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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
2 August 1966

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

North Vietnamese politburo member Nguyen Chi Thanh, who reportedly has been in South Vietnam directing the war effort since early 1965, has written an article criticizing those who had lost heart after the introduction of US troops into South Vietnam in mid-1965.

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[REDACTED] US forces fought several scattered skirmishes with the enemy in the central highlands during the conduct of Operation PAUL REVERE.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: US forces clash with Communists in several areas southwest of Pleiku (Para. 1). A South Vietnamese Army convoy was ambushed yesterday south of Saigon (Para. 2). Operation SPRINGFIELD II ended yesterday in Binh Duong Province, and Operation CHEYENNE began in the same area (Paras. 3-4).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Premier Ky reportedly announced today that he would not be initially available as a candidate for the position of chief executive for the government to be elected some time next year (Para. 1). Viet Cong armed units and sabotage squads in the Saigon area are being instructed to support Communist political efforts directed against the government's forthcoming elections (Para. 2).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: US Navy aircraft have struck the Haiphong POL facility for the third time since 29 June (Paras. 1-2).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: North Vietnamese politburo member Nguyen Chi Thanh, who reportedly has been in South Vietnam directing the war effort since early 1965, has authored what appears to be a defense of his stewardship against critics in Hanoi (Paras. 1-7).

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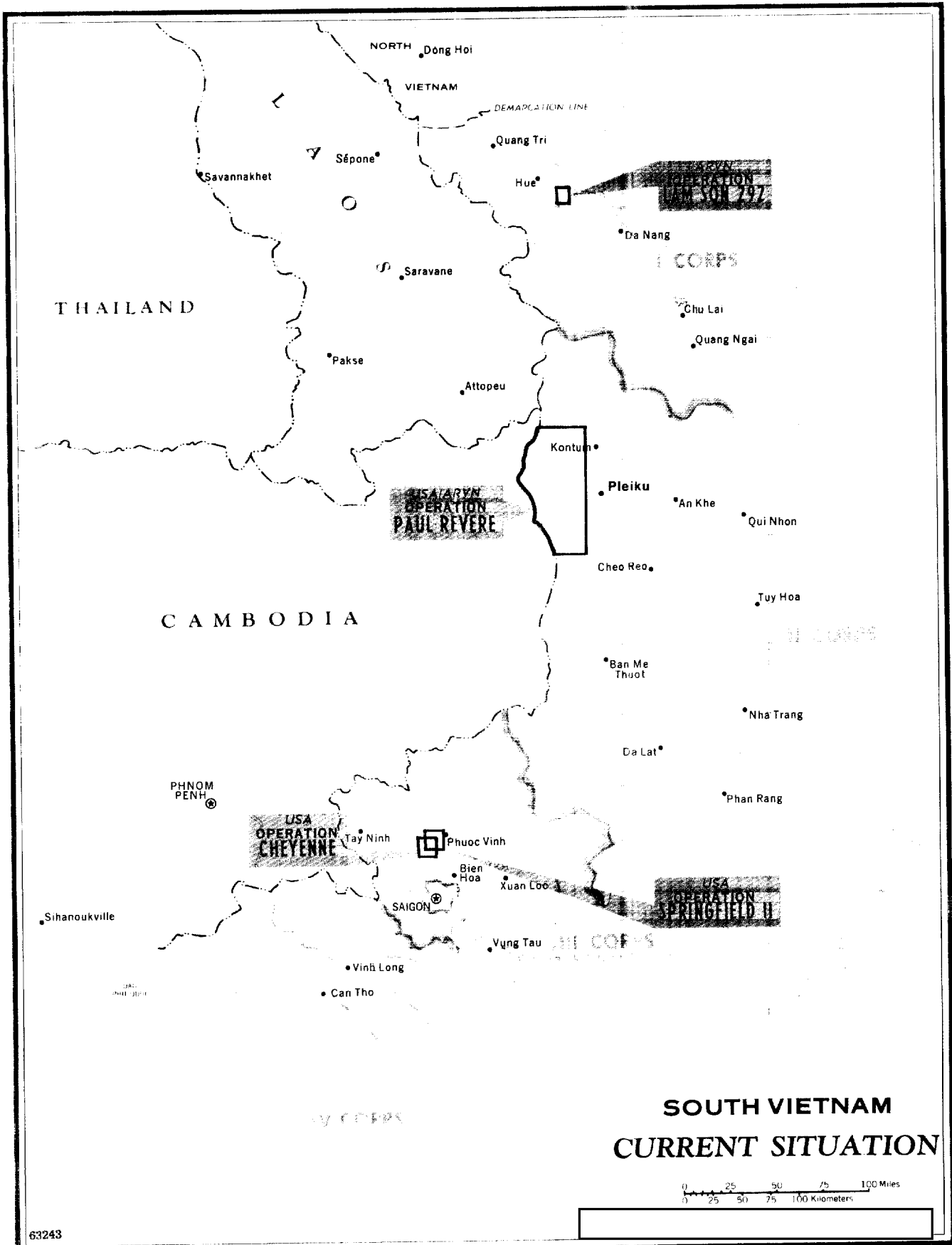
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Hanoi is attempting to strike a threatening note in its protests of US bombings in the Demilitarized Zone (Para. 11).

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VI. Other Major Aspects: Road construction is proceeding in northwestern North Vietnam (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Elements of the US 25th Infantry Division, participating in Operation PAUL REVERE in the central highlands of Kontum and Pleiku provinces, clashed with Communist forces in several scattered skirmishes today. One battalion of the US 1st Cavalry Division was helilifted into an area about 20 miles southwest of Pleiku and immediately was attacked by an estimated battalion-size enemy force. With support from tactical air strikes and coordinated artillery fire, the US troops repulsed the attack. In another encounter, a company of the 25th Infantry Division reported heavy contact with an enemy force in an area approximately 30 miles southwest of Pleiku near the Cambodian border. American casualties in today's action total ten killed and 80 wounded. Initial reports of enemy casualties indicate four killed. Operation PAUL REVERE is a long-term border surveillance operation which began on 9 May. Some 650 Viet Cong have been killed to date.

2. A South Vietnamese Army convoy was ambushed yesterday by a Viet Cong force approximately 25 miles south of Saigon. A reaction force was sent to the area and was supported by tactical air strikes, armed helicopters, and artillery fire. During the hour-long engagement, 32 South Vietnamese soldiers were killed, 14 wounded, and ten allied trucks damaged. One Viet Cong was reported killed in the action.

3. Operation SPRINGFIELD II, a US search-and-destroy operation in Binh Duong Province, ended yesterday. This operation was conducted in an area approximately 30 miles north of Saigon by five battalions of the US 1st Infantry Division. American casualties included two killed and five wounded. A total of ten Viet Cong were killed and two captured. The 1st Infantry Division began a six-battalion route security operation--CHEYENNE--yesterday in the same area. Estimated Viet Cong strength in the area of these operations totals 2,380.

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5. The three-battalion South Vietnamese search-and-destroy Operation LAM SON 292 ended yesterday following three days of operation in an area southeast of Hue in Thua Thien Province. Cumulative results were three South Vietnamese killed and eight wounded with 15 Viet Cong killed and two captured.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. According to the press, Premier Ky today formally announced that he "would leave politics" and return to the air force when an elected government assumes office some time next year. Various wire services have reported that Ky's statement today took the form of a communique' from the premier's office, following remarks by Ky along this same line to some newsmen on 31 July. Ky previously has expressed a desire to return to military duties, and today's remarks apparently put him officially on record as being initially unavailable as a chief executive for an elected government. Premier Ky has also been quoted recently as stating that Chief of State Nguyen Van Thieu might be a candidate for president or chief executive under the projected constitution.

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2. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Viet Cong have assigned some of their armed units and sabotage squads in the Saigon area to support Communist political efforts against the government's forthcoming constitutional assembly elections. These forces are to increase terrorism in the capital through assassinations and sabotage in an effort to cut down on the total vote.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. US Navy aircraft attacked the Haiphong POL facility for the third time on 2 August. Initial pilot reports indicate that all bombs were in the target area. One large explosion, three smaller secondary explosions, and a fire were reported. No US aircraft were lost. There were no tankers noted moored in the vicinity of the target.

2. Haiphong had been struck previously on 29 June and 7 July. Photographic analysis of these strikes indicated that slightly over 80 percent of this target had been destroyed. Today's strike was targeted against the remaining facilities including the pumping station, drumming and packaging facility, and the bunkering piers.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Politburo member Nguyen Chi Thanh, who reportedly has been in South Vietnam directing the war effort since early 1965, has authored what appears to be a defense of his stewardship against critics in Hanoi. The article was contained in the July issue of the North Vietnamese party journal, Hoc Tap, and carries unusually forthright and explicit criticism of those who differ with Thanh's views.

2. In essence, Thanh criticized those who had lost heart after the introduction of US combat troops into South Vietnam in mid-1965. Judging from the specific policies he defends and from the particular attitudes he attacks, Thanh was aiming his remarks at high-level Vietnamese Communists rather than the middle or lower level ranks who generally come in for the bulk of criticism. He particularly singled out those who base their analysis of the current situation in South Vietnam on past experience and ignore present "realities." Thanh asserted that "to repeat exactly what has belonged to history in a new reality is an adventurous act."

3. This barb is an obvious challenge to those who still rely primarily on the 1947 analysis by Truong Chinh of the war against France. Vo Nguyen Giap, the hero of Dien Bien Phu and the defense minister in Hanoi, is the most famous pupil of Truong Chinh and an old personal adversary of Nguyen Chi Thanh.

4. If Thanh and others in the Vietnamese Communist hierarchy have had some differences over how the war should be fought, the appearance of his article in the authoritative party journal suggests that the dispute has been resolved, at least for the time being, in Thanh's favor. There is no indication that any heads have rolled as a result of the argument. There is however, a hint in Thanh's article

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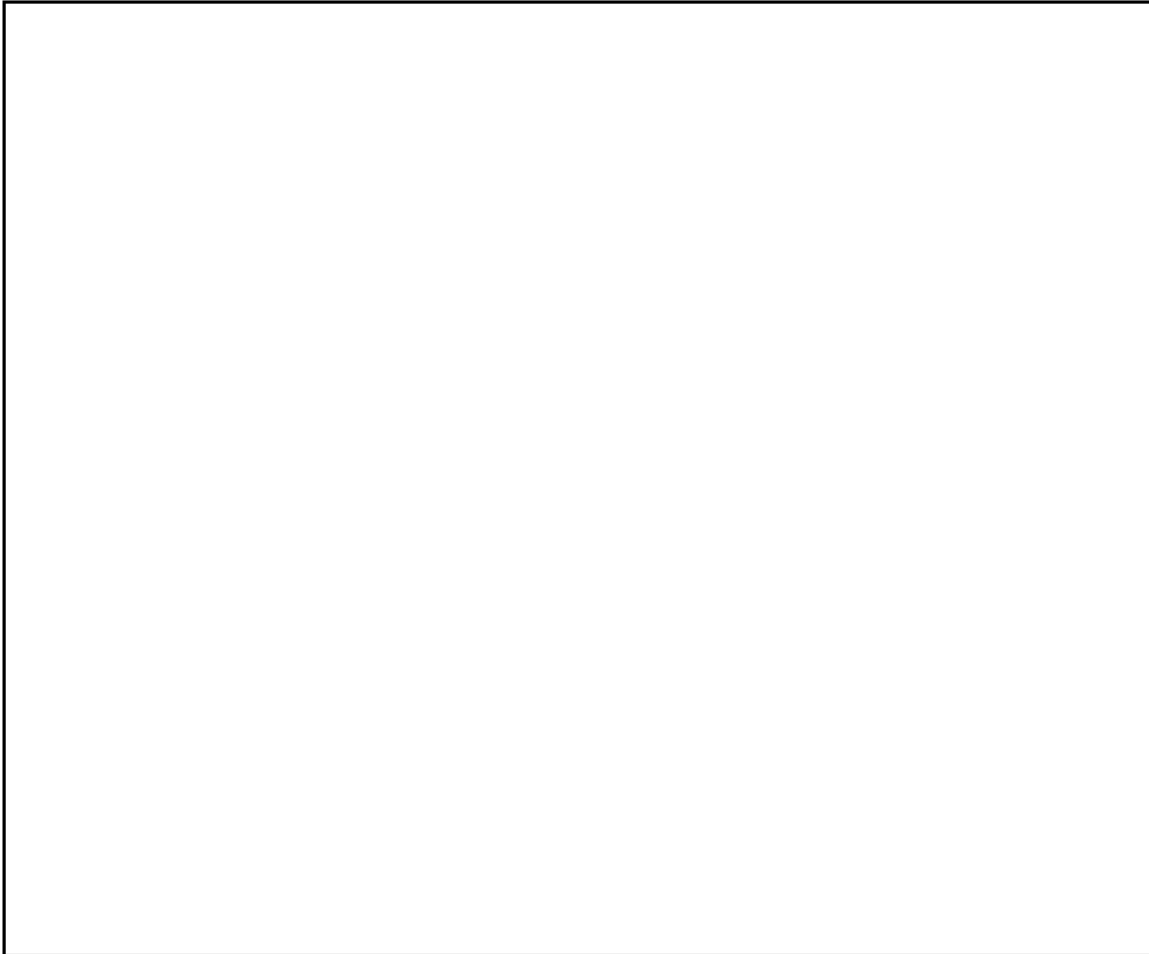
that there has been some footdragging in the ranks because of discouragement over the results of the past year's fighting against the US.

5. Thanh lashed out in unusually harsh language at those who offer suggestions on fighting the war but who are not familiar with the battlefield situation. He charged that in the situation such as existed in mid-1965 when US combat forces increased abruptly, "erroneous tendencies" appeared as well as "correct ideas." The erroneous tendencies result in the performance of work according to "old customs," according to Thanh.

6. Thanh singled out the question of the relation between the Communist effort in the delta and that in the highlands as one in which there is a particular difference of opinion. Although Thanh did not go into details, he did claim that some people tended to look at this problem "in an old-fashioned manner." The implication was that someone, presumably on a policy planning level in the military, had proposed that the Communists in South Vietnam concentrate their military efforts in the highlands, even at the expense of their position in the lowlands and delta area.

7. A recent article in the North Vietnamese Army journal, written in South Vietnam, addressed itself to this same problem and asserted that the 1965 Communist offensive in South Vietnam had succeeded in launching attacks in both the highlands and the delta, something which had never before been accomplished. The article claimed that this was the proper strategy and that it must be continued this year.

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Hanoi Protests Bombing of DMZ

11. Hanoi is attempting to strike a threatening note in its protests of the B-52 Stratofortress bombings of the DMZ without admitting that its own troops have recently transited this area en route to South Vietnam. In a party daily commentary on 2 August, Hanoi warned that "up to now" the DRV armed forces had always respected the 1954 Geneva agreements and the status of the DMZ, but that the US must now "bear all the consequences of destroying the buffer character of this area." This kind of veiled threat has been used before and has become fairly typical of Vietnamese propaganda reaction to US military

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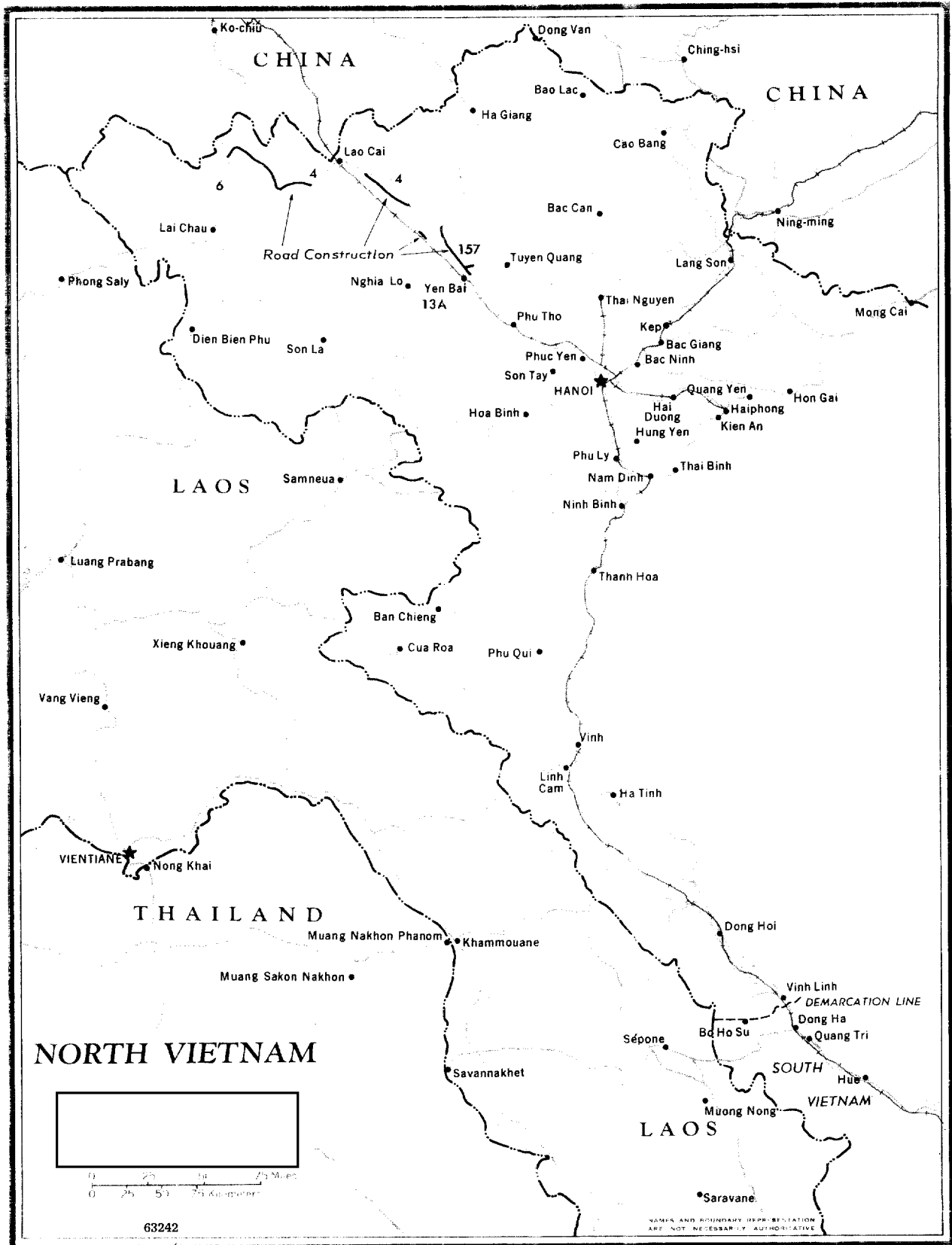
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initiatives in Vietnam, particularly with respect to the Geneva agreements and the question of foreign volunteers. This kind of a threat is probably as close as the Vietnamese wish to come to the more inflammatory Chinese propaganda stand that in "tearing up" the Geneva agreements the US justifies the Communists' ignoring these agreements.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Road work which has been under way northwest of Yen Bai since mid-1965 is continuing at a slow pace, and two roads in the area now appear to be in late stages of construction. Completion of the work will provide the first direct road connection between Yen Bai and Lao Cai on the Chinese border, and generally improve the road transport network in the northwest border area.

2. Photography [redacted] shows a road from Yen Bai to Lao Cai to be in the final stages of grading with portions of it already graded and usable. Several bridges still appear to be in early stages of construction, however. When finally completed, the road will run roughly northeast of and parallel to the Hanoi - Lao Cai railroad, connecting existing Routes 4 and 157 in the Lao Cai area with Route 13A at Yen Bai.

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[redacted]
[redacted] An existing road running north from Yen Bai in the direction of Lao Cai also has been extended for about 12 kilometers and may eventually provide a second road connection between Yen Bai and Lao Cai. West of Lao Cai work is nearing completion on another road that will link Lai Chou, on Route 6, with Lao Cai and with the Hanoi - Lao Cai railroad. Sections of this road also appear to be serviceable, but numerous bridges remain to be completed.

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3. The pace of construction observed on these roads suggests that they are part of a general plan to improve road transport in the area and that the major part of the work is being carried out by the North Vietnamese. There is no indication that Chinese Communist military engineers in the area are involved in this construction, although it is possible that they may provide occasional assistance.

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