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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

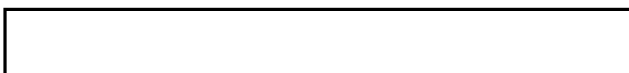


THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
23 August 1966

State Dept. review completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
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HIGHLIGHTS

Combat activity continues light in South Vietnam. However, a US freighter struck a Communist mine in one of the two main sea channels serving Saigon, and US troops operating in Quang Nam Province in the north discovered a battalion-sized enemy base camp. Reports continue to be received of Communist plans to disrupt South Vietnam's coming election.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
US Marines participating in Operation ALLEGHENY located an enemy arms base camp in Quang Nam Province (Para. 1). US units in Operation JOHN PAUL JONES discovered a small Communist arms cache northwest of Tuy Hoa (Para. 2). Three South Korean battalions began search-and-destroy Operation POLE STAR in northern Quang Ngai Province today (Para. 3). Operation COLORADO concluded in Quang Tin and Quang Nam provinces with a total of 514 Communist troops killed (Para. 4). Viet Cong guerrillas sank a US freighter in one of Saigon's river channels (Paras. 6-7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Reports of Viet Cong activities aimed at disrupting the forthcoming election for a constitutional assembly continue to be received from various areas in South Vietnam (Paras. 1-4). Some tentative estimates of the size of the voter turnout on election day have been received (Para. 5). A Buddhist effort to boycott the election appears more certain, although it is not yet clear whether techniques other than persuasion will be employed (Paras. 6-7).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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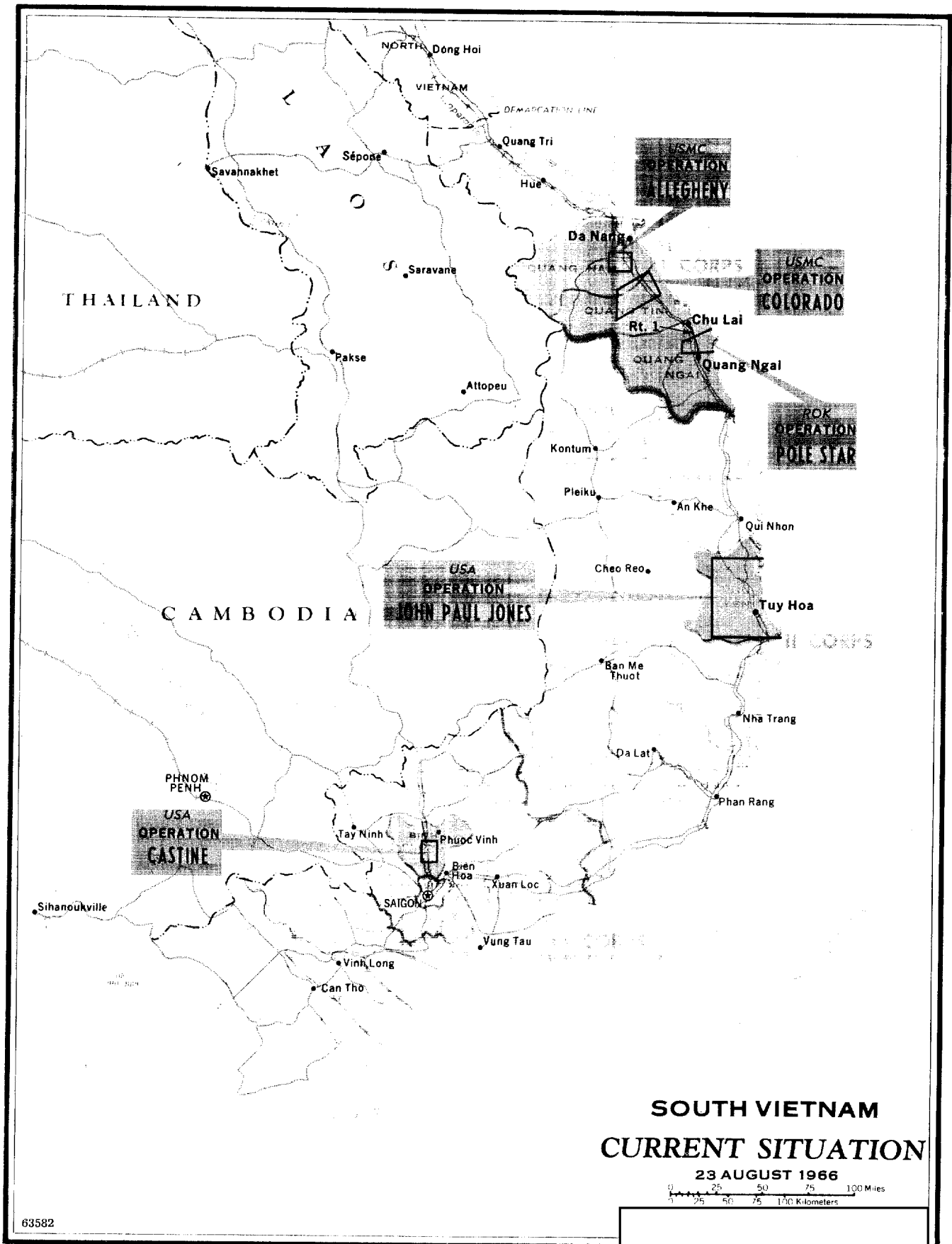
IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There
is nothing of significance to report.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. One battalion of US Marines began Operation ALLEGHENY yesterday. This search-and-destroy operation is being conducted in Quang Nam Province in an area about 15 miles southwest of Da Nang. Shortly after the operation began, a battalion-size Communist base camp was found which included 30 houses--each with a 15-man capacity--and two 60-man classrooms; large hillside caves in the area could be used as bomb shelters. During the search of the camp, one US Marine platoon was attacked by an unknown number of Viet Cong. Fourteen Americans were wounded before allied aircraft forced the attacking enemy force to retreat. US reinforcements are scheduled to reenter the area and destroy the base. The 70th Viet Cong Battalion has operated in the vicinity of the base in the past, and there have been several recent reports of a new, unidentified battalion in this area.

2. US Operation JOHN PAUL JONES continues in coastal Phu Yen Province without significant contact with Communist forces. However, elements of the US 101st Airborne Division located an enemy weapons cache in an area about 30 miles northwest of Tuy Hoa. Among the captured items were 16 cases of hand grenades, an unknown quantity of 60-mm. mortar rounds, a small quantity of bangalore torpedoes, and a US Army radio set.

3. Three battalions of South Koreans began Operation POLE STAR today in the coastal flatlands of northern Quang Ngai Province. This clearing operation is being conducted in a broad area on each side of Route 1 between Quang Ngai and Chu Lai. The 21st North Vietnamese Army Regiment--with a strength of 2,000 men--is reported to be in the area.

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4. US search-and-destroy Operation COLORADO, conducted in Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces by three battalions of US Marines, ended yesterday. In the operation, which began on 5 August, 25 Americans were killed and 177 wounded. A total of 514 Communist troops were killed and 54 captured. These cumulative totals include enemy casualties reported by seven South Vietnamese battalions which participated in this operation for ten days. During this time, South Vietnamese casualties totaled 50 killed and 203 wounded.

5. Operation CASTINE, a search-and-destroy operation being conducted in Binh Duong Province by three battalions of the US 1st Infantry Division, ended yesterday without having established significant contact with enemy forces operating in the area. There were no American casualties. Communist losses include two killed, and two weapons and 100 tons of rice captured.

Viet Cong Sink US Freighter

6. A Communist mine today sank the US freighter Baton Rouge Victory, operated by the US Military Sea Transport Service, in one of Saigon's two supply channels 22 miles south of Saigon. Seven crewmen, all believed to be American, were killed in the blast. Three others from the 45-man crew were reported wounded.

7. Baton Rouge Victory sank after being maneuvered to the north bank of the river. However, the main channel of the river remains open. The freighter, carrying general cargo, was substituted at the last minute for passage upriver in place of an explosive-carrying ship.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Reports of Viet Cong activities aimed at disrupting the forthcoming election for a constitutional assembly continue to be received from various parts of South Vietnam.

2. In central Vietnam, these reports range from antielection propaganda and seizure of voters' identity cards in Thua Thien and Quang Ngai provinces to the movement of a well-armed Viet Cong battalion to the vicinity of populated areas in Quang Nam Province. Other [redacted] reports of varying reliability include the formation of Viet Cong teams to assassinate candidates, sabotage of the polls, and planned demonstrations. A US official in Da Nang, however, has commented that neither the urban nor the rural Vietnamese populace in the area has yet been noticeably affected by Viet Cong anti-election activity. In his opinion, a Buddhist boycott is the most serious threat to a large turnout at the polls in the city of Da Nang, while Viet Cong intimidation would probably be more effective among rural inhabitants.

3. In Ninh Thuan Province, Viet Cong cadres have received training in methods to upset the 11 September elections, [redacted]

[redacted] Techniques covered include various methods of persuasion against voting, the use of explosives, and the interception of ballot boxes.

4. In the delta area south of Saigon, estimates of Viet Cong intimidation and voter interest vary from province to province. US observers have reported evidence of Viet Cong attempts to discredit the election in Chuong Thien and An Giang provinces, but have assessed the Viet Cong as having a greater capability for restricting the voter

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turnout in the former province than in the latter.

[redacted] interest in the election is high in Dinh Tuong and Kien Hoa provinces, with stiff competition looming up among Catholic and Cao Dai candidates. However, [redacted]

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[redacted] voter interest appears to be much lower in neighboring Go Cong Province, where there is some concern about Viet Cong action on election day.

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5. Although there is still ample time for events to have a significant effect on the size of the voter turnout on election day, some tentative estimates have been made. Phan Tan Chuc, a Saigon University lawyer and a former minister of education in the Huong government, has estimated that the Buddhist boycott will be quite successful in central Vietnam, with only 30 or 40 percent of the electorate voting. He expects that about 50 percent of registered voters will cast ballots in the southern provinces, and possibly 60 percent in Saigon. The US Embassy has commented separately that an over-all turnout of 50 percent of registered voters on election day will constitute a significant achievement by the government. Some 73 percent of the electorate voted in last year's local elections, which included full Buddhist participation and which was considered far less important by both the Saigon government and the Viet Cong.

Buddhist Election Boycott Appears More Certain

6. The official text of a recent Buddhist Institute communiqué, obtained yesterday by the US Embassy, directly urges Buddhist followers not to vote, rather than merely "reminding" them of their right not to vote as previously reported from unofficial sources. In addition, militant Thich Phap Sieu, recently named acting chairman of the General Association of Monks and Nuns, yesterday emphasized to newsmen the intentions of the Buddhist movement to boycott the forthcoming election.

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7. It is not yet clear whether the militants will attempt methods other than persuasion to increase the effectiveness of such a boycott. A moderate Buddhist monk recently in touch with US officials said he felt that the militants were planning "something" but did not know exactly what it was. He felt, however, that they would not dare to resume street demonstrations.

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Yesterday, Phap Sieu told newsmen that some 200 monks and nuns had recently pledged that they were ready to die to "preserve their faith and freedom."

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