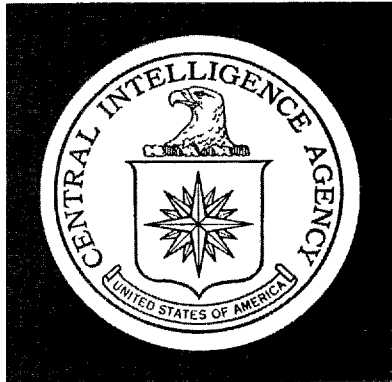


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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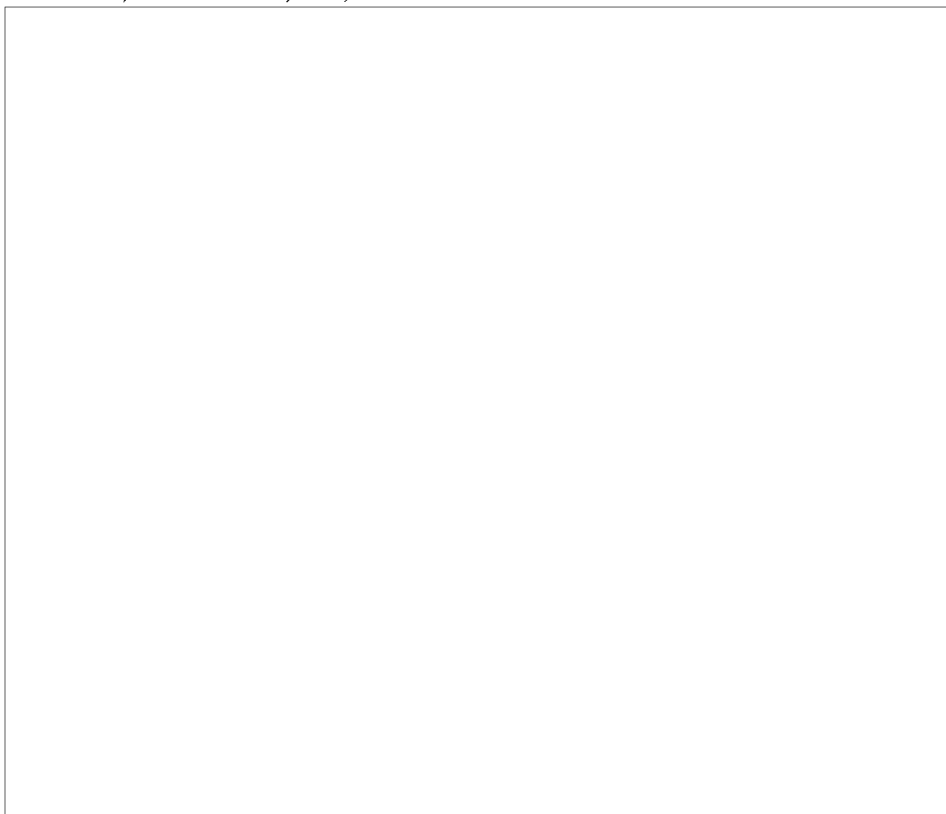
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This document contains classified information affecting the national security of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, US Code Title 18, Sections 793, 794, and 798.



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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

The South Vietnamese Government's recent mobilization decree has come under fire in the Senate. Hanoi is keenly interested in the US presidential elections but is cautious in assessing the impact of antiadministration sentiment.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
North Vietnamese gunners attacked six allied positions in Kontum Province with mortar fire on 26-27 November (Para. 1). US Marines reported two sharp clashes in I Corps (Para. 2).

[Redacted]

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Senate on 25 November began discussing the recent mobilization decree, charging that its promulgation was unconstitutional.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]. The lower house has recessed temporarily, but several deputies have been actively seeking assistance for their constituents (Para. 3).

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

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

V. Communist Political Developments: A Vietnamese spokesman has expressed interest in the forthcoming US presidential elections. Hanoi has, however, repeatedly indicated that it foresees no change in US policy as a result of the election (Paras. 1-4).

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VI. Other Major Aspects: The Laotian Government has registered its strongest public protest to date against the possible extension of a defensive barrier into Laos (Paras. 1-3).

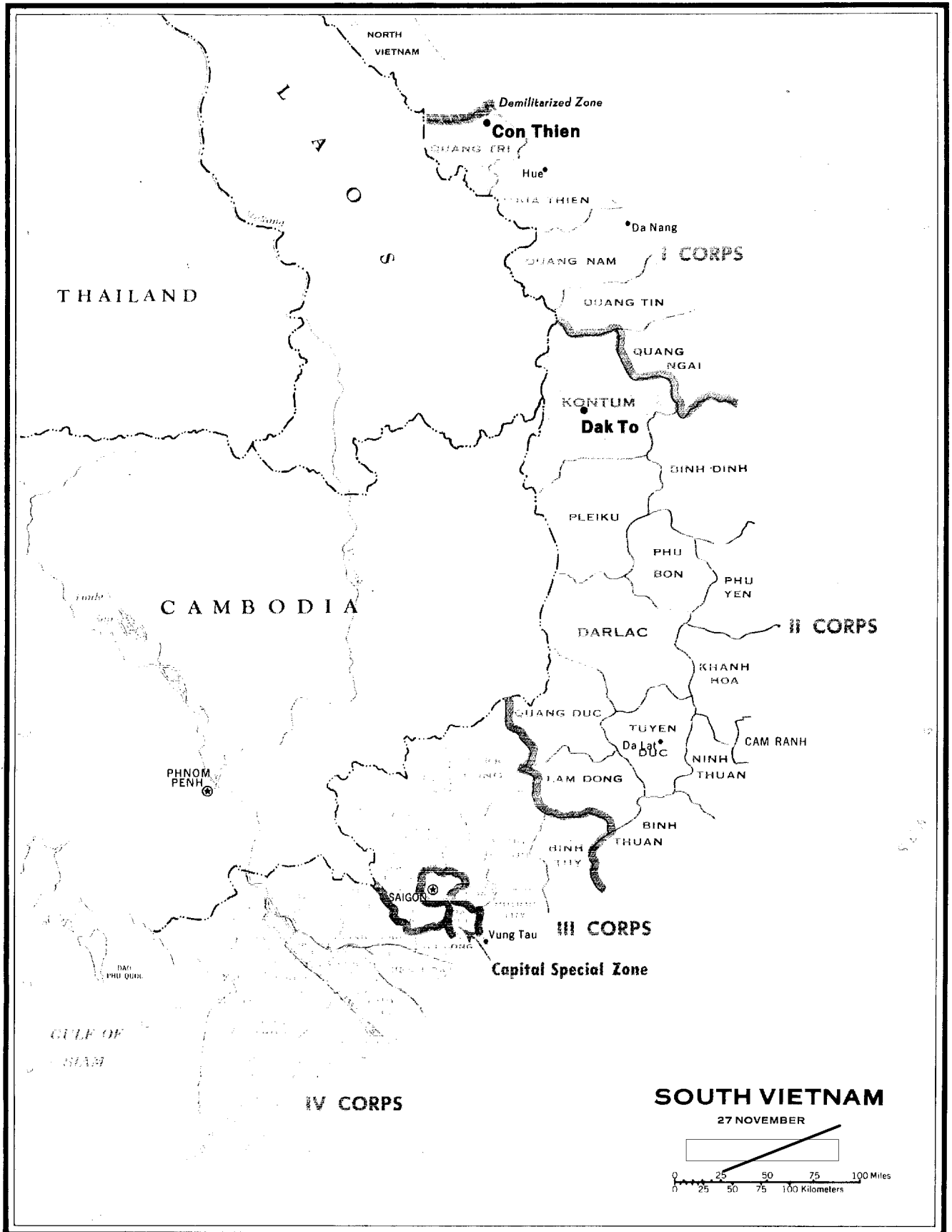
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3.5(c)I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. North Vietnamese troops hit four US outposts in the Dak To area with some 250 mortar rounds on 26 November. Early on the 27th two allied positions in the nearby provincial capital, Kontum city, were also hit. US casualties in the attacks were six killed and 31 wounded. US military officers speculate that the enemy may have fired this large amount of ammunition to use it up prior to completing a withdrawal from the Dak To battle area.

[redacted], but additional fighting cannot be ruled out in this area.

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2. US Marines reported two sharp clashes in I Corps. In the heaviest action 12 Marines were killed and 66 wounded in a day-long fight in the coastal lowlands some 19 miles southwest of Da Nang. Another engagement near the southern boundary of the Demilitarized Zone cost seven US lives. Twenty-two North Vietnamese soldiers were reported killed in that fight.

The Situation in the DMZ

3. The Demilitarized Zone has been relatively quiet for nearly two months. The last major action in this area was the massive artillery shelling of Con Thien in September. There are now indications pointing to a resumption of fighting in this sector.

4. The most important is the movement of the North Vietnamese 304th Division from its garrison area at the Thanh Hoa southward toward the zone. [redacted]

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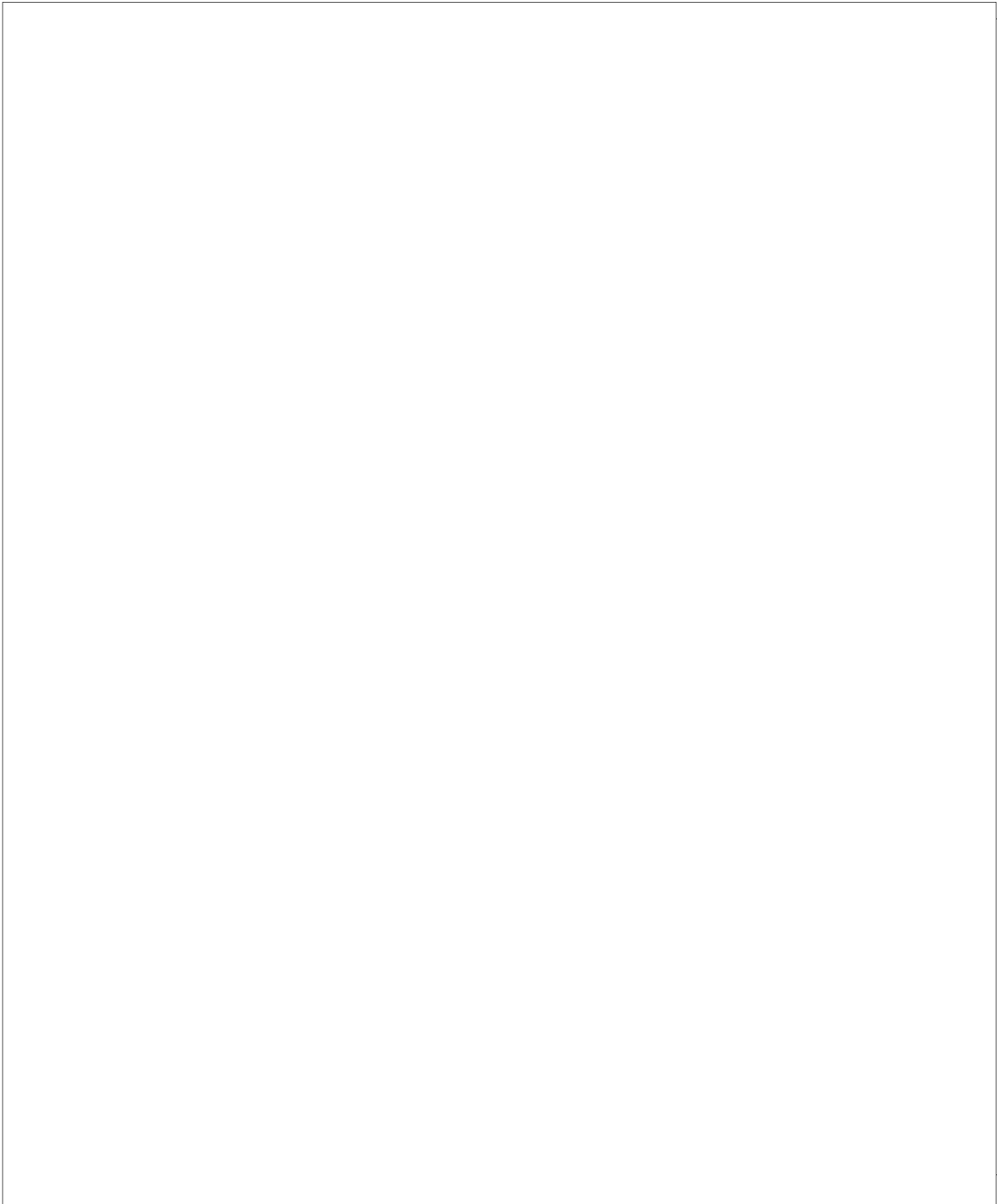
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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Senate on 25 November took up discussion of the government's recent mobilization decree and indicated general displeasure that it was promulgated unilaterally by the government before the legislature was invested. Although a number of senators criticized the substance of the decree, particularly the lowering of the draft age, the majority were concerned with its constitutionality. It was finally agreed that Prime Minister Loc or his representative should be invited before the Senate to discuss the decree and answer questions. Final language of the invitation is to be decided on at the Senate's next session on 28 November.

2. Defense Minister Vy reportedly is dissatisfied with the caliber of Vietnamese Army officers and is considering revamping the selection process. Rather than use a college degree as the sole criterion for admission to officer candidate school, Vy would reportedly first induct college graduates as privates and then screen them carefully for officer qualifications before giving commissions to those who measure up.

Lower House Activities

3. The lower house has recessed until 1 December while its rules committee begins work on drafting rules. Meanwhile, a number of deputies have been seeing to the needs of their constituents. Several deputies from central highland provinces met with Defense Minister Vy on 21 November to request better security along roads in the area. Other deputies have distributed relief supplies in their constituencies or have approached the government for such things as more refugee assistance and better compensation for war damage.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi continues to show keen interest in the US presidential elections, but it is cautious in assessing the impact of antiadministration sentiment. North Vietnamese commentary takes pains to show that the regime is not counting on the elections for a change in US policy, and to stress that the war must be won by frustrating US objectives in South Vietnam.

2. Mai Van Bo, North Vietnam's chief representative in France, touched on some of these points in a recent conversation with a Western journalist. Bo said that he believes the Vietnam war will be the principal theme of the election. He said he accepted, with "some reservation," US opinion polls showing a marked decline in President Johnson's popularity. He also said that he attaches particular importance to the New Hampshire primary as a preview of the November election.

3. Bo also claimed that "aggressive" US military and economic policies will eventually become stalemated and that the US will have to return to a "forced isolationism," and to a policy of "peaceful coexistence." His remarks are consistent with those of other regime spokesmen, who usually seek to avoid any implication that North Vietnam expects an early end to the war.

4. This theme was taken up recently in the army daily Quan Doi Nhan Dan, which commented approvingly on the antiwar sentiment in the US. The paper asserted that North Vietnam does not overestimate "internal contradiction" in the US. The deciding factor for victory, said the daily, is to "change the balance of strength in our favor on the battlefield by beating the Americans and their allies, militarily and politically." Whatever the results of the US presidential elections, it went on, the Vietnam policy of the US Government "will not change fundamentally by itself."

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3.5(c)VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The Laotian Government, in its strongest statement to date, has reiterated its opposition to the extension in Laos of the defensive barrier being constructed south of the Demilitarized Zone. A recent article in the official government newspaper argued that a manned barrier in Laos "would be without doubt an act in violation of the Geneva Accords."

2. The article, apparently written under the direction of Souvanna Phouma, appears in part to be an answer to a recent Newsweek article speculating that a manned barrier may be extended into Communist-controlled Laos, with or without the approval of Vientiane. It could also be that Souvanna has taken this opportunity to placate the Russians, who expressed irritation over his pro-Western remarks during recent trips to Washington and Canberra.

3. Although a barrier would somewhat tarnish Vientiane's neutrality, Souvanna appears more concerned that it would increase his country's direct involvement in the Vietnam war. He has also expressed fear that an artificial barrier would result in a de facto division of Laos and would encourage regional separatism.

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