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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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122
19 December 1967

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Information as of 1600
19 December 1967
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HIGHLIGHTS

There have been a number of indications pointing to a forthcoming increase in Communist military activity in the southern portion of I Corps. In addition, several [redacted] reports suggest an increase in terrorism around Saigon to mark three Communist anniversaries on 19, 20, and 22 December.

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I. Military Situation in South Vietnam: Numerous small unit engagements were reported in widely scattered areas of the country on 18 December (Paras. 1-3). A number of [redacted] reports indicate that Communist forces are planning attacks in Quang Ngai Province and in the Saigon area (Paras. 4-11).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: One of Vice President Ky's advisers reportedly fears that Police Director Loan's anti-American campaign will have repercussions if allowed to continue (Paras. 1-3). Defense Minister Vy appeared before both houses of the legislature on 18 December to defend the government's mobilization decree (Paras. 4-7). The Farmer-Worker-Soldier Bloc has disbanded its Lower House contingent and is apparently having difficulty keeping its Upper House group together (Paras. 8-11).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Five North Vietnamese - piloted MIG-21s have flown from Meng-tzu Airfield in southwest China to Phuc Yen (Para. 1). Two, and possibly four, North Vietnamese MIG-17s were shot down by US aircraft on 18 December (Para. 2).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Vietnamese Communist spokesmen continue to take a tough line on negotiations and a settlement of the war (Paras. 1-2). The Communists are using the anniversary of the Front's founding to stress their resolve to continue the war (Paras. 3-4).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Numerous small unit engagements were reported in widely scattered areas of the country on 18 December. A total of nearly 40 such clashes in the I and II Corps areas resulted in 25 enemy killed and seven captured.

2. On 17 December a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) company ran into a fight in Hau Nghia Province about 26 miles northwest of Saigon. A second company airlifted into the battle area also came under heavy fire. Four helicopters were downed and six were damaged. Allied losses were five killed and 15 wounded, and enemy casualties came to 42 dead.

3. The enemy force involved was probably the Viet Cong 269th Main Force battalion. The heavy weapons company of the 269th is reported to have four heavy 12.8-mm. antiaircraft guns. A recent defector reported that Viet Cong units in Hau Nghia were receiving training in antiaircraft fire techniques at a special school located in the Ba Thu area of Cambodia, opposite the Hau Nghia Province border.

Communist Military Plans in Quang Ngai

4. The Communists are apparently planning to intensify military activity in the southern portion of I Corps in the near future. [redacted]

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6. A recent defector, who claims to have been one of the 1,000 prisoners freed in the Viet Cong raid on the Quang Ngai jail in late August, has stated [redacted] that a combat battalion was formed from among the ex-prisoners. The source, a member of the Viet Cong [redacted] stated that between December and February the "entire Quang Ngai Province force" plans to attack the provincial capital.

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Increased Enemy Activity Expected in the Saigon Area

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9. Three commemorative days fall in the 19th to 22nd period. The first of these is 19 December or National Resistance Day, commemorating the commencement of the Viet Minh resistance against the French in 1946. The 7th anniversary of the National Liberation Front is on 20 December, and 22 December is the 23rd anniversary of the formation of the North Vietnamese Army.

10. The Communists have used such occasions in the past to stage dramatic attacks for a maximum propaganda gain.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Dang Duc Khoi, newly appointed special assistant to Vice President Ky, believes Police Director Loan is behind the recent upsurge in anti-American editorials in the press and has advised Ky to restrain Loan. [REDACTED]

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Khoi reportedly met with Ky on 13 December to discuss the problem and mentioned several instances of anti-Americanism which could be attributed to Loan and his subordinate, Mai Den, whom Khoi described as the "mastermind" of these incidents. One was the series of anti-American articles which have recently appeared in the daily Cong Chung, a paper generally considered to be under at least a degree of direct control by Loan.

2. Khoi expressed the fear that, while the Loan - Mai Den campaign has not yet reached serious proportions, continued free rein for them could damage US-Vietnamese relations and even hurt the war effort. He therefore advised, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] that Ky persuade Loan to dismiss Mai Den and stop publication of Cong Chung. Ky reportedly promised to talk to Loan but said he would have a difficult time persuading him to let Mai Den go. Ky said he had tried this once before to no avail.

3. Khoi said he had already discussed the situation with Loan. Although Loan agreed that the Americans posed no real long-range threat to Vietnamese sovereignty, the two could reach no common ground on how to lessen shorter range frictions which result from the massive American presence. Loan reportedly told Khoi that Mai Den was a dedicated, clever intelligence officer who had done nothing worse than criticize the US. Loan therefore felt it would be incongruous to fire his subordinate while others about whom Loan had evidence of some wrongdoing were kept on by their superiors.

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Mobilization Decree Defended Before Assembly

4. Defense Minister Nguyen Van Vy met with both houses of the National Assembly on 18 December to defend the government's partial mobilization decree of 24 October. Although Vy's performance appeared to have been satisfactory, according to press reports the Upper House meeting on 19 December voted overwhelmingly to reject the government's justification of its decree. Preliminary indications are that the government's position may be supported by the Assembly. There is at least one report that three members of the Lower House are circulating a draft decree to substitute for the government's decree.

5. Vy met with members of the Upper House for about four hours in an open plenary session attended by all 60 members. He read a statement outlining the government's position, and defended the former Directorate's action in promulgating the decree as legal under Article 111 of the Constitution. Vy maintained that promulgation in October was necessary in view of an anticipated 1968 requirement for 64,000 additional men and because of the need to give those who will be affected as much time as possible to meet the eventuality. He also argued that lowering the draft age from 20 to 18 was a logical course for a nation at war. He added, however, that 18-year-olds will not be called up before the end of 1968. Student deferments, he noted, would be flexible, allowing superior students to continue their studies. Those who want to study abroad will be required to pass special examinations, and they will have to pursue studies that will benefit the nation.

6. The question-and-answer period in the Senate was generally orderly and without rancor. Vy answered questions touching on such subjects as the rates of desertion and draft evasion (both down 30 percent in 1967 from 1966); postponement of certain parts of the mobilization decree until the National Assembly has the opportunity to legalize the order (there is no longer a question of amending or suspending the decree--the important thing is to apply it fairly); and the

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. At least five North Vietnamese - piloted MIG-21 fighters flew from Meng-tzu Airfield in southwest China to Phuc Yen on 17 December. Some 18 to 20 North Vietnamese MIG-21s had flown to Chinese airfields since 30 June of this year. The 17 December flight marks the first detected return of MIG-21 aircraft to North Vietnam.

2. There are believed to be about eleven MIG-21s and possibly seven or eight MIG-17s at various airfields within North Vietnam. At least two and possibly four MIG-17s were shot down by US aircraft cannon fire on 18 and 19 December.

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subject of draft deferments (no favors should be given to sons of wealthy or prominent families and a crack-down should be made on students who use their studies to evade the draft). Another question touched on the point of why the draft age was lowered if only a 64,000-man increase is needed (replacements are needed for casualties and discharges as well as to increase the size of the military--as only 40 percent of army's needs will be met by conscription in 1968). Suspicions were voiced that the government used the mobilization of specialists as a way to control oppositionists (defense requirements are the only consideration for drafting specialists--the main need will be for doctors which are in particular short supply).

7. Vy appeared before a closed session of the Lower House on the afternoon of 18 December. According to two Lower House officers, Vy's performance was as good as the one he gave before the Upper House. After reading a prepared statement, he replied to some 120 questions. Inquiries reportedly fell into three broad categories: 1) those challenging the constitutionality of the decree itself; 2) those questioning the fairness of the decree; and 3) those relating to what action the government might take if the National Assembly "rejects" the decree or requests that its application be suspended. Vy, in responding to the questions posed, stressed the need for the immediate application of the decree. He declared, however, that the government would follow another mobilization law if one were passed by the assembly.

Farmer-Worker-Soldier Bloc on the Downswing

8. The Lower House contingent of the Farmer-Worker-Soldier Bloc has reportedly decided to disband for lack of active participation. The Upper House contingent may also be near dissolving.

9. [redacted] five members of the Lower House group made the decision to disband on 10 December, following a series of meetings which went almost unattended. The five reportedly attribute their group's demise to the diminishing popularity of the bloc's leaders, most of whom are

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senators. Senator Dang Van Sung and Tran Quoc Buu, president of the Vietnamese Confederation of Workers, they say, are too pro-American, while Senator Ton That Dinh is too pro-Buddhist and antigovernment. The five also believe that Tran Van Don, president of the bloc, is a good man but not politically astute.

10. The bloc is losing prestige in the Upper House, according to Senator Nguyen Gia Hien, leader of the Senate's National Democratic Socialist Bloc. Hien reportedly claims that both Don and Dinh are primarily military men, uninterested in politics or political party formation. He claims that they can find no common ground with members of other Upper House blocs and will not discuss practical politics.

11. Although Hien's attitude may be slightly colored because of Don's refusal to go along with a proposal that their two blocs merge, there are other indications of Don's political ineptitude. This may hurt not only his bloc, but also his chances for election to the Upper House chairmanship. Hien has said that his bloc's votes will go to Senator Nguyen Van Huyen, despite Don's appeal for Hien's support. President Thieu, in addition, has reportedly indicated his preference for Huyen over Don.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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3.5(c)V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. North Vietnamese spokesmen abroad continue to take a tough line on the question of settling the war. They insist that an unconditional cessation of the bombing must precede any negotiations and that a settlement must be in accordance with their terms.

2. In a lengthy interview with a western journalist last week, Tran Viet Dung, counselor of the North Vietnamese mission in France, refused to consider any suggestions for achieving a settlement except on the basis of well-known Communist positions. He placed the blame for the war squarely on the US and claimed that the American aim is to destroy North Vietnam's sovereignty and bring it into the US "sphere of influence." Dung also claimed that the Liberation Front is much stronger than the "Saigon clique" but was unable to agree to or to even comprehend a proposal that the US and North Vietnam withdraw and leave a compromise government in the South.

Liberation Front Anniversary

3. The Vietnamese Communists are using the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the founding of the Liberation Front to voice their determination to press on with the war. At a meeting in Hanoi, Front and North Vietnamese officials spoke of their resolve and determination to continue the struggle. One spokesman portrayed the coming period as "one of violent and fierce battles," but claimed that the people will not shrink from any sacrifice or trial and that the North abides by the slogan, "everything for the fraternal south."

4. Similar statements were made at a gathering of Front officials in a "liberated area" in the South. Nguyen Huu Tho, head of the Front presidium, addressed high-level members of the Front and denounced what he termed "deceitful US peace negotiations." According to an 18 December broadcast, he also set forth "the future trend of the tasks of the Southern Armed Forces and People."

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