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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
20 April 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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HIGHLIGHTS

Major new fighting has broken out south of Da Nang and US aircraft providing air support to government forces reportedly have inflicted heavy personnel losses on the Viet Cong. On the international front, Soviet President Mikoyan told the Indian President on 18 April that the DRV was already receiving Soviet weapons "intended to shoot down American aircraft." Peiping, which has intensified its propaganda attacks on the US, continues to take a somewhat less flexible public line on negotiations than Hanoi.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Major new fighting was reported in progress today south of Da Nang near the government outpost of Viet An in Quang Tin Province (Paras. 1 and 2). A terrorist bomb blast in Ban Me Thuot has resulted in sizable casualties, including several Americans wounded (Para. 3). An American civilian and two Vietnamese were killed last night in a roadblock ambush on the outskirts of Saigon (Para. 4). The government follow-up air-ground operation against a Viet Cong headquarters in western Tay Ninh Province has been terminated with generally meager results (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: A close adviser to Premier Quat has commented that the Premier made the major decisions in the suspension of two senior military officers and is making progress in extending his control over the armed forces (Paras. 1-2). The possibility of a recent sabotage attempt against Premier Quat's private plane is under investigation (Para. 3). A young Buddhist monk reportedly committed self-immolation in Saigon today to protest the present popular suffering in Vietnam (Para. 4).

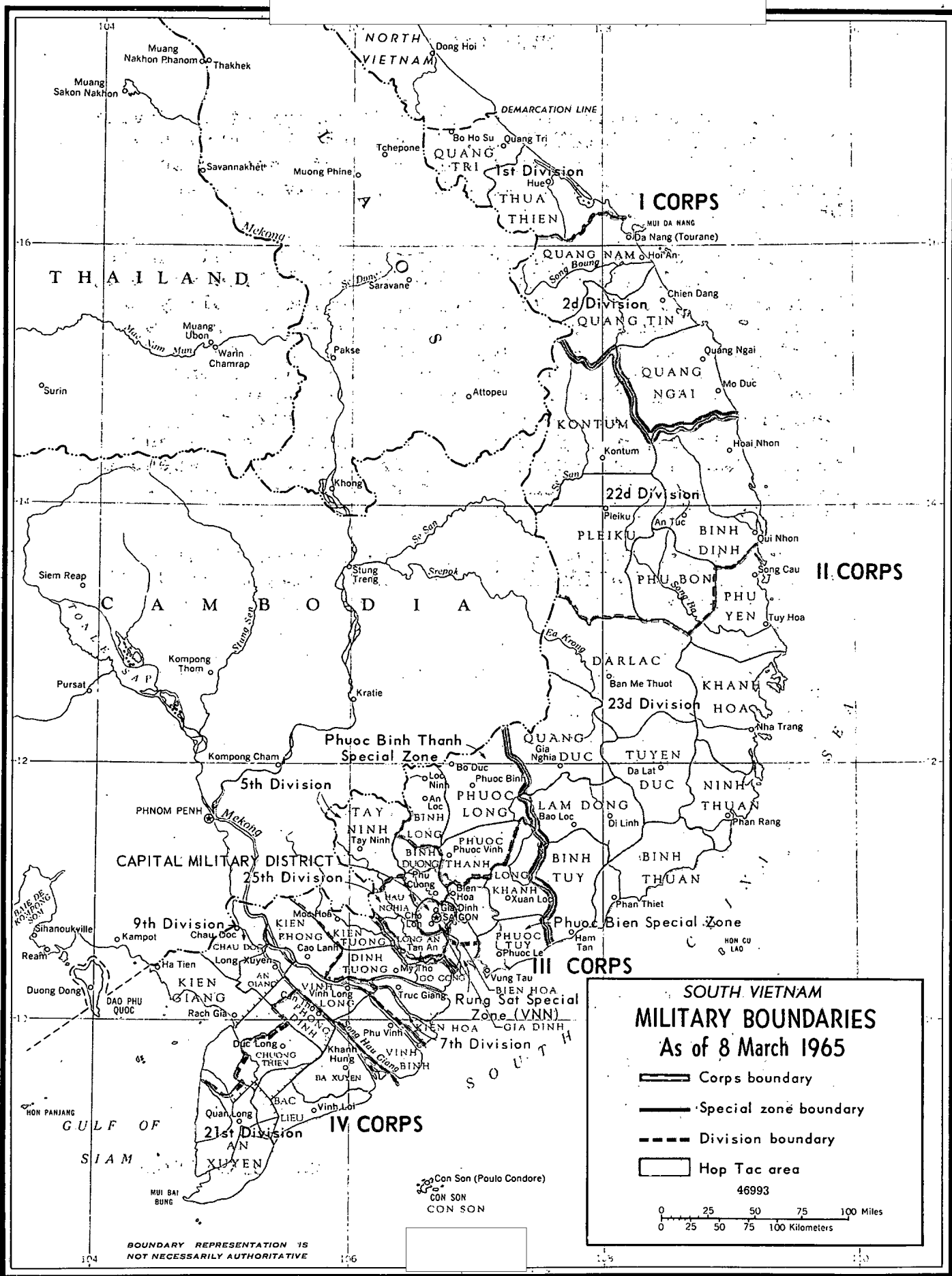
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: US and South Vietnamese air strikes and road reconnaissance missions on 20 April achieved limited results, including damage to one bridge and destruction of several trucks. Two US Navy aircraft were lost. The pilots are presumed dead (Paras. 1-5).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: Soviet President Mikoyan told Indian President Radhakrishnan in Moscow on 18 April that weapons "intended to shoot down American aircraft" were being received by the DRV (Para. 1).

V. Communist Political Developments: Peiping is intensifying its propaganda effort to mobilize support, both foreign and domestic, for the regime's policy on Vietnam. Peiping continues to take a somewhat less flexible public line on negotiations than Hanoi (Paras. 1 and 2). In South Vietnam, the Liberation Front "presidium" has issued a communiqué which appears designed to retain some freedom of maneuver on the role of the Front and on the exact conditions of any future "settlement" of the war (Paras. 3-5). Dependents of Soviet and other Communist personnel in Hanoi are being evacuated from North Vietnam (Para. 7).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Indian Prime Minister Shastri has again criticized American bombing in North Vietnam (Para. 1).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. According to press reports, more than 40 US jet bombers and fighters today bombed and strafed fortified Communist guerrilla positions 28 miles south of Da Nang air base as major new fighting between government and Viet Cong troops continued into its second day. Pilots of the US planes--F-4B Phantoms, B-57 bombers, and F-100 Supersabres--reportedly destroyed one antiaircraft gun emplacement and six buildings, caused several secondary explosions, and started large fires. Preliminary estimates by US military spokesmen, presumably based on pilot reports, placed Viet Cong losses as high as 150 killed, although there was no confirming body count.

2. The jets were providing air support to government forces attempting to dislodge an estimated three Viet Cong battalions entrenched just south of the road linking the important government outpost of Viet An with Thanh Bin Town, in Quang Tin Province. The engagement began yesterday when ARVN units encountered heavy resistance from the well-fortified enemy position, losing nine killed and 29 wounded, in addition to five US military advisers wounded.

3. Eleven Vietnamese were killed and 41 persons, including four US enlisted men, were wounded last night when a terrorist bomb exploded in a bar in Ban Me Thuot, Darlac Province.

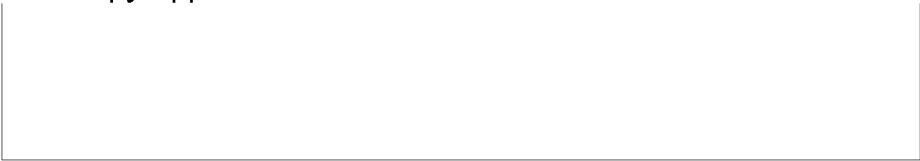
4. An American civilian and two Vietnamese were killed last night less than five miles from the Saigon city limits when they were caught in a roadblock ambush set up by a band of 50 Viet Cong on the multilane Bien Hoa highway. Several other Vietnamese were reported wounded or kidnaped. The American was identified as John B. Cone, an engineer employed by USOM to work on a construction project for improving the Saigon water supply.

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5. The Viet Cong yesterday placed automatic weapons fire on two US Marine trucks en route to Phu Bai, in Thua Thien Province. The vehicles received slight damage, but there were no casualties.

6. The ARVN search-and-destroy operation, which followed the 15 April bombing of the Viet Cong headquarters area in western Tay Ninh Province, was terminated on 18 April. No contact was made with the Viet Cong during the three-day sweep. Only a small amount of weapons, documents, and materiel was found. Two tons of rice and 72 houses were destroyed in the ground probe.

7. MACV's military report for 18 April shows 56 Communist-initiated incidents, seven of which occurred during the reporting period. Communist saboteurs mined the coastal railroad in Thua Thien, Binh Dinh, and Binh Thuan provinces. Guerrilla-directed 81-mm. mortar fire was placed on a railroad station in Binh Thuan Province. Government outposts in Chuong Thien and An Xuyen provinces, and an armored personnel carrier section at Vinh Binh Airfield in Vinh Binh Province received small arms harassing fire.

8. Three government operations of battalion strength or larger were initiated and three terminated, leaving 19 in progress on 18 April. A large-scale RVNAF guard-and-escort operation was initiated on 17 April in Binh Dinh Province to provide security for truck convoys traveling along Route 19 from the coastal city of Qui Nhon to II Corps headquarters at Pleiku. Government elements participating in the operation include one airborne brigade, two airborne battalions, two Ranger battalions, an armored cavalry unit, and five Regional Forces - Popular Forces companies.

9. Company-size or smaller operations conducted on 18 April increased to 2,576. Only six contacts were made with the Viet Cong, none of which produced significant results.

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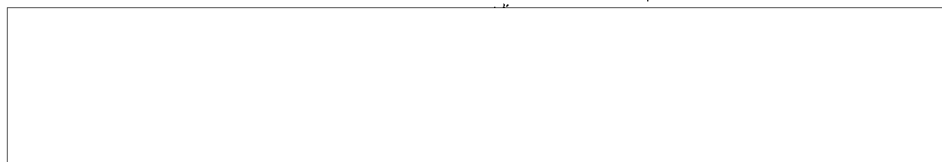


10. VNAF and USAF aircraft flew 97 combat sorties against enemy targets throughout the country, including 48 by USAF B-57/F-100 jets. Pilots reported 260 structures destroyed and 69 damaged.

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II. POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Bui Diem, a cabinet member and close adviser of Premier Quat, [redacted]

[redacted] Quat had made the principal decisions in the recent suspensions of Admiral Cang and General Dong, and was satisfied with his progress in gaining control over the armed forces. He said various generals had expressed their support for Quat during the premier's recent provincial tours. Diem said that Quat would probably try to replace III Corps commander General Vien with 9th Division commander General Vinh Loc in order to be certain of the loyalty of all key unit commanders.

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2. Quat recently told Deputy Ambassador Johnson that he had taken no steps to carry out his plans to reorganize the military command, but he did refer to a possible shift in the III Corps command. If this were done, all but two or three of the top troop commanders would be men alleged at one time or another to be sympathetic to the Buddhists.

3. Premier Quat also told Johnson that the possibility of sabotage against his personal aircraft was being investigated after both engines had suddenly cut out after takeoff from Bien Hoa Airfield on 17 April. The pilot, Quat's cousin, had successfully restarted one engine, and was able to return to Bien Hoa.

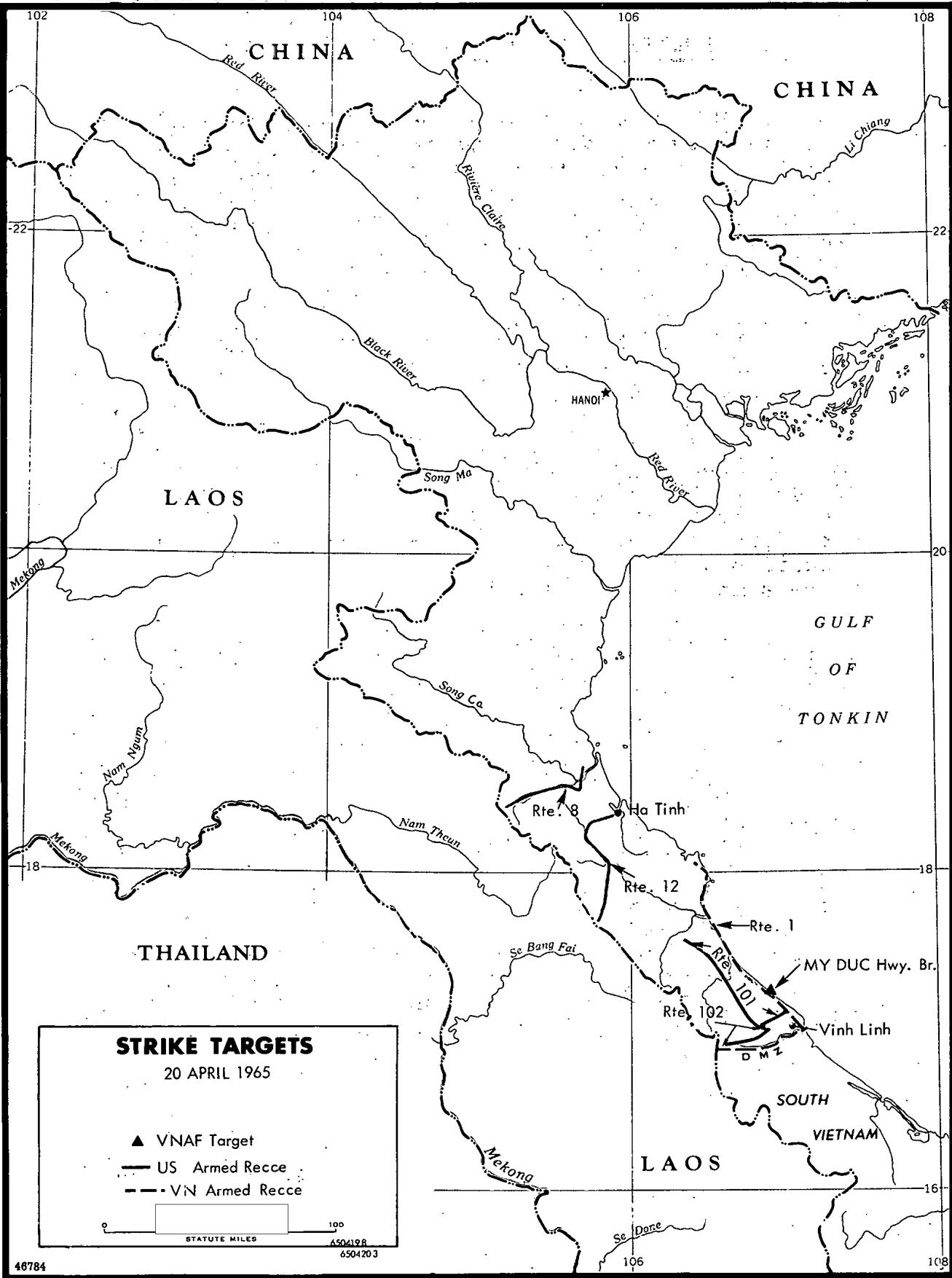
4. Press reports state that a 16-year-old Buddhist monk burned himself to death today near the Buddhist Institute in Saigon. The monk left a note indicating that his sacrifice was for the "present sufferings sustained by the central area population and the present war situation...." Not enough details are available to determine whether the protest was against the Communists, whom the Buddhists have recently attacked for oppressions in Central Vietnam, or was intended to dramatize the need for peace.

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NORTH VIETNAM



STRIKE TARGETS
20 APRIL 1965

- ▲ VNAF Target
- US Armed Recce
- - - VN Armed Recce

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STATUTE MILES
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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. US and South Vietnamese air strikes of 20 April achieved limited results according to preliminary evaluations. A Vietnamese strike against the My Duc bridge on Route 101 failed to damage the structure. A follow-up by US Air Force F-100s cratered both approaches and slightly damaged the bridge. All aircraft returned safely.

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2. A US Air Force armed reconnaissance mission along Route 8 succeeded in creating several landslides in the Kim Cuong chokepoint area. In addition two buildings and four boxcars were attacked. Weather precluded a reconnaissance of Route 12, an attack on the Mu Gia Pass Camp, and the accomplishment of any photographic damage assessment. All aircraft returned safely.

3. One truck was destroyed during the reconnaissance of Route 1 north of the Demilitarized Zone.

4. Also on 20 April US Navy aircraft conducted three armed reconnaissance missions, two during daylight and one at night, along Routes 101, 102, and 107, south of the 18th parallel. During the first reconnaissance three groups of trucks were attacked with unknown results. Aircraft attacked 8 to 12 barges near Route 101 during the second reconnaissance and destroyed a camouflaged truck. No targets were observed during the night mission and no ordnance was expended. Pilots report encountering heavy anti-aircraft fire during the truck attacks and possible 37-mm. AAA fire and a heavy automatic weapons barrage during the night mission. One A1H was lost; it apparently flew into the ground during a rocket run. The pilot is presumed dead. Aircraft flying a barrier combat air patrol in the area, which is about 200 miles south of Phuc Yen Airfield, reported three distinct radar contacts but were unable to make visual identification.

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5. Two other night missions were flown by US Navy aircraft against Routes 1 and 15 from the 20th parallel southward. Three trucks were attacked with unknown results. Heavy AAA fire was encountered south of Vinh. One A4C exploded in mid-air after being hit. The pilot's status is unknown, although he probably was not able to eject.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Soviet President Mikoyan told Indian President Radhakrishnan in Moscow on 18 April that Soviet military aid was going to the DRV and that the weapons furnished were "intended to shoot down American aircraft."

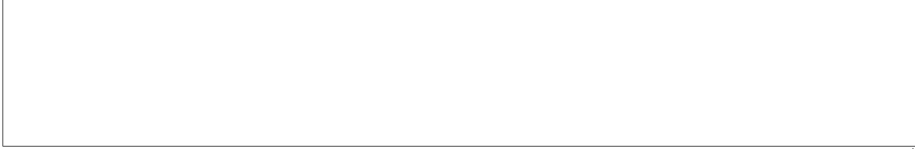
2. If Soviet military equipment is en route to Vietnam, it probably is moving by rail through China rather than by sea. Cargo information on the eight Soviet vessels known to be en route to or in Haiphong indicates they are making normal commercial deliveries of oil, fertilizer, vehicles, and industrial equipment.

3. In his talk with the Indian President, Mikoyan claimed that the Soviet people were eager to help the DRV, but that the North Vietnamese seemed to be defending themselves very well. The 17 April joint Soviet-DRV communiqué took the same line in conditioning the dispatch of Soviet volunteers to North Vietnam on an intensification of US aggression and on an appeal from Hanoi.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peiping is intensifying its propaganda effort to mobilize support, both foreign and domestic, for the regime's policy on Vietnam. On 20 April Peiping announced that the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress--China's rubber-stamp parliament--had adopted a resolution calling for the Chinese people to join "with the world's people" in launching a "powerful mass movement" to force the United States out of Vietnam. The Chinese people were instructed to make "full preparations" to send men to fight alongside the Vietnamese "people" in the event that the United States "continues to expand the war" and the "Vietnamese people need them." While repeating and putting the National People's Congress stamp of approval on previous Peiping declarations, the resolution continues to place conditions on the introduction of Chinese personnel. It does not represent any extension of Peiping's commitments.

2. The 20 April resolution continues Peiping's hard line on negotiations. Hanoi's four-point formula for a settlement is termed the "sole and correct" path for resolving the Vietnamese question --a line less flexible than that employed by the North Vietnamese premier, who on 8 April said merely that the formula represented the "soundest basis" for a political settlement.

3. The Viet Cong's Liberation Front has broadcast a communiqué said to have been adopted at a 15 April session of the Front "presidium." The communiqué, broadcast in Vietnamese, appears basically to be a response to the appeal to world parliaments issued by the DRV National Assembly on 10 April. It stresses the unity of the Front with the North Vietnamese in the "struggle" against "US aggression." The communiqué assailed President Johnson's call for "unconditional discussions."

4. In spelling out the Front's position on settling the war, the communiqué declared that the "basic stand" of the NFLSV consists of resolutely

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fighting the "US imperialists...to the end." The communiqué adds that putting an end to US "aggression" is a "basic principle...to settle the Vietnamese problem satisfactorily." Any "approach" to the restoration of peace in South Vietnam which is not "based" on US withdrawal, says the communiqué, must be regarded as "unrealistic." The wording of the communiqué on a settlement of the war suggests that the Front wishes to preserve some flexibility in its position on the question.

5. The Front communiqué refers to the NFLSV as an "organ" leading the "resistance war" in South Vietnam. According to the communiqué, any "solution" for South Vietnam will be "unrealistic and impractical" if it "disregards the participation and decisive position of the NFLSV." This relatively cautious formulation on the position of the Front may have been intended to leave some room for maneuver on the exact role and status of the Front in any future move toward a settlement in Vietnam.

6. Soviet President Mikoyan, in his 18 April talk with Indian President Radhakrishnan (See IV. 1), said that the 17 April joint Soviet-DRV communiqué "had been most carefully drafted" and represented a "full statement" of the Soviet position on Vietnam. Although Mikoyan maintained that President Johnson was "undoubtedly shrewd" in making his 7 April speech proposing unconditional Vietnam negotiations, he claimed that the proposal was not serious. He asserted that the US must realize that the DRV would not agree to talks while US attacks against North Vietnam continue.

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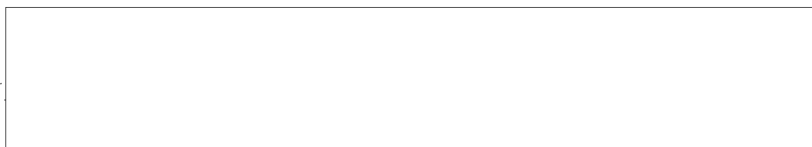


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8. The periodic Sino-US ambassadorial talks are scheduled to resume tomorrow in Warsaw. At the last meeting on 24 February, Chinese Ambassador Wang was predictably unyielding on Vietnam and merely reiterated Peiping's demand that the US withdraw completely and permit the Vietnamese to "settle their own problems."

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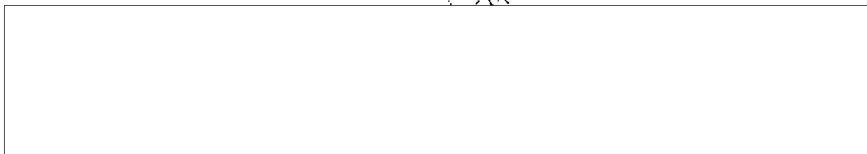


VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

Indian Prime Minister Shastri has again criticized American bombing in North Vietnam. Delhi radio says he told a reception of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society that if US raids continue, "there is hardly any point in President Johnson's acceptance of the nonaligned countries' proposals for talks without preconditions. The bombing must stop, and that will make talks possible. India's policy," he continued, "is to bring an end to the hostilities...."

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