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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
31 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

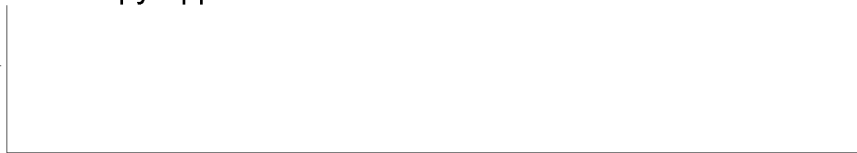
Asian Communist propaganda is playing the US Embassy bombing in Saigon as a new example of the insurgent intention to "continue to strike at the Americans" as long as they remain in South Vietnam. The commentary suggests that the bombing was coordinated by the North Vietnamese. DRV approval of such a heavy, frontal assault on the US diplomatic headquarters would indicate a willingness to risk a stiff US retaliatory response.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
There are press reports of a major battle in progress for control of a strategic government outpost south of Da Nang in Quang Tin Province. Over-all Viet Cong military activity, as reported by MACV, continues relatively light and widely scattered (Paras. 2 and 3). On the ARVN side, significant Viet Cong casualties have resulted from three large-scale government search-and-destroy operations in the southern delta (Para. 5). Also, a major US-Vietnamese napalm attack has reportedly been launched against a Communist base area north of Saigon (Para. 7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Operations at the US Embassy in Saigon were restored today with a reduced staff (Para. 1). Last night, six Viet Cong armed with hand grenades were reportedly seized in Da Nang, suggesting that several anti-US terrorist acts were planned for the last few days (Para. 2). In Saigon today, a small government-sponsored rally protested the bombing of the US Embassy (Para. 3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
Air operations were continued today against the DRV radar system. Six radar sites were struck by US and VNAF planes in a coordinated assault; some of the raiders subsequently conducted an armed reconnaissance mission down a major DRV supply route into Laos. Full photographic results of today's strikes are not yet available (Paras. 1-6).

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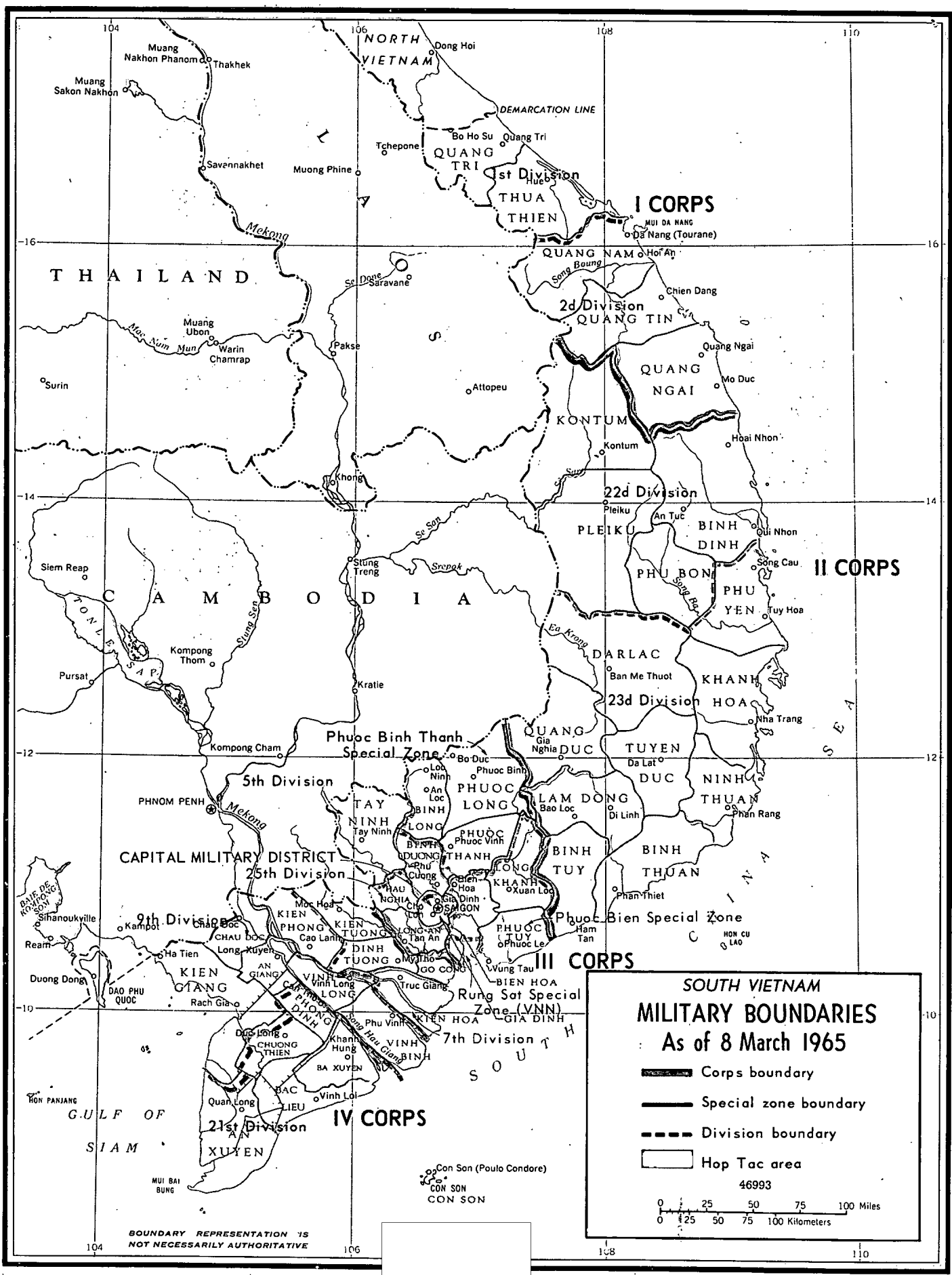
IV. Other Communist Military Developments: No bloc military movements connected with the situation in Vietnam have been detected today.

V. Communist Political Developments: Both Hanoi and Peiping have joined with the Viet Cong in depicting the Embassy attack as symbolic of US weakness in South Vietnam (Paras. 1, 2, 4, and 5). The Liberation Front has alluded to the bombing as a response to coordinated calls for anti-US acts by both the North and South Vietnamese Communists; this line follows recent Hanoi statements which have more openly admitted DRV involvement in the war (Para. 3). Moscow has been more restrained in its handling of the bombing, although it is pointing to the deed as indicative of the ineffectiveness of US policy (Para. 7).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Some free world merchant shipping circles are concerned over the effects of US policy on shipments to and from North Vietnamese ports. No actual diversions of scheduled shipping to the DRV have yet been noted, however (Paras. 1-3).



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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Although officially confirmed Viet Cong military activity remains light and widely scattered, the press reports a major battle in progress for the control of a strategic government outpost south of Da Nang, in Quang Tin Province. On the government side, a major US-Vietnamese air offensive has reportedly been launched against a Viet Cong base area north of Saigon; three search-and-destroy operations in the southern delta have produced significant Communist casualties.

2. Unconfirmed press reports state that three US helicopters were shot down today by Viet Cong ground fire during a major new battle for control of Viet An, 35 miles south of Da Nang. Viet An is a government outpost on top of a small rise which commands the approach to Tam Ky, capital of Quang Tin Province. According to the press reports, two US Marine helicopter crewmen were killed and 16 other Americans wounded. A total of 25 helicopters, lifting Vietnamese troops into action, reportedly encountered a barrage of fire from an estimated two companies of Viet Cong armed with mortars and recoilless rifles. Every helicopter taking part in the operation was hit. Elements of an ARVN regiment were already in place in the battle area.

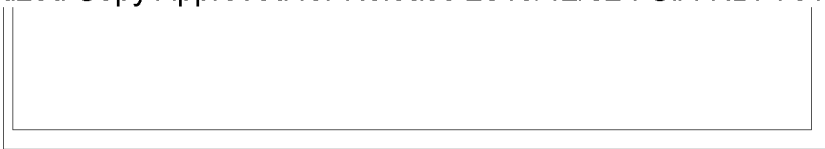
3. MACV's military report for 29 March shows 15 Communist-initiated incidents, seven of which took place during the reporting period. The unusually low total may in part reflect slow reporting from the Corps areas to Saigon. Only one armed attack was listed; small-scale terrorism and harassment of government posts, hamlets, and watchtowers predominated.

4. In I Corps, MACV has confirmed earlier press reports of a Viet Cong attack on a village in Quang Tri Province, about 17 miles from the North Vietnamese border. Twenty-four Popular Forces soldiers were killed, five wounded, one captured, and 25 weapons seized. Guerrilla-directed mortar fire was placed on a government outpost in Quang Ngai Province, and a New Life Hamlet was harassed in Thua Thien Province. No current actions were reported in II Corps. In the III Corps area, a military post in Long An Province received small arms harassing fire. Friendly losses were one killed, one wounded, 18 missing, and 18 weapons. A New Life Hamlet in Hau Nghia Province was entered and harassed. In IV Corps, Communist guerrillas fired on a Popular Forces outpost in Kien Phong Province and harassed a CIDG-defended hamlet in Ba Xuyen Province.

5. Government operations of battalion strength or larger decreased on 29 March from 20 to 17, with four initiated and seven terminated. A large-scale ARVN operation initiated on 29 March in Hau Nghia Province to locate and destroy the 261st main force Viet Cong battalion and the C-221st local force Viet Cong company has produced initially favorable results, with Communist losses listed as 16 killed and six weapons seized along with 1,500 rounds of ammunition. No friendly losses have been recorded thus far.

In An Giang Province, 19 Communist insurgents were killed by a 26-29 March search-and-destroy operation. ARVN casualties were two killed and six wounded. On 29 March, an ARVN guard/escort operation to provide security for Route 40 in Phong Dinh Province resulted in 15 Viet Cong killed. Three government soldiers sustained minor injuries.

6. Company-size or smaller operations conducted during 29 March declined to 2,332. Only three contacts were made with the Viet Cong, none of which produced significant results.



7. The press reports that more than 100 US and South Vietnamese aircraft today conducted a large-scale napalm bombardment operation against the 50-mile-square Boi Loi Forest, a long-time Viet Cong jungle stronghold about 50 miles northeast of Saigon.



II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Operations at the US Embassy in Saigon have been restored with a reduced staff. The Consular Section, which had occupied the heavily damaged ground floor, has been relocated at Norodom Compound, site of the embassy's administrative and support offices. The toll from yesterday's bombing now stands at 2 Americans and 18 Vietnamese killed, 54 Americans and 129 Vietnamese wounded.

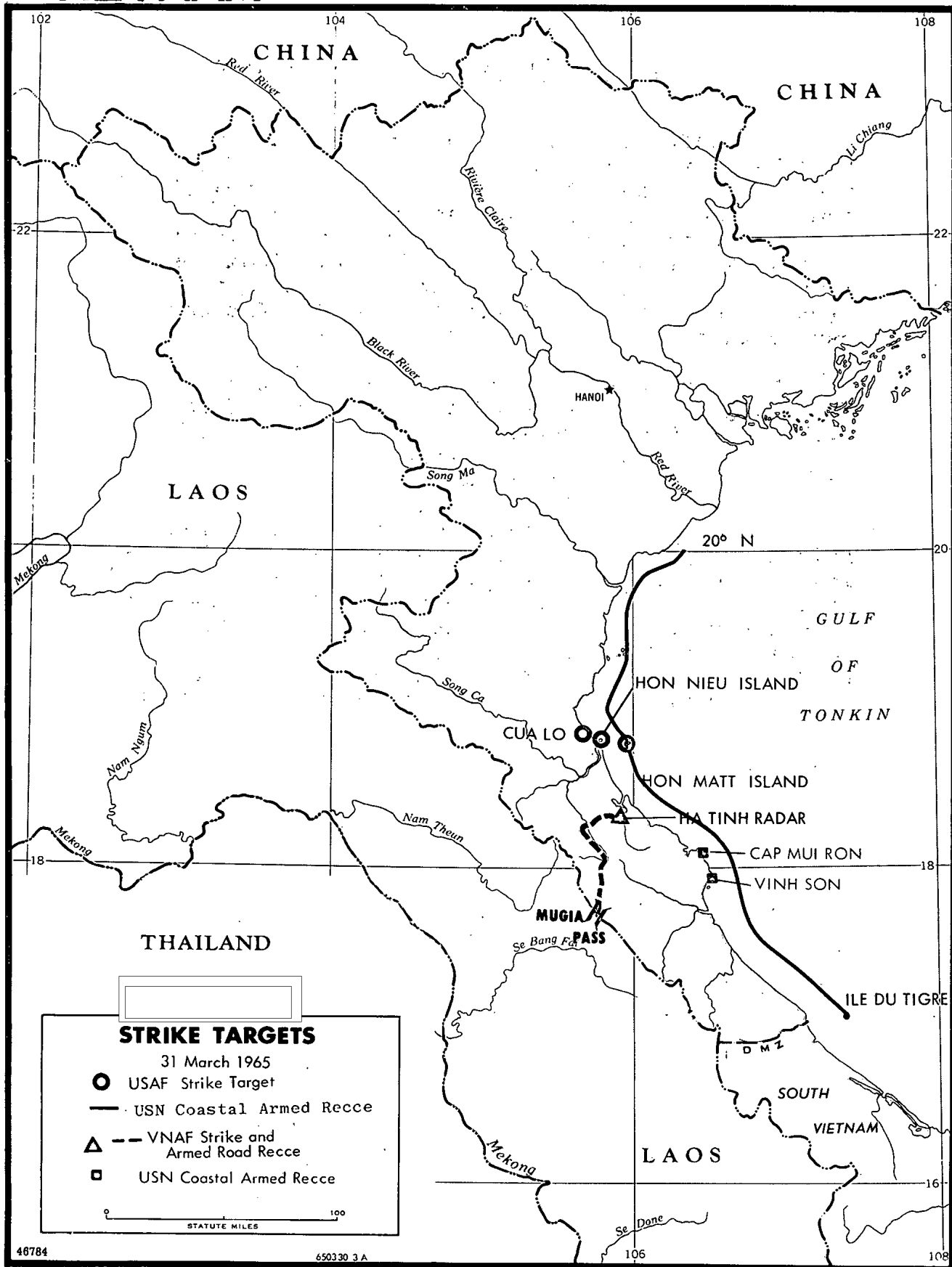
2. The press reports, meanwhile, that six Viet Cong armed with grenades were arrested last night in Da Nang, suggesting that the embassy bombing may have been the signal for a generalized wave of Communist terrorism.

3. A small government-sponsored rally was held in Saigon today in protest against the bombing of the embassy. Some 2,000 civil servants, labor union members, and school children assembled before City Hall for a 20-minute meeting. The demonstrators carried banners reading "Down with the blood-thirsty policy of the Viet Cong" and "Capital punishment on the spot for the terrorists."

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NORTH VIETNAM



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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. A total of six radar installations were simultaneously struck by US Air Force, US Navy, and Vietnamese aircraft on 31 March. In addition, US Navy aircraft performed an armed coastal reconnaissance, while Vietnamese aircraft performed an armed route reconnaissance along Route 12.

2. Thirty-six USAF F-105 jet fighters with eight supporting aircraft attacked the Cua Lo, Hon Nieu Island, and Hon Matt Island radar sites (see map). At Cua Lo, bomb damage assessment (BDA) pilots reported that the entire ridge line upon which the target was located was burning and smoking. On Hon Nieu Island, BDA pilots observed considerable smoke from the southern end of the island. However, the radar site on the northern end of the island showed no evidence of any damage. It appears that strike aircraft completely missed their target. At Hon Matt, BDA pilots reported no damage to the radar site. One F-100 reconnaissance aircraft was hit by ground fire and crashed in Laos. The pilot was rescued by helicopters.

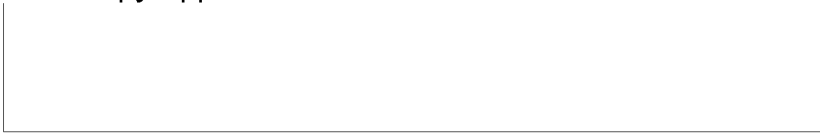
3. A total of 66 US Navy aircraft conducted restrikes against the Cape Mui Ron and Vinh Son radar sites. Both targets were originally attacked on 26 March. Pilots reported many hits were observed in the Cape Mui Ron target area. Oblique photos of this target show severe damage to two buildings and several others damaged.

4. Results are not yet available on the armed coastal reconnaissance performed by the US Navy aircraft after the strikes. One propeller-driven aircraft was missing in the Vinh Son target area. The pilot has not yet been recovered.

5. Fifteen Vietnamese Skyraider aircraft, supported by 14 USAF aircraft, struck the Ha Tinh radar site and then conducted an armed route reconnaissance along Route 12 to the Laotian border. BDA pilots estimated that the radar site was 80 percent destroyed. During the route reconnaissance the aircraft scored a direct hit on a gun emplacement and scored numerous

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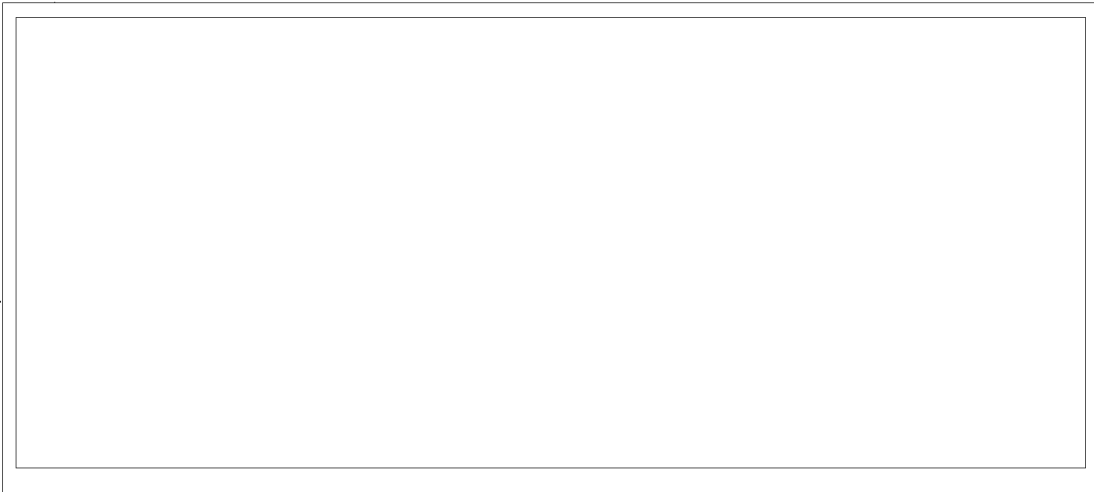
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hits on two groups of barracks. One Vietnamese AlH went down north of Dong Hoi, and rescue operations are still under way for the pilot.

6. One of the two pilots reported lost in the US Navy strike against Bach Long Island on 30 March was rescued late on that day. Rescue efforts for the other pilot have been terminated.

7. The damage to Dong Hoi airfield in the raid of 30 March was somewhat greater than first indicated by post strike photography. Further analysis of the photographs indicates that seven rather than five of the approximately 15 buildings at the airfield were destroyed. More than 30 bomb craters, rather than 12, are visible in the runway, while one helicopter was left damaged on the runway.



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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Nothing of significance to report.

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Both Hanoi and Peiping have joined with the Viet Cong in depicting the Saigon Embassy bombing as symbolic of US weakness and futility in South Vietnam. Within hours after the Embassy was rocked by a Viet Cong bomb, Hanoi radio was boasting that the insurgents "will continue to strike" at Americans, if they "stubbornly cling to South Vietnam." The Hanoi broadcast claimed that "the period when (the US) wished for a certain amount of safety everywhere on Vietnamese territory is definitely gone." Hanoi took note of Western press speculation that the US might step up the war still further and might even bomb Hanoi following the attack on the Embassy. The North Vietnamese, however, expressed their defiance by reiterating that "no intimidation whatever can dampen the ironlike determination" of the Vietnamese, both north and south, to "deal still heavier blows" to the US.

2. The Liberation Front radio on 30 March bragged that the "Saigon People's Armed Forces" had attacked the "very head of the US bandits." The Front radio also warned that there "is no place in this country in which the Americans will be safe." According to the broadcast, the Embassy bombing was "the most eloquent response" to both the 22 March Liberation Front statement and to the 27 March North Vietnam Fatherland Front call for increased efforts to "annihilate" the US.

3. The Front radio allusion to the bombing as a response to calls from both North and South Vietnamese Communist headquarters is the latest of several such statements apparently designed to give the impression that the US is now more than ever facing a united Vietnamese war effort. On 31 March the North Vietnamese National Assembly Reunification Committee stated flatly that the North Vietnamese people are "coordinating the battlefields in North and South Vietnam to defend the North." The statement further asserted that "more than ever before, the revolutionary tasks of North and South Vietnam are closely related."

4. The Peiping People's Daily commentator discussed the Embassy bombing in Saigon as a retaliatory blow by the "South Vietnamese people" against alleged US aggression, carefully avoiding any implication that China might become involved in efforts to "punish" the US for its actions. The article, broadcast by NCNA on 31 March, termed the attack on the Embassy in Saigon "heartening news to all revolutionary people."

5. According to the Chinese, the bombing of the Embassy was a demonstration of US vulnerability --a "merciless sneer" by the Vietnamese people at US claims of military superiority--and evidence of the determination of the "South Vietnamese people" to struggle on until the last US soldier has been "driven out."

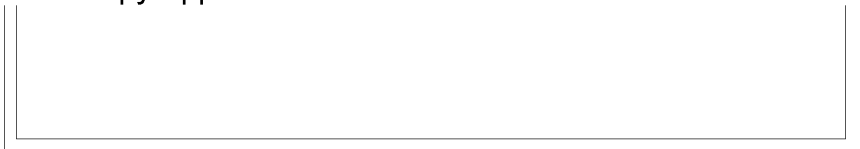
6. Peiping has not as yet commented on the alleged attack by US aircraft against Chinese fishing boats near Hainan Island. According to a Chinese broadcast of 30 March, two US fighters had strafed fishing vessels on the high seas the previous evening and chased them into Chinese territorial waters. The Chinese did not, however, cite this as evidence of aggression against China and reported only that the "departments concerned" are following the matter with "close attention."

7. Moscow has reported the Embassy bombing, but so far has issued only two low-level commentaries. A domestic news broadcast referred to the bombing as a "bold and daring operation." The commentator noted that "foreign correspondents" were quick to point out that the bombing testifies to the "very considerable support" that the Viet Cong enjoys even among the Saigon populace. An article in the newspaper of the Young Communist League asserted that "Americans should blame themselves" for the bombing, since the US has "violated all norms of international law" in the long years of the Vietnam war.

8. The Soviets have also implied that US policy toward Vietnam will have an adverse effect on other East-West issues. The Soviets have now taken steps to defer a resumption of the Geneva disarmament talks indefinitely. Since the initiation of US air strikes against North Vietnam, Moscow has indicated privately that the time is not propitious for disarmament talks.

9. Moscow feels such negotiations would be incompatible with its unyielding public posture on the Vietnam crisis, and would invite further Chinese allegations of Soviet "plotting" for peace talks. In order to avoid a completely negative

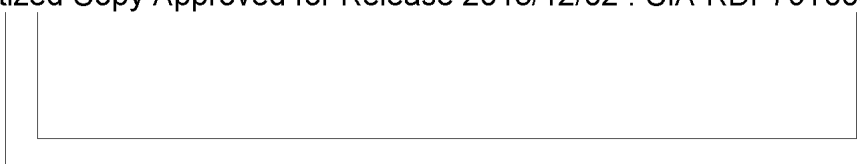
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stand, however, a Soviet Foreign Ministry official informed the British ambassador on 30 March that the USSR favors disarmament discussions in a "more representative" body than the 17-nation Geneva committee. He proposed a meeting in the next two weeks of the UN Committee for Disarmament, composed of all UN members, to work out recommendations for further steps. This obviously is a formula for protracted maneuver and delay.



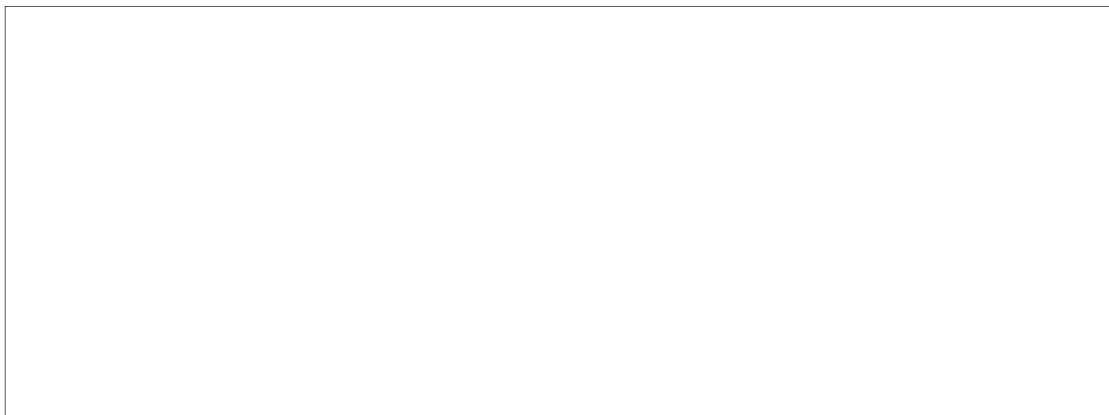
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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Reaction among free world shipowners to the Vietnamese crisis has been noted most strongly in Japanese shipping circles. The concern expressed in other free world countries--particularly the United Kingdom and Norway--centers mainly on fear that the US may extend to free world shipping participating in the North Vietnamese trade the same sanctions now being enforced for participation in the Cuban trade. So far, however, no actual diversions of scheduled shipping into North Vietnamese ports have been noted.

2. Problems which had prevented the departure to North Vietnam of a Japanese tanker chartered by Communist China to carry gasoline have now been resolved. The voyage had reportedly been held up when the Japanese Seamen's Union refused to staff the ship because of the dangers involved. Difficulty was also encountered in obtaining war risk insurance for the voyage.



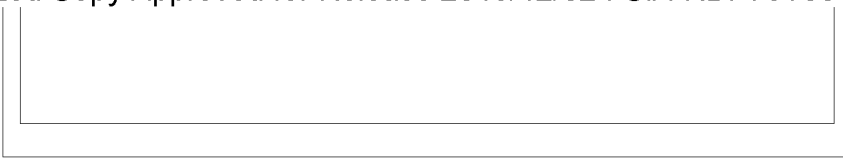
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4. Thai Army and security forces were put on alert yesterday as a precautionary measure in reaction to the bombing of the US Embassy in Saigon. Prime Minister Thanom told the press he feared similar terrorist acts might be staged against US facilities in Thailand. According to press reports, the Thais claim they have intelligence indicating that Communist insurgents have singled out US air bases as possible targets. In the past,

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Bangkok officials have evinced some concern over Thai security arrangements at military installations. In recent months plans have been developed to strengthen security forces at these installations.

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