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Resumé of Current Security Conditions

(NOTE: While none of the information contained in the following report is quoted from classified material, it is requested that this report be handled in a discreet manner to avoid any misunderstanding that classified information is being passed on in an indiscriminate manner to East Lansing.)

Previous notes from Saigon have referred to a general deterioration of the security condition, which also have been supported by comments in both the local and international press. In general, this deterioration has taken the nature of increased activity on the part of the Viet Cong which includes acts of terrorism against individuals and groups, whether peaceful villagers or members of the Vietnamese Government armed services. The stepped-up activity has, of course, been most noticeable in the area south of Saigon, extending all the way to the seacoast; however, it has been reported recently that six Vietnamese medical technicians were killed by the Viet Cong just outside of BanMeThuot. In another incident, two American hunters and a French guide were ambushed in Binh Long Province just north of Saigon. The Frenchman was killed and the two Americans returned fire, reportedly killing two Viet Cong. There have also been verified reports of a private car being blown up on the highway north of Saigon, the latest newspaper account reporting this as having occurred 31 kilometers north of Saigon.

On Sunday, August 7, two Vietnamese jeeps were ambushed on the road leading to Cap St. Jacques. Several people were killed. As a result of this incident, many Americans and others who were spending the weekend at the Cap were forced to stay overnight there and were given an escort back to Saigon the next morning. On Handville's last return from the Cap on August 20, he also was provided with an escort part of the way back to Saigon. Adkins and Nicol have been out in the field during the last two weeks around Dalat, Nha Trang, BanMeThuot, and Hue; however, they were not provided with armed escorts because the local Surété chiefs did not feel it was necessary.

August 19 was one of the days during which GVN anticipated trouble, in view of the fact that this is a North Vietnamese holiday, as is September 2. The local police stepped up their patrol activities from August 17 to August 23, and over that weekend made a number of arrests involving groups of ten and twenty people. These people were armed with grenades, knives, propaganda literature, etc., and according to police were prepared to cause trouble. The police have again stepped up their control activities in anticipation of similar trouble during the September 2 period. October 26 is the next day which is causing some concern for the local police. In reviewing our monthly reports, we notice that there is a gradual increase in the number of political and administrative arrests reported by the Surété.

As a result of this activity, many aspects of the American aid program have been slowed down, if not halted. While Americans still travel on official business throughout the country, there are many areas in the south where they cannot travel because the local agencies are not able to provide enough security and recommend that they stay away from some of the more remote places. This means that some programs in agriculture, health, malaria control, land reform, canal work, etc., cannot receive as much supervision as they did in the past.

While unofficial travel for pleasure outside of the city of Saigon has not been formally prohibited, all trips, official and otherwise, must be cleared with Embassy Security and the recommendations are such that unofficial travel is virtually discouraged and prohibited if one reads between the lines. Pleasure trips outside the city are permitted on scheduled airlines.

There has not seemed to be any undue concern about the situation in Laos insofar as it may or may not affect Vietnam at this time. However, officials have reported that there is a more notable feeling of unrest and/or insecurity among the Vietnamese at this time, caused principally by the increased activity of the Viet Cong.

RFT:pp

✓cc: Dr. Musolf