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[Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh may be dead or so seriously ill that he is expected to expire in the near future.

A communiqué issued by North Vietnamese authorities at 0400 Hanoi time on 3 September (1600 2 September EDT) announced that during "the past few weeks" the 79-year-old leader "has not been well," and that a team of experts had been assembled to provide him with constant care. The brief item strongly suggests that it is an attempt to soften up the populace for a subsequent death announcement.

Confirmation that Ho has been seriously ill helps to explain evidence of disarray in North Vietnam during the past few months. Since at least last spring, when the regime held a prolonged strategy review and presumably set a relatively firm course for itself, there have been signs of pulling and tugging within the leadership about the war, the negotiations, and domestic policies.

Ho's demise would remove the man who has been the dominant figure in the Vietnamese Communist movement for nearly 40 years and the one who probably has exercised a deciding role in settling persistent policy disputes. His successors are men who have generally managed to work together over the years in pursuit of broad common goals, but whose public statements in themselves reflect distinct differences of approach and emphasis on many basic policies.

It seems likely that some kind of consensus at the top was worked out prior to this first announcement that Ho is ill. In the short run this probably will result in the maintenance of continuity with previous policies, but in the longer run a new leadership probably will have trouble making and carrying out key decisions without the benefit of Ho Chi Minh's personal prestige and authority.]

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[Military activity throughout most of South Vietnam has remained relatively light during the past several days but there are more signs that an upsurge in enemy action is likely before long.



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[Libya: The military junta is consolidating its position.

The new regime is not encountering any threat to its rule, [redacted] Some senior military and security officials loyal to King Idris have been arrested and the military is performing all civilian security functions. The military is still exercising tight control over the civilian security forces. It is taking over all heavy equipment such as armored vehicles.

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Radio Libya is broadcasting the names of senior members of the old government who are allegedly voicing their support of the junta. To forestall any public criticism of its actions the junta has suspended the publication of five Libyan newspapers and periodicals. In a move indicative of a growing confidence, the army yesterday lifted the curfew, which had been imposed Monday, for a three-hour period.

The Revolutionary Command Council has still not disclosed its membership, but has announced that it will administer the country itself rather than forming a new cabinet. [redacted]

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[redacted]

Soviet comment on the coup has been sparse but gives cautious approval. In the Arab world the coup has made Saudi Arabian officials more concerned over the future of Arab moderates. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Colombia: President Lleras' decision to shuffle cabinet and gubernatorial posts last week is likely to aggravate his political difficulties.

Lleras apparently acted because he believed opposition Conservatives had not fully supported his government in the month-long crisis over charges that members of his family and certain government ministers were guilty of influence peddling. The affair has been handled ineptly from the beginning; political infighting has damaged the President's prestige and widened cracks in the country's National Front political system.

The President probably will emerge victorious from the present crisis, but it comes at a bad time for his government. Tax reform measures pending before congress are in difficulty and the influence peddling affair is not yet resolved. In addition, party conventions to pick candidates for next year's presidential election are due next month. At the very least, the changes in government at this time will reduce the administration's efficiency and add to its lame duck aspect.

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NOTES

USSR - East Germany: [redacted]

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[redacted] Moscow's reply to the Allied initiative on Berlin of 7 August will soon be forthcoming. The meeting between the Soviet and East German foreign ministers in Moscow on 1 September, [redacted] was apparently hastily arranged, [redacted] East German Foreign Minister Winzer's sudden trip to meet with Gromyko suggests that the two sides may have to resolve some differences concerning the Soviet reply. [redacted]

* * * *

Guyana: In a largely symbolic gesture meant to increase national self-reliance and confidence, the parliament voted last week that Guyana will become a republic on 23 February 1970. Prime Minister Burnham told the parliament that he heads a "socialist" party and accordingly plans to transform Guyana into a "cooperative republic." [redacted]

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[redacted] Guyana will keep its ties to the British Commonwealth. Indeed, Communist opposition leader Cheddi Jagan can be expected to ridicule the new republic's economic philosophy and continue calling for the expropriation necessary to achieve economic independence and true socialism. [redacted]

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