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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

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C O N T E N T S

(Information as of noon EST, 21 December 1967)

Far East

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<p>Communist military activity remained at a relatively low level throughout South Vietnam during the past week. Meanwhile, in its first test of strength with the National Assembly, the Thieu government failed to get full approval of its partial mobilization decree.</p>	



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COMMUNISTS STEP UP MILITARY ACTIVITY IN LAOS	7
<p>The Communists have launched their annual dry-season offensive, and there are tenuous signs that a more wide-ranging effort may be made this year.</p>	



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FAR EAST

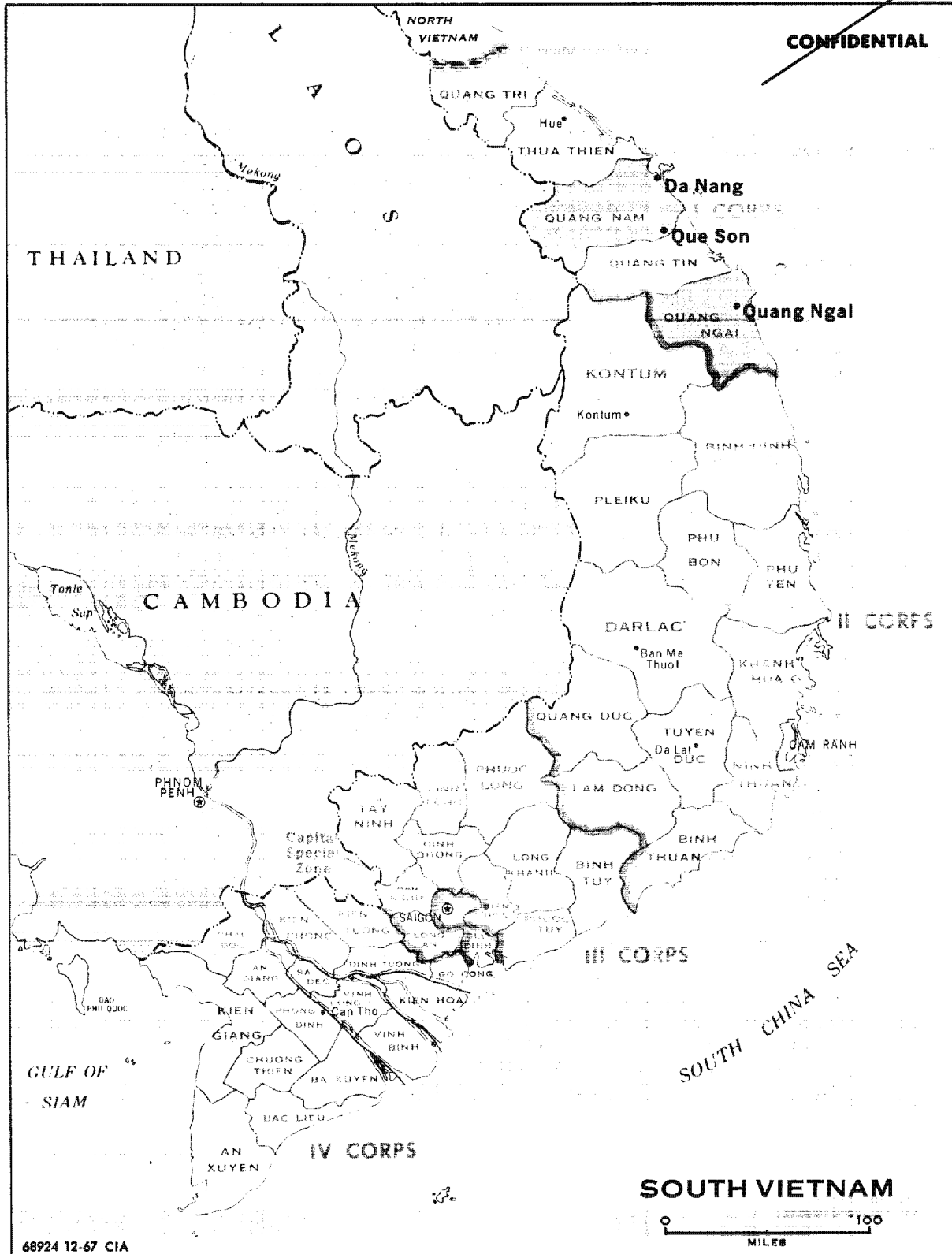
Communist military activity in South Vietnam remained at a relatively low level but there was further evidence of plans for a major Communist offensive in the heavily populated coastal area of central South Vietnam. The National Liberation Front's seventh anniversary was the occasion for renewed assurances of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese resolve to continue fighting until "final victory." Premier Chou En-lai publicly promised "more effective" Chinese support but confined himself to the standard description of China's role as a "dependable rear" for the Vietnamese people's struggle.

Communist forces in Laos have launched their annual dry-season offensive, with some signs of a more sustained and wide-ranging campaign this year. Unconfirmed reports tell of North Vietnamese troops moving into northern Laos. In reaction to an attack by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces on a government base in southern Laos, Premier Souvanna Phouma again denounced the presence of the North Vietnamese as a flagrant violation of the Geneva accords.

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SOUTH VIETNAM



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VIETNAM

Communist-initiated military activity remained at a relatively low level throughout South Vietnam during the past week. The few significant encounters in recent days resulted mainly from US and South Vietnamese sweep operations, some of which penetrated deep into sensitive Communist base areas and caused a considerable number of enemy casualties.

Despite the low level of activity, there are new indications that the Communists are planning to intensify their military efforts in various sections of the country. Extensive repositioning and maneuvering of enemy combat units point to a renewal of offensive activity in the near future.

Documents recently captured in Quang Nam Province outlined a plan in which one regiment of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division would conduct a diversionary attack near Que Son to draw allied reaction forces into the area from nearby strongpoints. This regiment would then withdraw and join forces with the division's other two subordinate regiments to attack the remaining allied forces to the south. Because of the heavy casualties suffered by the 2nd Division in recent months, however, there is some doubt this plan can be put into effect.

In Quang Ngai Province, an

[redacted] suggest that the province and its capital city may

be focal points of impending attacks.

Political Developments
in South Vietnam

In its first test of strength with the National Assembly, the Thieu government failed to get approval of its partial mobilization decree. On 18 December, Defense Minister Nguyen Van Vy went before each house of the assembly to defend the decree. Although Vy's presentation was well received, according to several senators, the Upper House the following day resoundingly rebuffed the government, largely on the basis of allegations that the decree is unconstitutional.

The Lower House also may not approve Vy's defense of the mobilization decree. Because of the generally progovernment Democratic Bloc, however, the government has more leverage in the Lower House and could stave off a rejection.

In any case, the Thieu administration apparently plans to implement its decree on 1 January with or without National Assembly approval, thus risking further difficulties in its relations with the legislature. Vy indicated during the interpellation, however, that if the assembly passed a mobilization law of its own, the government would carry it out.

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On 19 December, the government brought to trial in a military court 26 persons involved in the 1966 Buddhist "struggle" movement, which was centered in I Corps. Prominent among the defendants are the former mayor of Da Nang, Dr. Nguyen Van Man, and a former area commander, Colonel Dam Quang Yeu. Conviction and heavy sentences may bring about another confrontation between the government and the militant Buddhists. There are also indications that the Viet Cong are formulating plans to exploit the issue by attempting to stimulate mass protests.

President Thieu has indicated that if the "strugglers" are convicted, he may exercise clemency. Sentiment against the trial is running high in the National Assembly, however, and both houses have formed committees to look into the matter of amnesty for political prisoners.

Bui Quang San, a member of the Lower House from Quang Nam Province, was assassinated by two unknown persons on 15 December. Government spokesmen have claimed that the Viet Cong were responsible for San's death, but there is some possibility that he was killed as the result of his involvement in a political squabble within the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD).

NFLSV Anniversary Celebrated

The Liberation Front's pretension of being the sole representative of the South Vietnamese people received strong endorsement from its Communist allies this week in propaganda accompanying the celebration of the Front's seventh anniversary on 20 December. The North Vietnamese stressed their own and the Front's resolve to struggle until "final victory," pointing to the success already achieved in the current winter-spring campaign as evidence that the Communists have the military initiative.

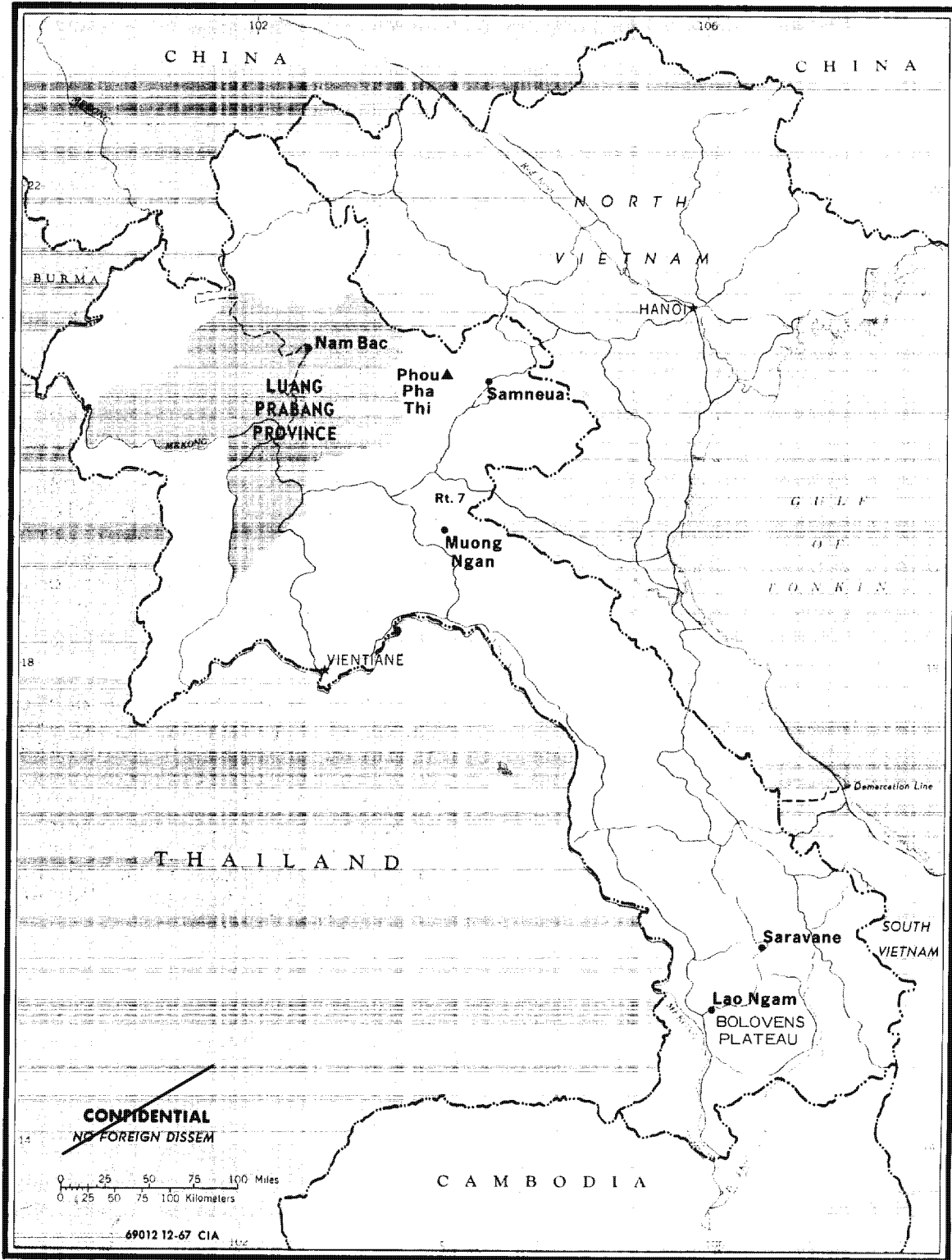
In their propaganda on the anniversary, Moscow and Peking stressed the significance of the Front's new political program but, in doing so also pointed up their differing views on the conflict. Soviet statements took Moscow's usual line that the program will be particularly important in solving the Vietnamese problem. The Chinese, on the other hand, only rarely refer to the program and this time chose to emphasize that portion having a militant and uncompromising tone. In its over-all treatment of the anniversary, Peking repeated its strong but carefully worded offers of encouragement and support to the Vietnamese as long as they continue to fight. [REDACTED]

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LAOS



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COMMUNISTS STEP UP MILITARY ACTIVITY IN LAOS

The Communists have launched their annual dry-season offensive in Laos, and there are tenuous signs that a more wide-ranging effort may be made this year.

The most significant Communist activity has occurred near the northern edge of the Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos. On 11 December, two battalions of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops overran a government base camp at Lao Ngam, inflicting heavy casualties on the camp's defenders. The following day, an important government guerrilla outpost a few miles to the north was captured by the enemy. Although Lao Ngam was subsequently reoccupied, the attack represents an important setback to the government's long-range security and development programs in this rich, rice-growing area.

The Communists are now threatening the provincial capital of Saravane, [redacted]

[redacted] Saravane is only lightly defended by government troops, and its tactical importance is minimal, but its loss would be a severe psychological blow to the government.

The recent enemy actions appear to be a resumption of the campaign launched in late July to counter the government's increased presence around the rim of the Bolovens. The Communists

are almost certainly aware that stepped-up intelligence and harassment operations are being mounted from some of these advanced bases, and their attacks are designed to thwart government encroachment into the infiltration corridor. The Communists also want to push government troops from the Bolovens, but it is unlikely they are willing to sustain the losses such an undertaking would entail.

At any rate, the region's military commander will probably try to use the Communist threat to the plateau to persuade the general staff in Vientiane that the recent deployment of southern-based troops to northern Laos has left the south in a precarious military position.

In the north, the Communists are continuing their campaign against government-supported guerrilla outposts south and west of Samneua. They may be planning to isolate Phou Pha Thi, an important staging base for government guerrilla and air operations in the area. Such bases have frequently changed hands during past offensives, and it is unlikely that the Communists can hold any of them for long in the face of air support for government troops.

This season, the Communists will probably also attempt to counter recent government gains

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in the north, and there are unconfirmed reports that as many as 3,000 North Vietnamese troops are moving into Laos along Route 7. A likely spot for a Communist thrust would be in the Muong Ngan Valley, an important rice-producing area recently brought under government control. A continued government presence in this area

would weaken the enemy's southern defense of the Plaine des Jarres. The Communists are also continuing to move troops and supplies into northern Luang Prabang Province, suggesting that another push against government positions at Nam Bac may be in the offing.

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