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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

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17 November 1967
No. 0316/67

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C O N T E N T S

(Information as of noon EST, 16 November 1967)

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FAR EAST

The Communist "winter-spring campaign" in South Vietnam focused last week on the western highland provinces of Darlac and Kontum. The willingness of Communist commanders to take heavy losses in actions around Dak To underscores their aim of drawing in and tying down major allied forces in order to relieve pressure on Communist positions in coastal areas and the delta. This objective was also reflected in Hanoi propaganda claims that US forces have lost the initiative in the highlands and have been forced into a "passive posture" throughout South Vietnam.

In Saigon, Prime Minister Nguyen Van Loc announced a cabinet that is dominated by generals and holdovers from the Ky government. Although the new cabinet is balanced regionally and religiously, only a few members have been chosen on essentially political grounds and most appear to be competent technicians or experienced administrators.

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VIETNAM

Communist main force units, supported by local Viet Cong elements, have launched an ambitious "winter-spring campaign" in South Vietnam's western highlands. Since the campaign began early this month, the enemy has staged a series of large-scale assaults, ambushes, and heavy mortar barrages on US and South Vietnamese positions from southern Darlac Province to central Kontum Province.

The focus of this activity has been the area around Dak To, where at least five North Vietnamese regiments--some 7,000 men--are currently deployed. US and South Vietnamese forces countering the Communist threat in this area now total more than 9,000 men, including 12 battalions and their respective headquarters units.

Enemy losses thus far in the campaign around Dak To have been extremely high and will undoubtedly affect the efficiency of future efforts. Since the current fighting began on 3 November, more than 600 enemy soldiers have been killed in contrast to friendly casualties of 102 killed and 533 wounded. The Communist forces nevertheless possess the manpower and heavy weapons, possibly including rocket forces, to mount additional large-scale actions.

The enemy strategy evidently also includes maintaining pressure on allied units in Pleiku and Darlac provinces. The North Vietnamese 95B Regiment, which has been recently reinforced, remains ac-

tive in western Pleiku. Small unit attacks, probes, and shellings are expected against some of the more lucrative allied targets in the area. Elements of the North Vietnamese 33rd Regiment have been involved in several mortar attacks on US positions near Ban Me Thuot.

According to a recently captured enemy document, Communist plans for the "winter-spring" offensive in the highlands call for large-scale maneuvers designed to draw in and tie down large numbers of allied troops, thus relieving to some extent allied pressure in the coastal areas. The highlands campaign has apparently also been coordinated with recent intensive enemy efforts farther south in northern III Corps.

For the present, however, a lull in activity in northern III Corps continues. Some of the Communist forces in northern Binh Long and Phuoc Long provinces are regrouping, while others are continuing to prepare for future offensive activities. Elements of the Viet Cong 9th Division, which apparently took heavy losses in the recent fighting around Loc Ninh, have moved northward to positions near the Cambodian border. Elements of two North Vietnamese regiments are just south of Song Be. They have been noted making battle preparations, including the construction of defensive positions and, possibly, the preparation of 140-mm. rocket

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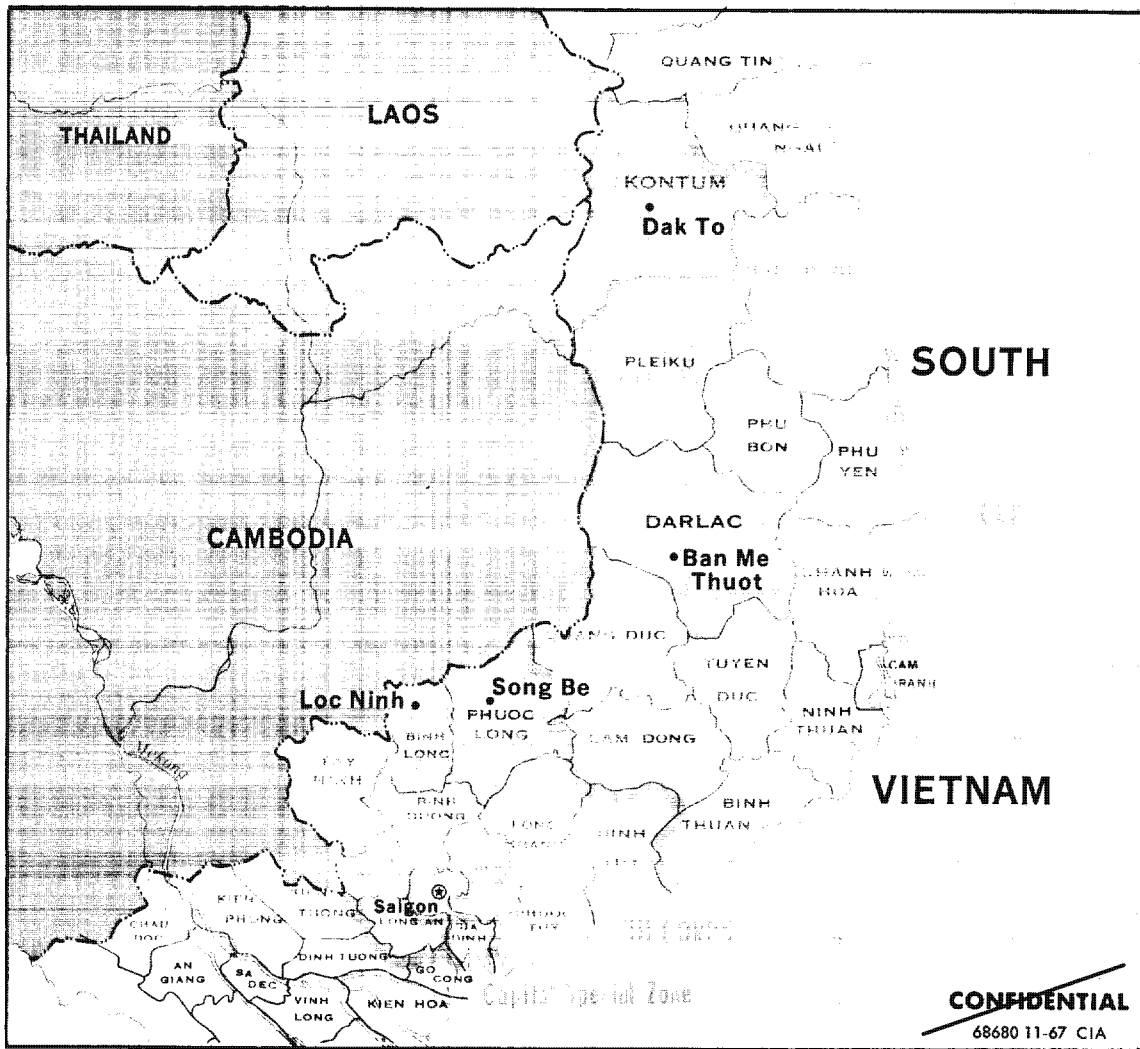
firing positions--heretofore un-
observed in III Corps.

Political Developments
In South Vietnam

Prime Minister Nguyen Van
Loc announced the formation of the
new cabinet on 9 November. Nine
of its 17 ministers served in the
previous cabinet. The key minis-
tries--defense, interior, foreign
affairs, revolutionary development,

and economy--are headed either by
generals or by holdovers from the
Ky government.

Although the new cabinet is
balanced regionally and reli-
giously, only a few of the appoint-
ees have been chosen on essen-
tially political grounds. Rather,
most appear to be competent tech-
nicians or experienced administra-
tors. The appointments therefore
largely confirm earlier statements



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of President Thieu that cabinet members would be selected on the basis of competence and ability to work together.

The recently elected lower house of the National Assembly held its first working session on 8 November. Nguyen Ba Luong was named acting chairman and Duong Van Ba acting secretary general. Luong has since announced he will be a candidate for the permanent chairmanship of the lower house. His principal rival for that post probably will be Ho Huu Tuong, a prominent Buddhist layman identified with the militant Buddhist faction. The government is opposed to Tuong's candidacy, and is reportedly attempting to organize opposition to it.

The upper house, continuing to work on its internal organization, has decided to create 12 standing committees to deal with legislative matters and its own internal affairs. The senators decided not to create a position of secretary general, principally because they did not want so much power vested in one man. Instead, a five- to ten-man internal affairs and rules committee will probably act as the regulatory body for such matters as controlling the agenda and ruling on legislative procedures.

Political maneuvering in the legislature, apart from the competition for assembly offices, presently centers on efforts to create political blocs in the lower house. Although there are reports that religious and other

groups are endeavoring to form blocs that would give them political leverage, the most successful effort to date appears to be that of the government in launching the Democratic Bloc, with possibly as many as 50 members.

The Democratic Bloc, being promoted by Ky and other top leaders, will reportedly assume a strong progovernment stance in the lower house and will support Nguyen Ba Luong's bid to become chairman of that body. Luong will be the nominal head of the bloc, but the actual leadership will be vested in Representative Le Tai Hoa, reportedly at Ky's request.

Ho Chi Minh Possibly Ailing

[REDACTED] 3.3(h)(2)
[REDACTED] HO was "very weak" and was confined to bed when the Soviet ambassador invited him to the celebrations in Moscow. The 77-year-old leader, moreover, has made no public appearances since North Vietnam's national day celebrations in late August.

Despite his inactivity and apparent aloofness from the political scene, there has been no indication that his subordinates have had difficulty in running the country without his immediate leadership and direction. The evidence suggests that the regime's major policies--particularly on strategy for the war and on possible peace negotiations--have been the result of collective decision-making. [REDACTED] 3.5(c)

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NORTH VIETNAM'S SHIPPING PROBLEMS GROW

North Vietnam's port operations continue to be hampered by cargo handling difficulties. Essential needs are being met, however, and in recent months port congestion has been somewhat eased.

Imports by sea in the first half of this year reached a record high average of about 128,000 tons per month. This placed heavy demands on port facilities, particularly at Haiphong. Ships had to wait days before starting to unload and cargo began to pile up on the docks. By August, turnaround time for ships was averaging more than 30 days.

Since then, however, imports by sea have been cut back and congestion has eased. In October, only about 90,000 tons were unloaded and the average turnaround time dropped to 19 days. This was still higher, however, than in 1966 when the average turnaround time was only 13 days.

Silting in the main channel into Haiphong also creates problems and most ships must now enter the harbor at high tide. Those drawing as much as 26 feet of water have been forced to wait ten days or more for a high enough tide.

The average load per ship is now being reduced--possibly to permit entry to the harbor at any

high tide. In some recent cases, small Soviet ships carrying flour have been diverted to other ports to ease the strain at Haiphong.

Bomb damage to key bridges in the Haiphong area has made the moving of goods through the port area increasingly difficult and time consuming. Pontoon bridges, ferries, and the intensified use of inland waterways, however, have minimized the disruption to the transport system. In addition, frequent air raid alerts, especially at Haiphong, cut considerably into working time at the docks.

Despite these problems, North Vietnam continues to import essential nonmilitary goods by sea. Bulk foodstuffs accounted for over 65 percent of October's imports and petroleum totaled another 13 percent. The North Vietnamese should be able to maintain the present level of cargo arrivals.

Instead of using Haiphong, cargo from incoming ships can be loaded into barges at the many island anchorages in the Gulf of Tonkin. This has been done in the past with tankers but probably would be done on a large scale only as a last resort because barges shuttling to and from the mainland would be highly vulnerable to air attacks.

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