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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
23 April 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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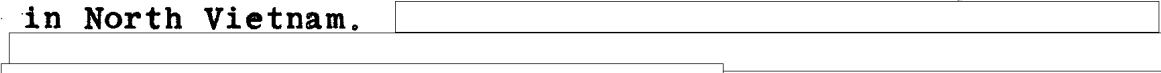
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23 April 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

Ground fighting appears to have been temporarily suspended in Quang Tin Province, but new air attacks have been launched against Viet Cong fortifications south of Da Nang. Premier Quat has indicated a number of army reforms he is considering. US and South Vietnamese aircraft continued to strike at targets in North Vietnam.



The Liberation Front has set up a permanent mission in Moscow. This appears to be the first tangible result of Le Duan's trip to the USSR and Communist China. The high-level DRV delegation arrived home on 23 April. The Communists continue to present themselves as "reasonable" but Liberation Front officials in Prague declared that the nonaligned nations' appeal for a peaceful settlement was "unacceptable."

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

New air attacks have been launched against Viet Cong fortifications south of Da Nang, in Quang Tin Province. Ground fighting appears to have been temporarily suspended (Para. 1). Communist strongholds northeast and southwest of Saigon have been attacked by USAF and VNAF aircraft (Para. 2). Two US military personnel were killed and one wounded last night in Quang Tin Province when Viet Cong guerrillas fired on a USMC/USN underwater demolition team survey party (Para. 3). The large-scale government heliborne operation in Binh Dinh Province is continuing (Para. 4).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Premier Quat has mentioned several internal improvements he hopes to make in the ARVN to cope with a possible renewal of Viet Cong offensive activity (Para. 1). The archbishop of Hué states that urban morale has improved as a result of the air strikes on the North and that Catholic relations with the Buddhists in his area are better; he felt, however, that a temporary cessation of the air strikes was



50X1



desirable to give Hanoi an opportunity to seek negotiations (Para. 2).

[redacted] tribesmen may attack the town of Ban Me Thuot on 24 April. There have been no recent indications, however, that a new revolt is imminent (Para. 3).

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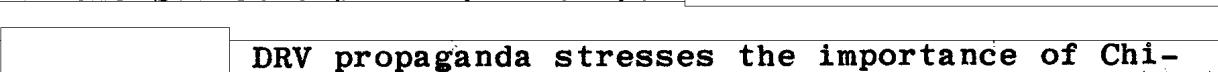
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Some 220 US and South Vietnamese aircraft conducted strikes and armed reconnaissance missions in North Vietnam on 23 April south of the 20th parallel. Seven bridges were destroyed, several ferries sunk or damaged, and a number of vehicles hit (Paras. 1-4). A US Navy air strike against DRV vessels near Vinh on 22 April damaged five of them (Para. 5). All aircraft returned safely.



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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: Nothing significant to report.

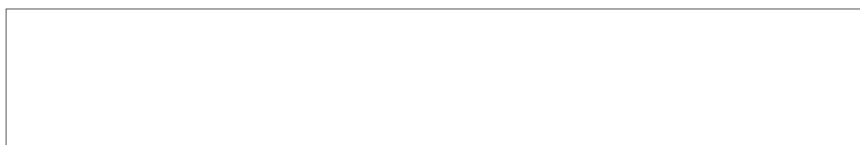
V. Communist Political Developments: The top-level DRV delegation which has been visiting Moscow and Peiping arrived home on 23 April. Hanoi has announced that the "friendship visits" ended "successfully" (Para. 1). The first tangible result of the talks in Moscow appears to be the establishment of a permanent Liberation Front mission in the Soviet capital (Para. 2).



[redacted] DRV propaganda stresses the importance of Chinese Communist support, but the wording of a domestic broadcast appears designed to reassure the population that Chinese volunteers will arrive only if invited by Hanoi (Paras. 4, 5, and 6). The Chinese continue to spread the idea that the Communist side is "reasonable" while US "aggression" is a threat to world peace. Chou En-lai hinted that Peiping might be interested in negotiations concerning Cambodia "as a start" toward a settlement (Paras. 7-10). Liberation Front officials, however, have declared the nonaligned nations' appeal "unacceptable" (Para. 11). Asian Communist propaganda will make increased use of pictures showing "war damage" in North Vietnam (Para. 12). An important Italian Communist Party delegation is leaving Rome on 23 April for visits to Moscow, Peiping, and Hanoi (Para. 13).

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23 April 1965



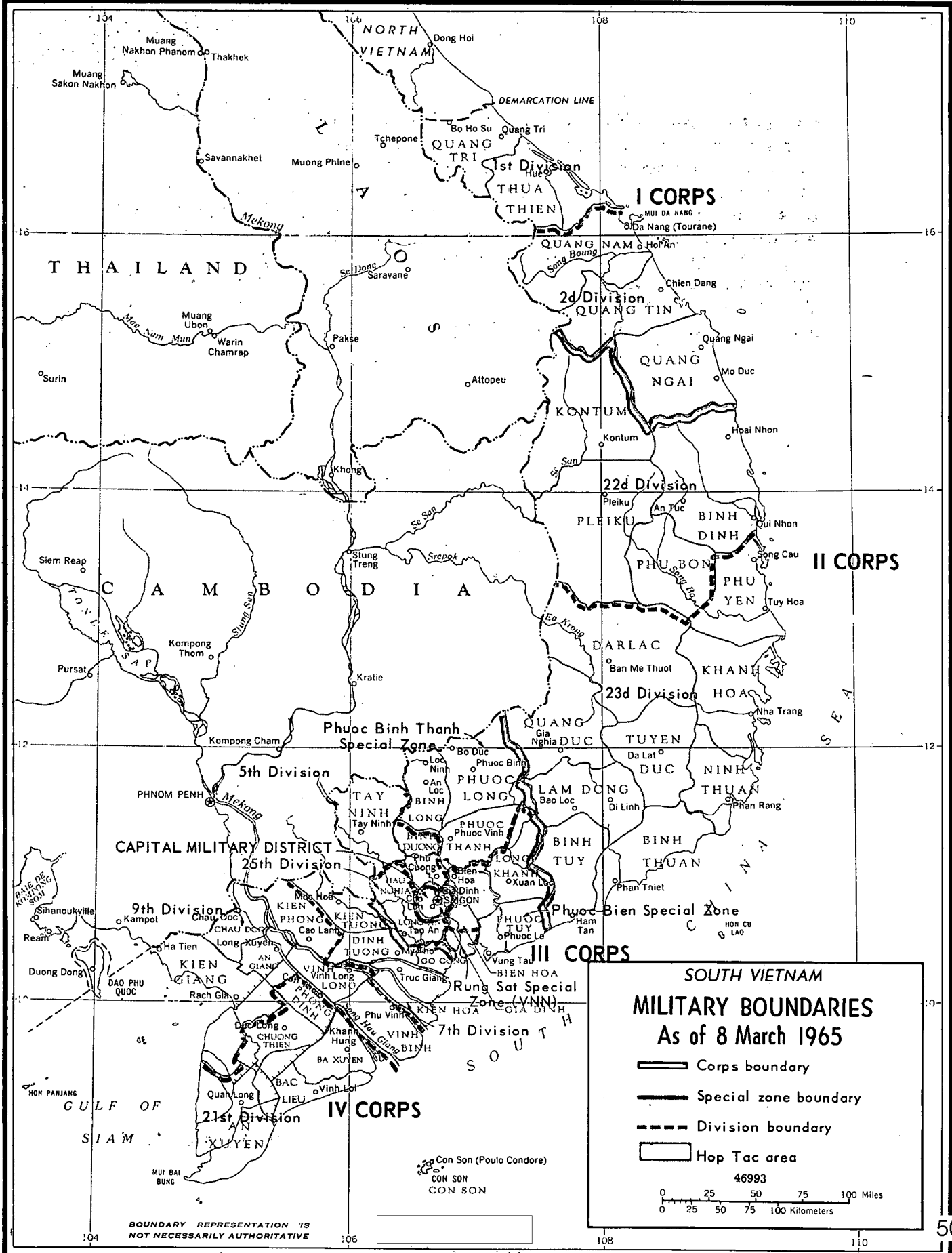
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VI. Other Major Aspects: The Cambodian foreign minister has said that Phnom Penh will insist that a new Geneva conference must address itself solely to the Cambodian problem. He admits, however, that such a meeting might be the occasion of informal discussions concerning Vietnam which could lead to an enlargement of the terms of reference. Press reports quote the South Vietnamese foreign minister as stating that his government had agreed to a conference limited to the Cambodian problem, but would join in any effort aimed at restoring peace and preserving freedom.

23 April 1965

iii

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50X1


I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The press reports today that US and Vietnamese fighter aircraft again bombed and strafed heavily fortified Communist positions 28 miles south of Da Nang, near the government outpost of Viet An. The effect of this strike on the Viet Cong is not yet known. Ground fighting has apparently been temporarily suspended, following yesterday's withdrawal of government forces in the face of heavy enemy resistance.

2. US military authorities reported an estimated 30 Viet Cong killed in a USAF strike yesterday against a guerrilla stronghold 275 miles northeast of Saigon. Also yesterday more than 115 houses and a bridge were destroyed in two separate raids in the Ca Mau Peninsula, 150 miles southwest of Saigon, according to press accounts from Saigon.

3. A USMC/USN underwater demolition team survey party was fired on by an unknown number of Viet Cong last night as they attempted to come ashore in landing craft from the USS Cook at the mouth of the Tra Bang River, 55 miles southeast of Da Nang, in Quang Tin Province. One marine and one navy man were killed, and another navy man wounded. The marines returned the fire with unknown results.

4. Updated interim results of the large-scale government heliborne operation initiated on 19 April in Binh Dinh Province to locate and destroy the 50th main force Viet Cong battalion and one local force Viet Cong company list enemy casualties thus far as 39 killed and 25 captured. Friendly losses are placed at 14 killed (ten US), and 19 wounded (seven US). Nine of the ten US killed were helicopter crewmen killed during the initial assault phase. The operation is continuing.

23 April 1965

I-1



50X1

5. MACV's military report for 21 April shows 22 Communist-initiated incidents, eight of which occurred during the reporting period. Viet Cong saboteurs mined an unescorted freight train in Bien Hoa Province, derailing the engine and two freight cars and injuring five railroad employees. Bridges were sabotaged in Binh Duong and Hau Nghia provinces. Small-arms harassing fire was placed on government posts, hamlets, and on district headquarters in Dinh Tuong, Chuong Thien, and Binh Tuy provinces.

6. Government ground operations of battalion size or larger declined on 21 April from 23 to 22, with nine initiated and ten terminated; none had significant contact with the enemy.

7. Operations in company strength or less conducted on 21 April numbered 2,734, an increase of 435 from the previous day. Thirty contacts were made with the Viet Cong, with guerrilla losses listed as 32 killed, 30 captured, and 36 weapons. Government forces sustained casualties of eight killed and 31 wounded.

8. VNAF and USAF aircraft flew 106 widely scattered sorties against enemy targets throughout South Vietnam on 21 April. Thirty-six of these were flown by USAF B-57 jet bombers and F-100 Supersabres. Pilot reports listed 99 structures destroyed and 21 damaged, although the results of most strikes were obscured by dense jungle foliage and tree cover. In the III Corps area, aircrews of five armed UH-1B helicopters estimated 13 Viet Cong killed when they returned ground fire encountered during visual surveillance missions.

23 April 1965

I-2

50X1

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. In a discussion with Ambassador Taylor yesterday concerning ARVN's ability to deal with a possible Viet Cong offensive after the present relative lull, Premier Quat mentioned several improvements he hoped to make. He spoke of the possibility of raising a force of 30,000 Nung tribesmen, of his plans to assign officers now serving in Saigon ministries to combat duty, and of improving the quality of present commanders. Quat made no mention of a further introduction of foreign troops.

2. The acting Roman Catholic archbishop of Hué told the US consul recently that he felt a temporary cessation of bombing against North Vietnam might be in order to allow Hanoi an opportunity to seek negotiations as an alternative of calling for intervention from Communist China. The archbishop commented that the strikes had raised morale among urban dwellers and intellectuals in South Vietnam, but said he felt that they had had negligible impact on rural areas, where local security was the main concern and could only be improved by ground action and a "truly revolutionary" government. The archbishop added that relations between Catholics and Buddhists in Hué were now better than at any time since last summer.

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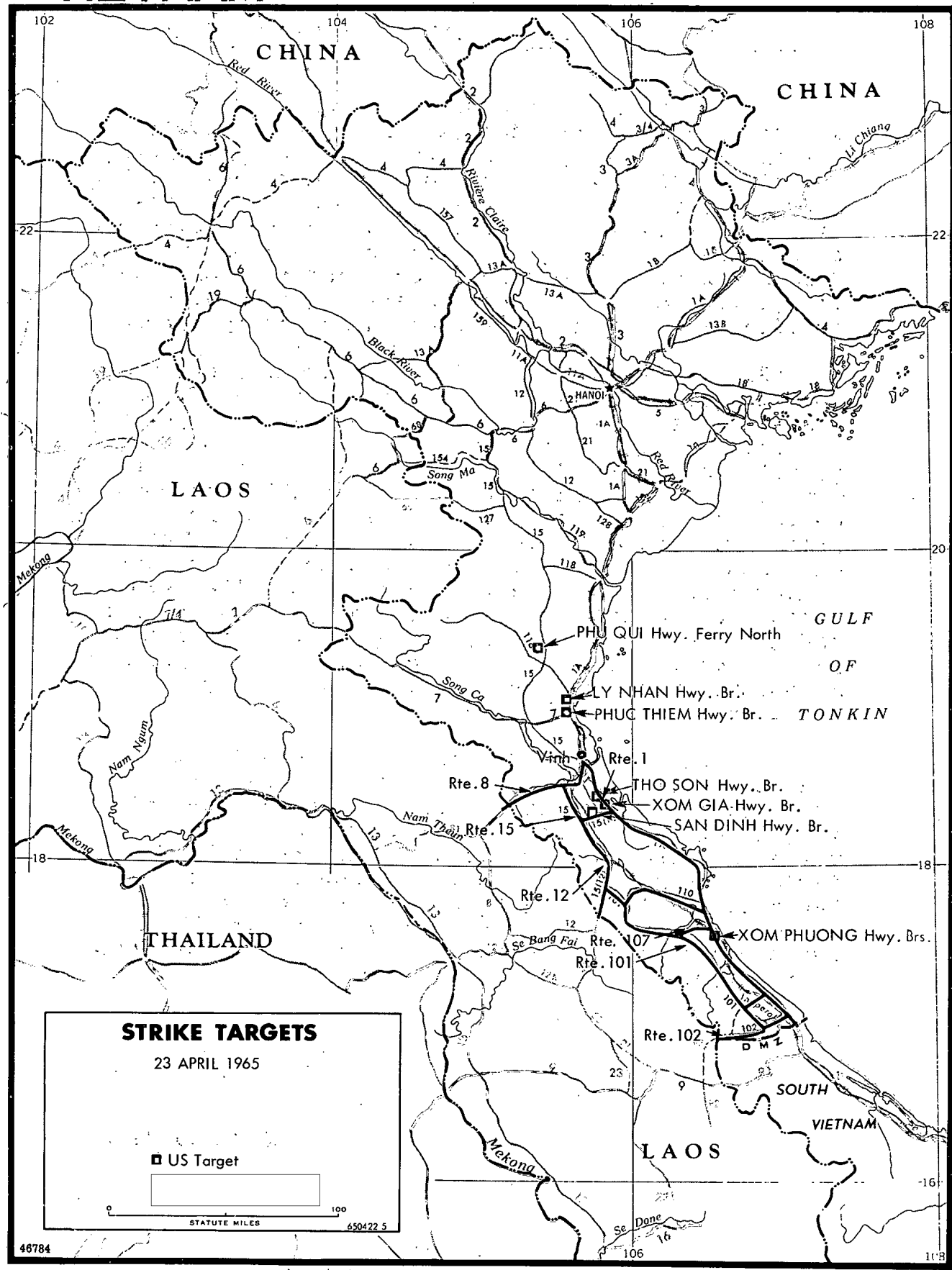
23 April 1965

II-1

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NORTH VIETNAM

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

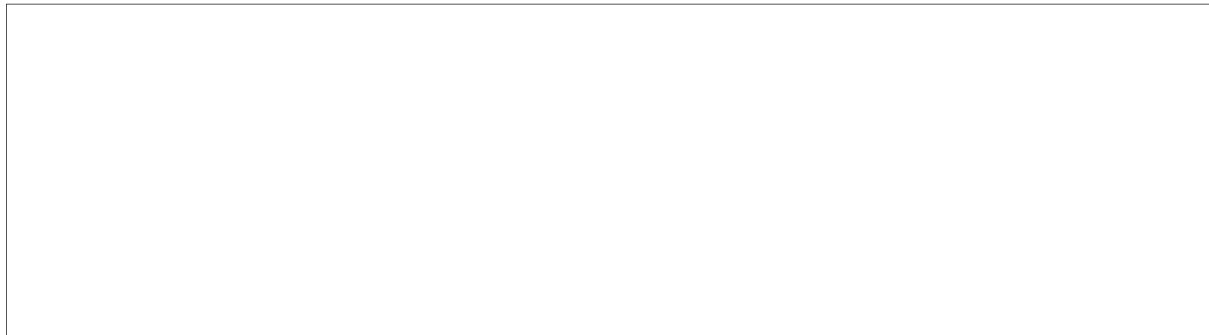
1. A USN strike against the twin highway bridges at Xom Phuong succeeded in destroying both bridges, one with bombs and the other with a Bullpup air-to-surface missile. Double strikes by navy planes also destroyed bridges at Tho Son, Xom Gia, and Sam Dinh. Sampans anchored near the Phu Thach ferry were strafed with unknown results.

2. USAF aircraft struck two bridges and two ferries on the same mission. The Phuc Thiem and Ly Nhan bridges were destroyed. The landings at Phu Qui highway ferry north were destroyed, and the Phu Qui highway ferry was damaged. Two trucks were strafed during post-strike armed reconnaissance by the strike aircraft; one was destroyed and one probably destroyed.

3. South Vietnamese aircraft conducting daytime armed reconnaissance along Route 101 from Xuan Son to the DMZ damaged the ferry at Xuan Son and a wooden bridge along the route.

4. USAF B-57s conducted night armed reconnaissance along Routes 7, 8, and 12. Targets attacked included gun emplacements and trucks on Route 7 and a bridge on Route 8. No strike results are available.

5. Further reporting on the USN strike against six vessels near Vinh on 22 April states that five of them, including the four patrol-type craft, were damaged. Three of the patrol craft got under way, but two were burning.



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23 April 1965

III-1



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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Nothing significant to report.

IV-1

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The North Vietnamese party first secretary and his delegation left Peiping on 22 April, and apparently stopped overnight in Nanning before arriving in Hanoi on 23 April. The Chinese account of the departure simply reported the event, mentioning the names of those seeing the Vietnamese off. The Hanoi version stated that the "friendship visit" to the USSR and China had ended "successfully."

2. The first tangible results of the week-long DRV-Soviet talks appear to have emerged. Moscow TASS reported that the head of the "permanent mission" of the NFLSV headed by Dang Quang Minh, a NFLSV central committee member, arrived in Moscow today along with other "officials" of the mission. Reportedly, the mission would enjoy the same quasi-diplomatic status as the front's six other overseas missions. This announcement comes only six days after the joint DRV-Soviet communiqué recognized the Front as the "only legitimate representative" of the South Vietnamese people. Moscow had agreed to the establishment of a Front mission in Moscow late last year.

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4. North Vietnam continues to stress the "wholehearted support" of the Chinese people for the "Vietnamese peoples' just struggle" against the US. This support, according to an editorial, is "a great encouragement." The editorial quoted the 20 April Chinese Communist National People's Congress resolution supporting the recent appeal of the DRV National Assembly. The editorial asserted that "China's assistance to the Vietnamese people" is a "great, wholehearted, long-standing, and comprehensive assistance."

V-1

23 April 1965

50X1

5. The Hanoi paper repeated various Chinese Communist statements of support such as Teng Hsiao-ping's 18 April declaration that "in all circumstances and at all costs, the Chinese Government is resolved to fulfill its internationalist duty to support the Vietnamese people's struggle against US imperialism."

6. The editorial repeated the Chinese resolution's wording that the Chinese people are ready, "when needed," to send volunteers to help the Vietnamese "drive out the US aggressors." The North Vietnamese domestic radiobroadcast version of the Chinese NPC resolution, however, changed the words, "when needed," to "when asked," probably in an effort to reassure the home audience that any decision to send Chinese volunteers into Vietnam would rest with Hanoi, not with Peiping.

7. The Chinese are continuing their efforts to spread the idea that the Communist side is taking a reasonable stand in Vietnam while US "aggression" threatens world peace. During a recent conversation with a diplomat from a neutral Asian nation, the Chinese counselor of embassy in Paris charged the US with attempting to increase tension by sending more troops to Vietnam. He asserted that it appeared the Americans were "willing to go to the Chinese border according to their present plans."

8. The Chinese diplomat then contrasted alleged US bellicosity with French efforts to promote neutralization. He said the French have suggested a tripartite government for South Vietnam which would represent French interests, US interests, and the interests of the Vietnamese, and claimed that the Vietnamese people would be "quite willing" to cooperate with the French. This is the first time that the Communists have hinted at this type of an arrangement.

9. The Chinese reiterated, however, that this was not the time for negotiations and stated categorically that no approach had been made by the Americans through diplomatic channels or in Warsaw. He pointed out that it was especially important for the neutral nations to stand together in the face of US "aggression," and commented that the nonaligned countries had not done enough--although they have "good intentions."

10. In private conversations with selected foreign officials Premier Chou En-lai has been trying to give the impression that China is not completely inflexible on Vietnam negotiations. Former British Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker on 23 April informed the American ambassador in Bangkok that during his recent visit to Burma he learned that Chou had told Ne Win that Peiping would be interested in a Cambodian conference "as a start."

During a conversation with the French envoy in Peiping, Chou is earlier reported to have taken the same line, suggesting that Cambodia be dealt with in a conference first, then Laos, and finally Vietnam.


11. The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry informed the Canadian Embassy in Belgrade on 12 April that the 17-nonaligned-nation appeal on Vietnam negotiations was handed over to the Liberation Front representative in Prague on 5 April by the ambassadors of Yugoslavia, the UAR, and Ghana. The next day the Front representative invited the three ambassadors back and returned the appeal with a letter signed by the acting head of the Front mission which stated that the appeal was "unacceptable" since it would involve abandonment of the liberation struggle. The letter referred to the 22 March Liberation Front statement as representing the "irrevocable position" of the Front. The Front representative in Peiping had reportedly refused to accept the appeal when nonaligned diplomats in that capital had attempted to hand it over. The Front has not publicly replied to the appeal.

12. Asian Communists apparently hope to make greater use of TV films in their anti-American propaganda on Vietnam. In late March a four-man Chinese Communist television team was noted on "urgent assignment" in North Vietnam photographing war damage. In Paris meanwhile, the US Embassy was recently informed by a representative of the French state-owned TV system that the Paris office has been flooded with thousands of feet of film from Viet Cong sources. This film is said to be accompanied by carefully prepared captions and scripts.

23 April 1965

V-3

50X1



13. A five-man Italian Communist Party delegation left on 23 April for Moscow, Peiping, and Hanoi to discuss ways of supporting North Vietnam, according to a press report from Rome. The delegation is headed by Giancarlo Pajetta, member of the party secretariat and one of the party's chief foreign affairs experts.

23 April 1965

V-43



50X1


VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Cambodian Foreign Minister Koun Wick told the British chargé in Phnom Penh yesterday that Cambodia would insist that a Geneva conference address itself solely to the Cambodian problem. Koun Wick recognized, however, that a conference on Cambodia might occasion informal discussions of Vietnam which could lead, if all parties agreed, to an expansion of the conference's terms of reference. He said that Cambodia wanted participation limited to the 1954 Geneva powers, and indicated that the absence of the National Liberation Front was no problem since Cambodia already had "satisfactory assurances" from the Front. Koun Wick's remarks are consistent with recent statements by Prince Sihanouk, who apparently fears that he cannot get Chinese backing for a Cambodian conference that is recognized as a prelude to discussions on Vietnam.

2. Press reports quote South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Do as stating that he had replied to the Cambodian Government that South Vietnam would agree to participate in a conference limited to a recognition and guarantee of Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity. He reportedly added, however, that South Vietnam would join in any effort aimed at restoring peace in the area and preserving the independence and freedom of the countries of Southeast Asia.

23 April 1965

VI-1


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TOP SECRET