SEPTEMBER THREAT ASSESSMENT

1. (U) USDAO Saigon Monthly Intelligence Summary and Threat Analysis (MISTA) for September 1974 follows.

2. (C) This month's MISTA contains the following subjects:

   North Vietnam
   - Political Developments
   - Infiltration
   - Air Defense Developments

   South Vietnam
   - Communist Military Activity
   - Conclusion

3. (C) Hanoi's media have continued the hardened propaganda line mounted in mid-August following President Ford's assertion that the United States' Vietnam policy would not change. Reference to an urban struggle "to topple" the Thieu government, noted for the first time since the Ceasefire on 15 August, has been carried forward:

   "The contradictions between the southern people ... and the Thieu clique have become very acute and are of an explosive character. The time has come for the compatriots...to realize clearly that no peace, no national concord."

   Nhan Dan, 14 September 1974

   This theme has been taken a step further by Liberation Radio in a rare appeal to ARVN officers to take part in the overthrow of their government:

   "Toppling Thieu and compelling the U.S. to end its involvement in SVN...are the tactful and correct lines of action and a path that you, well-informed officers in the Saigon Army, are advised to follow in order to cope with the present situation."

   Liberation Radio, 19 September 1974
Hanoi has also suggested that Washington's political support for Thieu is waning:

"The new U.S. rulers, stubbornly continuing to pursue the Nixon doctrine, are still using Thieu as a tool to continue the Vietnамized war policy and repress all opposition forces while preparing conditions for changing horses when compelling circumstances arise."

_Nhan Dan, 14 September 1974_

4. (C) A shift to hardline propaganda has preceded major Communist offensives. The generally aggressive tone of the present campaign, however, seems designed to bolster morale and motivation among troops and cadre, exhorting them to take advantage of what Hanoi perceives as "new opportunities" created by the uncertainties facing the Thieu administration, i.e., the transition of power in Washington, U.S. and SVN domestic economic problems, congressional cuts of military aid, and recent internal SVN expressions of discontent.

5. (C) Furthermore, Premier Pham Van Dong's 1 September DRV National Day address was rather subdued in regard to Communist intentions in the South. The Premier concentrated on accomplishments in the North since the ceasefire and reasserted Hanoi's commitment to "strictly respect and seriously implement" the Paris agreement. In a key passage, Dong listed these tasks for the future:

"We must devote all our strength to restoring and developing our economy and developing culture (and) stabilize and gradually improve our people's life."

_Hanoi Radio, 2 September 1974_

He consistently referred to the war in the past tense and tied the North's military potential to defense of the homeland:

"We must remain highly vigilant, constantly strengthening our national defense potential and standing ready to smash all provocative acts of the enemy against the DRV."

_Hanoi Radio, 1 September 1974_

6. (C) In short, Dong seemed to disallow any major near-term change in Hanoi's current pursuit of a balanced military/political policy to achieve its objectives in the South. In
concluding his speech, however, the Premier called on party cadre to "achieve unanimity of views and unity of actions." This unusual plea along with the variance between the media's on-going hardline propaganda and the softened tone of Dong's speech, suggests some disunity among the party leadership.

7. (S) Infiltration activity remained at a seasonal low level in September. Since mid-April, all combat replacement groups have gone to the northern areas of SVN. Only 4 such groups, totaling about 2,600 men, were reported in September, bringing the total for 1974 to 87,200. In addition, the NVA has begun to beef up MR-559 rear service units. These rear service units are actively upgrading the infiltration/logistic system's capability to support a sustained high volume dry season infiltration and logistics effort. In order to support expected heavy truck traffic on Route 14, NVA engineers are continuing to increase high-speed dual-lane road construction to eliminate bottlenecks caused by existing single land roads. Heavy road building equipment -- road graders, road rollers and rock crushers -- is being sent by sea to Dong Ha, as well as pipeline sections, cement and other construction material for use by rear service units. Meanwhile, food, supplies, and ammunition are being prepositioned to support the coming effort. Although the NVA has created a highly efficient and versatile infiltration/logistic system, the future level of infiltration and cargo shipment remains unknown at this time.

8. (S) In SVN, the NVA has expanded its SAM defenses to cover all of Quang Tri Province. Two new sites at Cam Lo provide increased air defenses for the Cam Lo/Dong Ha logistics and settlement areas, and will further hinder potential VNAF air operations and reconnaissance over the so-called "liberated areas" of Quang Tri Province.

9. (S) Communist military activity in MR-1 during September remained high. Thua Thien Province replaced Quang Nam as the scene of the heaviest activity as RVNAF forward positions received continuous pressure throughout the month. The Communists achieved their most important gains in Phu Loc (D) where 324B Division and provincial units reestablished control over high ground contested since April and attempted to push forward into the lowlands. After a series of setbacks, ARVN 1st Division forces, reinforced by return of the 54th Regiment from Quang Nam, blunted the Communists' advance by mid-month. The situation has now stabilized, but recent sharp ground contacts attest to the continued Communist pressure in the area. Similar Communist attacks against Marine, Airborne and Ranger Outposts west and northwest of Hue and along the Ceasefire line in Quang Tri netted only minor gains.
10. (S) Quang Nam Province remained stable with the most
significant activity focusing on airborne and 3rd Division
efforts to regain territory lost in the Thuong Duc area and
Que Son Valley with only limited advances being made. How­
ever, a series of sharp ground contacts northeast of Thuong
Duc in early October may presage a final Communist thrust
before the rains by mid-October inhibit major offensive
activity.

11. (S) In order of battle developments, a prisoner reported
the move of the 41st Regiment into Quang Nam during August.
He indicated that the 1200-man regiment would operate in an
area northeast of Duc Duc. Several ralliers and a captured
document indicate the presence in Quang Nam of the 56th Infantry
and 68th Artillery Regiments of the 304th Division since July.
Previous reports from other ralliers that the entire division
was in Quang Nam appear to be an NVA attempt to confuse the
issue.

12. (S) Elsewhere in southern MR-1, the Communists stepped
up their continuing campaign to eliminate isolated GVN out­
posts in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces. In Quang Tin
Province, activity gradually increased around the isolated
GVN outpost at Hau Duc where at least three Communist battalions
are believed preparing to overrun the town. In Quang Ngai
Province, long expected attacks on similarly isolated outpost
of Gia Vuc finally materialized, and the defending 70th Ranger
Battalion was forced to withdraw on 21 September. Communist
pressure also increased around outposts at Tra Bong and Son Ha
where eventual heavy attacks are anticipated.

13. (S) The onset of the rainy season will probably deter
major Communist initiatives in MR-1 after mid-October, but
a significant upsurge in activity is possible immediately
prior to that time. The primary Communist objective would be
to establish control over forward areas for use as spring­
boards for possible major attacks at the end of the rainy
season. While major main force attacks may not occur in the
region during the remainder of the year, it is expected that
Quang Nam Province will continue to experience a higher than
normal level of Communist harassment, probably in the form
of ABF's.

14. (S) The only significant order of battle development
in northern MR-1 was confirmation of the movement of the
166th Artillery Regiment to NVN. Departure of the 166th
reduces the number of artillery regiments in the region to
eight. Shown below is the current Communist OB in MR-1:

DIVISIONS 4 (+1 AD)
BRIGADES 1
REGIMENTS 31 (+21 AD)
COMBAT PERSONNEL 95-105,000
ARTILLERY 260-290
ARMOR 350-400

15. (S) In MR-2, Communist activity during September consisted of movement into attack positions and light harassing and probing attacks in the highlands, while in the coastal lowlands, major Communist units started rebuilding in preparation for attacks and local force units harassed GVN population centers.

16. (S) In the central highlands, the 10th and 320th NVA Divisions and associated B-3 Front elements shifted into apparent pre-attack positions. In Kontum Province, the Headquarters, 24th Regiment, moved to a position just north of Ngok Bay Mountain, elements of the 29th Regiment were confirmed in contact near Chuong Nghia outpost, and elements of the 95B Regiment moved into the critical Chu Pao Pass area. In Pleiku Province, the 48th Regiment refitted and was restargeted against Thanh An District Town. By the end of the month, all major units, supported by artillery, were committed. The 9th and 26th Regiments were probing forward RVNAF positions along Route 509 west of Pleiku City, while 48th and 64th Regiment elements were in the Thanh An area. In Quang Duc Province, the 271st NVA Regiment elements refitted and conducted harassing attacks and reconnaissance along LTL 8-B. Captured documents indicated that MI elements of the B-3 Front were in Quang Duc making an assessment in preparation for the annual fall campaign.

17. (S) In the coastal lowlands, initiation of the third phase of the Communists' Summer Campaign in Binh Dinh and Phu Yen Provinces has been expected at least since mid-September. Communist activity, however, remained relatively low in both scope and intensity. In Binh Dinh, the 2nd and 12th Regiments were rebuilding in the rear base areas while the 141st Regiment continued to defend the approaches to the lower An Lao Valley against limited RVNAF probes. RVNAF resecured a series of strategic villages on the Phu My/Phu Cat
District border, which had been held by Binh Dinh Provincial Unit forces since late May. BG Niem, the 23rd ARVN Division Commander, estimates that the 3rd NVA Division has the capability to conduct only limited attacks against selected objectives for the remainder of the year. The Communists' developing LOC and logistics complex, however, will enable them to conduct major combined arms operations in early 1975. Further South, the Communists continued sapper attacks against the GVN Cam Ranh Bay logistics complex, while in Binh Thuan Province, the 812th VC Regiment and associated local forces intensified terrorist and harassing attacks in the Thien Giao/Ham Thuan Triangle and against major GVN development projects in Hoa Da (D).

18. (S) During October, limited probing and harassing attacks against forward RVNAF positions and principal LOC's can be expected in the highlands. Attacks against the isolated GVN outpost of Chuong Nghia are likely. (Note: Chuong Nghia was overrun on 7 October.) In the coastal lowlands, delayed, reduced-scale, third phase attacks will probably coincide with rice acquisition operations in the principal producing provinces. The Communists will continue to target GVN depots/installations in urban areas.

19. (S) Communist order of battle and strengths shown below remained unchanged during September.

| DIVISIONS   | 3 |
| REGIMENTS   | 17 (+4 AD) |
| COMBAT PERSONNEL | 35-40,000 |
| ARTILLERY   | 60-75 |
| ARMOR       | 115-135 |

20. (S) In MR-3, activity dropped significantly. Main force units rested and refitted following heavy fighting in the second half of August; however, local forces and sappers increased activity in areas under GVN control in late September.

21. (S) In the 5th NVA Division AO, no firm relocations of Communist units were noted; however, it appears that 5th Division forces are gradually moving back toward the Elephant's Foot. Activity in Tay Ninh Province consisted mainly of ABF's designed to keep RVNAF off balance, while the Communists went about consolidating recent territorial gains west of the Vam Co Dong River.
22. (S) In the 9th NVA Division AO, activity consisted mainly of ABF's along LTL-7. These allowed the Communists to defend their areas effectively, while conserving their manpower. Major elements of the 9th Division were able to move north to regroup and refit. In the most significant action, in mid-September the 141st Regiment/7th Division conducted a heavy attack by fire and counterattack which prevented ARVN from moving back to Base 82; however, ARVN retook the base on 4 October. The 141st Regiment has now apparently moved north and has been replaced by the 95C Regiment.

23. (S) In the 7th NVA Division AO, there was a decrease in activity. In early September, ARVN forces, moving against light Communist resistance, reoccupied the Thai Hung/Ba Cam area in northern Bien Hoa Province. Communist forces suffered heavy casualties from air and artillery strikes and subsequently moved to safer ground farther north. Toward the end of the month, 7th Division forces were conducting reconnaissance of Phu Giao and Chon Thanh.

24. (S) DAO Saigon estimates that a moderate increase in activity will occur in the second half of October. The Route 7 area will remain volatile. Action in the vicinity of Phu Giao and Chon Thanh is possible, and the Communists will probably defend against any ARVN attempts to move into their base areas. GVN officials still believe that major Communist attacks will occur in the region in November. The Communist order of battle is as shown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISIONS</th>
<th>3 (+1 Sapper, 1 Artillery, 1 Air Defense)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REGIMENTS</td>
<td>18 (+7 Sapper, 3 Artillery, 3 Air Defense)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMBAT PERSONNEL</td>
<td>40-45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTILLERY</td>
<td>80-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMOR</td>
<td>190-200</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

25. (S) In MR-4, Communist forces conducted their usual monthly highpoint which was of shorter duration and lower intensity than those of July and August. Strength and disposition of Communist units remained about the same except for the deployment of two battalions of the 207th Regiment to lower Kien Phong. This move was in support of continuing Communist efforts to establish a base area from which to supply units in Dinh Tuong Province and adjacent areas. In eastern
Dinh Tuong, VC/NVA units conducted operations apparently designed to open up the lower portals of infiltration corridor 1-B which had been subject to frequent RVNAF interdiction. Overall, Communist efforts in the northern delta will probably continue to revolve around establishing a base area and harassment and shelling of RVNAF and GVN targets.

26. (S) In the lower delta, cumulative effects of Communist efforts throughout the year became quite visible in the border area of Vinh Long and Vinh Binh Provinces. About 50 per cent, or 49,000, of the population in the two northern districts of Vinh Binh have fallen under full-time VC control, as opposed to about 30 per cent at the first of the year. Vinh Long shows parallel developments of varying intensity in the southern half of the province. The Communists are expected to continue to exploit what is for them a favorable situation. In Phong Dinh Province, elements of two NVA regiments operated periodically in western districts with the objective of securing staging areas close to QL-4. Twenty-thousand refugees were generated in the extreme southern tip of the province alone. Although all but 4,000 to 5,000 of these have since been relocated, this flow of displaced people indicates the degree of the Communists' operational freedom in southern and western Phuong Dinh. Shellings and harassments in the remaining areas of the lower delta did not alter the situation to the advantage of either side. Overall, VC/NVA forces in the lower delta continued to make gradual progress in expanding their presence and impact. There are no indications that this course of developments will soon be arrested. It appears quite likely that RVNAF cutbacks will aggravate the slow but steady downslide in southern MR-4.

27. (S) Communist order of battle and strength estimates for MR-4 are as shown:

| DIVISIONS | 0 |
| REGIMENTS | 14 |
| COMBAT PERSONNEL | 20-25,000 |
| ARTILLERY | 0 |
| ARMOR | 0 |
28. (S) Positive indicators of Communist activity in the coming month are lacking. At this time, major attacks do not appear to be in the offing, although such a potential exists in MR's 1, 2 and 3.

29. (S) In MR-1, previous indicators of a "third phase" of Communist attacks in Quang Nam have yet to materialize. However, Communist forces in the area have generally refrained from ground contacts since early August and presumably are ready for a final wave of attacks before heavy rains by mid-October inhibit major attacks.

30. (S) In MR-2, 10th Division forces north of Kontum City are similarly rested and could initiate new attacks on forward RVNAF positions in that area. In Binh Dinh Province, previous plans for a "third phase" of activity may not materialize due to substantial losses in earlier fighting. In any event, such activity would be rather limited in scope.

31. (S) In MR-3, ARVN officials expect major attacks to occur in November. In the meantime, a moderate increase in activity could occur later in October prior to initiation of major attacks.

32. (S) Prevailing patterns of activity are expected to continue in MR-4, including the monthly highpoint.

33. (S) In general, the Communists will continue to conduct limited attacks against targets of opportunity in order to improve their tactical position, attrite RVNAF and expand their territorial and population base, with the possibility of major attacks in selective areas looming in the background.