiencing difficulties as a result of heavy winter rains. The rains, however, have not prevented the Communists from unleashing sporadic heavy barrages, and 287 rounds were fired on 14 December.

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Ground Action

3. Action in the ground war was light on 14-15 December. The US Americal Division continues to report sporadic enemy resistance south of Da Nang in the Quang Nam - Quang Tin Province border area. A notebook captured recently in this region reveals that the North Vietnamese 2nd Division has been ordered to launch an offensive prior to the Christmas truce period. This is unusual in view of the heavy losses suffered by this unit during the past four months. The document itself notes that the division failed to achieve its 1967 autumn campaign objectives.

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4. In Binh Dinh Province during the early morning hours of 14 December an outpost manned by a South Vietnamese Popular Force company was overrun by an enemy company. At first light US and South Vietnamese reinforcements were moved into the area and fighting continued throughout the day. The enemy force withdrew at dusk. Allied losses were 21 killed (three US) and 22 wounded (ten US). Enemy losses were put at 55 dead.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Lower House deputy Bui Quan San from Quang Nam Province was killed on the evening of 14 December by two unidentified assailants. Current speculation in Saigon is that the killing may have been the result of a squabble within the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD) or a Viet Cong terrorist act. There is substance for the former belief. San was involved in a factional dispute and switched allegiance within the party. His "second wife," who apparently saw the murderers, reported that they had familiar faces and spoke the patois of Quang Nam.

2. Some elements in the Lower House have already seized on the killing to flay the government for not providing protection to National Assembly members. Their complaints were cut off by interim Lower House Chairman Nguyen Ba Luong who counseled that judgment should be reserved until the official investigation is completed. Luong also reported that an assassination note was found pinned to San's chest, but that its contents had not been disclosed. Western press reports, however, claim that the note accused San of wife-stealing, torturing civilians, and having a son working for US intelligence. Under the constitution, a special election must be held within three months to fill the vacancy left by San's death.

Lower House Developments

3. The Lower House during its 13 and 14 December sessions devoted lengthy debate to the impending trial of 26 struggle movement leaders for treason. Placed on the agenda because of a petition signed by 70 deputies, the subject evoked considerable protest, and it was eventually decided that the house should "make known its attitude" in opposition to the trial. A decision on the exact form of any action was deferred until the 15 December session.

4. Deputy Nguyen Dai Bang of Hue started off the discussion by reading a letter from relatives of the defendants claiming that the struggle had been for legitimate purposes and that it had, in fact, resulted in the establishment of the present government.

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Characterizing the trial as an act of revenge against genuine nationalists, Bang said that he personally intended to write letters to President Thieu, the chairmen of both houses of the National Assembly, and the president of the Third Military Field Court conveying the views of the defendants' families.

5. Another deputy, Nguyen Ngoc Nghia of Thua Thien, argued that it was not the 26 defendants who had led the struggle, but rather the monks who issued the orders. He asked rhetorically why the monks themselves were not put on trial--a line also taken by militant Buddhist Thich Thien Hoa, a leading participant in the struggle, in a communiqué issued on 13 December.

6. Those deputies who favored proceeding with the trial spoke cautiously, and the majority appeared strongly in favor of some sort of leniency, if not cancellation of the trial and release of the defendants. The two alternatives placed before the house for later consideration at its 15 December session were the immediate release of the prisoners or the establishment of a special committee to draft an amnesty law covering political prisoners arrested since 1 November 1963. If the latter alternative is adopted, the Lower House would request that the trial be postponed during the drafting process. The Upper House has already decided to draw up an amnesty resolution, and Senator Tran Van Don recently told Vietnam Press that the Senate would definitely send a letter to the President requesting postponement of the trial.

7. As part of its other business during the 13 and 14 December sessions, the Lower House also decided to establish 14 permanent committees. Deputy Ho Huu Tuong attempted to have a committee on foreigners' affairs established to examine violations of Vietnamese sovereignty by foreigners, but his proposal received the support of only five deputies. The majority felt that the judiciary and interior committees could handle such cases.

8. In connection with the legislature's challenge of the mobilization decree, the government will send a delegation to answer questions at the morning session of the Lower House and the afternoon session of the Upper House on 18 December. The government representatives will include Defense Minister Vy, Undersecretary for University and Technical Education Cung, and Minister for Legislative Liaison Tuong. The Lower House session probably will be closed, while the Upper House will probably open its session to the public.

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Possible Electrical Workers' Strike

9. The Electrical Workers' Union has threatened a strike to begin on 18 December or shortly afterwards if the French-owned public utility, the Compagnie des Eaux et d'Electricite, does not meet its demands for increased benefits. Specifically, the unions are asking for a 15-percent cost of living allowance retroactive to 1 August; severance pay and an extra month's salary because the company is turning its operations over to the government; and a 1,000-piaster Tet bonus--all payable by 31 December. For its part, the company has said that it fully intends to give the workers severance pay and Tet bonuses, but not until 5 January, and that any question of a cost of living allowance increase must be taken up with the Ministry of Public Works, which will pay the workers' salaries after 31 December.

10. Vo Van Tai, general secretary of the Saigon Council of Unions, has said that the council will give the strike both moral and financial support if it occurs. He believes there will be a strike. Neither the minister of public works nor the minister of labor has done anything, he says, toward mediating the dispute or toward alleviating the workers' fears that they will come out on the short end as a result of the management change.

11. Tran Quoc Buu, president of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, has, however, urged Prime Minister Loc to take action and, as a result, the issue was placed on the agenda of the Council of Ministers meeting for 14 December. Should the strike occur, it will affect not only the Saigon area but also some or all of nine other cities where affiliated French companies have installations. The union, however, has agreed to stagger the hours and the areas of the strike in Saigon so that power will not be completely cut off.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

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Chinese Activity in North Vietnam

4. Several of the recent Spanish repatriates from North Vietnam have told of the activities of Chinese Communist engineer and antiaircraft troops in North Vietnam. Their reports give a detailed picture of the Chinese activities [redacted]

[redacted] The Spaniards' observations appear generally accurate, but like many reporters they have also provided hearsay and personal impressions which in many instances are exaggerated or incorrect.

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5. Some of the refugees described in detail the personal appearance and bivouac areas of the Chinese and their movements on truck and foot. In the main, the Spaniards said, the Chinese were performing construction and antiaircraft tasks.

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6. The Spaniards described Chinese troops manning AAA guns and repairing bridges and railroads at Lang Son, Lao Chai, and other areas in northern North Vietnam. One of the refugees also said that Chinese engineers were building a huge airfield near Yen Bai, and a "strategic" road from Lao Cai through Yen Bai to Son Tay.

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7. According to the Spaniards' reports, Chinese troops were billeted in tents and caves near Chi Ne, about 35 miles south of Hanoi. Some of the caves were used for AAA guns. The guns were controlled electrically and moved on tracks to the cave entrances when planes appeared.

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8. The refugees probably reflected the feelings of many of their Vietnamese neighbors in claiming that, in effect, the Chinese had "taken over" certain areas. All the refugees noted, however, that an official North Vietnamese presence was maintained in all regions where numerous Chinese were observed, and none said the Chinese exercised any control over the population or attempted to disseminate Maoist propaganda. Some of the Spaniards indicated the unhappiness and uneasiness of the Vietnamese because of the many Chinese, but there were no reports of serious friction or any actions by the Chinese which might arouse popular resentment.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Chinese Refugees From North Vietnam

3. Chinese who have fled North Vietnam to avoid the war are apparently causing some concern to Peking. According to a Red Guard publication, Chou En-lai told a group of Red Guards on 14 November that among the people causing trouble in Canton were those who have "run away from Vietnam." The Chinese premier asserted that the refugees had actually fled from fear of US air attacks, although they were claiming they left because they could not study Chairman Mao's thought in North Vietnam.

4. Chou admitted that there was revisionism in both China and North Vietnam but pointed out that this was not the real reason for the refugee's flight. He minimized the importance of revisionism

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in North Vietnam, asserting that the major preoccupation there was fighting the US.

5. Chou's comments suggest that Peking finds the refugees unwelcome. They spread stories detrimental to Sino-Vietnamese relations and are extra mouths to feed.

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