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MCO



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam



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21 December 1967

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

Communist forces staged widespread attacks throughout South Vietnam on 20 and 21 December. The Chinese Communist radar network along the Vietnam/Laos border has been expanded in the past several months.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Communist guerrillas staged a series of attacks throughout the country on 20-21 December (Paras. 1-6). The North Vietnamese have augmented their combat forces in the northern part of South Vietnam in the past year (Paras. 7-11).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Upper House has asked Prime Minister Loc for an official explanation of the government's attitude toward Cambodia (Para. 1).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. Communist Political Developments: Several Communist capitals have conferred quasi-diplomatic status on National Liberation Front representatives (Paras. 1-4).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Cambodia says it will fight, if as US press reports hint, US forces pursue the VC into Cambodia (Para. 1).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Viet Cong guerrillas staged widespread attacks on 20-21 December, the seventh anniversary of the founding of the National Liberation Front.

2. An unknown number of enemy saboteurs fired mortars into the Can Tho Airfield complex in the Mekong Delta province of Phong Dinh. Three US helicopters and two airplanes were destroyed and eight aircraft damaged in the early morning raid.

3. Other terrorist incidents included raids against several South Vietnamese villages and two grenade throwings in downtown Saigon. Thirteen US and South Vietnamese military personnel were wounded when a grenade was tossed into a crowded bar in the more serious of the Saigon incidents.

4. In northern Tay Ninh Province a base camp of the US 25th Infantry Division was struck by mortars for the second time on 20 December, wounding 17 Americans. Three US soldiers were killed and 11 wounded earlier in the day in an abortive attack which included a mortar barrage of over 200 rounds.

5. Also on 20 December, a South Vietnamese camp some 23 miles northwest of Saigon was hit by a 350-round mortar bombardment. The attackers--an estimated enemy company--were finally driven off by intense artillery and air support.

6. At least 52 enemy troops were killed during a three-hour battle with a company of the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Regiment some 17 miles southeast of Saigon late on 20 December. This was the first major combat for the Thai soldiers, who are taking part in the four-company search-and-destroy Operation NARESUAN in southern Bien Hoa Province.

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Build-up in the Tri-Thien Area

7. During the past year the North Vietnamese have augmented their combat forces in the Tri-Thien Military Region. This strategic area encompasses the lower half of Quang Tri Province and all of Thua Thien Province, including the important population centers of Quang Tri city and Hue.

8. At the end of 1966 the Communists had eight main force battalions in this region, organized in one regiment--the 6th--and five separate battalions. At present the existence of three full regiments--the 5th, 6th, and 9th--has been confirmed in this region and there have been reports of a 4th Regiment being organized in southern Thua Thien this fall. The build-up has been accomplished through the infiltration of battalion-size units formed and dispatched to the south by the 304th and 341st divisions.

9. The 5th Regiment was confirmed in MACV's order of battle late this summer. The presence of the 9th was confirmed during the past week. These two regiments are believed to be in the vicinity of base area 101 southwest of Quang Tri city. The 6th Regiment is probably located west of Hue in base area 114. In addition to these units, the 31st Regiment of the North Vietnamese 341st Division has been tentatively identified in communications with the headquarters of the Tri-Thien Military Region. In recent weeks communications intelligence has traced the movement of this unit southward through the Laotian corridor to a position just west of the A Chau Valley. This communications link suggests that the 31st will be committed in Thua Thien Province.

10. If the 4th and 31st regiments are confirmed as subordinates of the Tri-Thien Military Region the number of combat battalions in this area will total 15, nearly double that of a year ago.

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11. The buildup of these forces lends further credibility to a recently captured enemy document which indicated that "large-scale" attacks were planned along the populous coastal plains of northern South Vietnam. The Communists may intend to coordinate attacks here with actions in the Khe Sanh area or across the Demilitarized Zone.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Upper House has written a letter to Prime Minister Loc asking for an explanation of the government's attitude toward Cambodia. The letter made reference to the recent discovery of Viet Cong bases in Cambodia and put specific questions to Loc, such as, why are the Cambodians allowed to use the Mekong River and what is the government doing to stop smuggling in the border area of Chau Doc Province? The Foreign Ministry is drafting a reply.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. In what appears to be a concerted effort to improve the international status and prestige of the Liberation Front, some Communist capitals are publicizing the reception of Front representatives as diplomats. The language of the announcements concerning the Front varies and may be deliberately vague, but it seems to include in some cases changing the status of the Front Mission from "foreign representatives" accredited to an unofficial "front" or "solidarity" organization to a more official position such as a "diplomatic mission" accredited to the host government.

2. According to Hanoi radio, the new Liberation Front representative in Peking presented his "letter of appointment" to Premier Chou En-lai on 5 December. Hanoi quoted the Chinese premier as saying that the Chinese Government regarded the Liberation Front permanent mission as "an official diplomatic mission enjoying the same status as foreign embassies in the diplomatic corps in Peking." Hanoi and Liberation Radio have played up the move as one which enhances the Front's international status. Radio Peking, has so far not reported the event as a change in the Front's status.

3. A new Front representative arrived in Berlin on 15 December and received high-level treatment from the East German government. He was received by both State Council Chairman Ulbricht and Foreign Minister Winzer. According to an East German radio account, Ulbricht described the local Front office as a "diplomatic mission." In Prague, however, a new Front representative who arrived on 16 December was not accorded diplomatic status. The Czech treatment of the delegation head made it clear that he was still accredited only to the nongovernmental Czech National Front.

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4. There is as yet no evidence that other Communist countries intend to change the status of the Front representative. In the USSR, for example, the Front representative is officially accredited to the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, although he frequently sees high-level Soviet leaders and attends diplomatic functions.

5. Accrediting the Front representative to a foreign government with the rank of ambassador is not a new move by Communist or leftist governments. Front delegations in Pyongyang, Havana, and Phnom Penh have enjoyed this status for some time--in the case of Pyongyang for more than a year.

6. The new flurry appears to be related to the Front's recent efforts to improve its international status and position without actually declaring itself a government. These efforts abroad include the publicity given its new political program and the more recent attempts to get maximum ventilation for this program by circulating it through the United Nations. To date there is little evidence that the Front intends to abandon its demonstrated reluctance to proclaim itself a formal government.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The Cambodian Government has now commented officially on the increasing speculation in the US press that allied forces may pursue Vietnamese Communist units into Cambodia. On 21 December Phnom Penh announced that "35,000 armed soldiers" and the "entire civilian population" would fight US troops if they "invaded" Cambodia. Chief of State Sihanouk recently warned the Cambodian people of possible US air and ground attacks and exhorted them to be prepared for full-scale guerrilla warfare. Phnom Penh has shifted a number of small military units to the frontier during the past six weeks and has ordered increased training of paramilitary elements. There is no evidence, however, that it intends a significant strengthening of its border defenses.

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