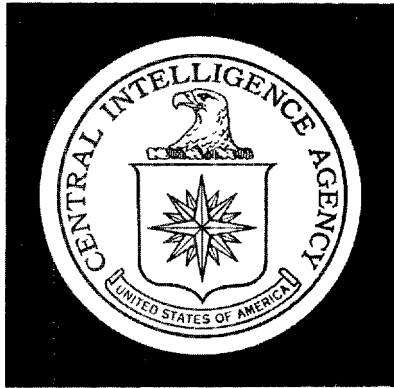


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

NSA review completed

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7 December 1966

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Information as of 1600

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HIGHLIGHTS

The assassination of Tran Van Van--an outspoken critic of the Ky regime--apparently by the Viet Cong, may be calculated to draw suspicion to the regime itself and exacerbate regional frictions.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Operation SUTTER, conducted by US Marines in Quang Tin Province, ended on 6 December with a total of 13 Communist soldiers reported killed (Para. 1). A South Vietnamese search-and-destroy operation in the Mekong Delta was responsible for killing 12 Viet Cong on 6 December (Para. 2). A South Vietnamese outpost about 18 miles northwest of Saigon was overrun with five South Vietnamese reported killed (Para. 3). Two explosive charges were found and disarmed early on 7 December at an ammunition dump on Tan Son Nhut Air Base (Para. 4). The VC radio has called Operation ATTLEBORO the "bitterest defeat" yet suffered by the US (Paras. 5-7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Tran Van Van, a prominent southern member of the Constituent Assembly, was assassinated early on the morning of 7 December by an alleged Viet Cong terrorist (Paras. 1-4).

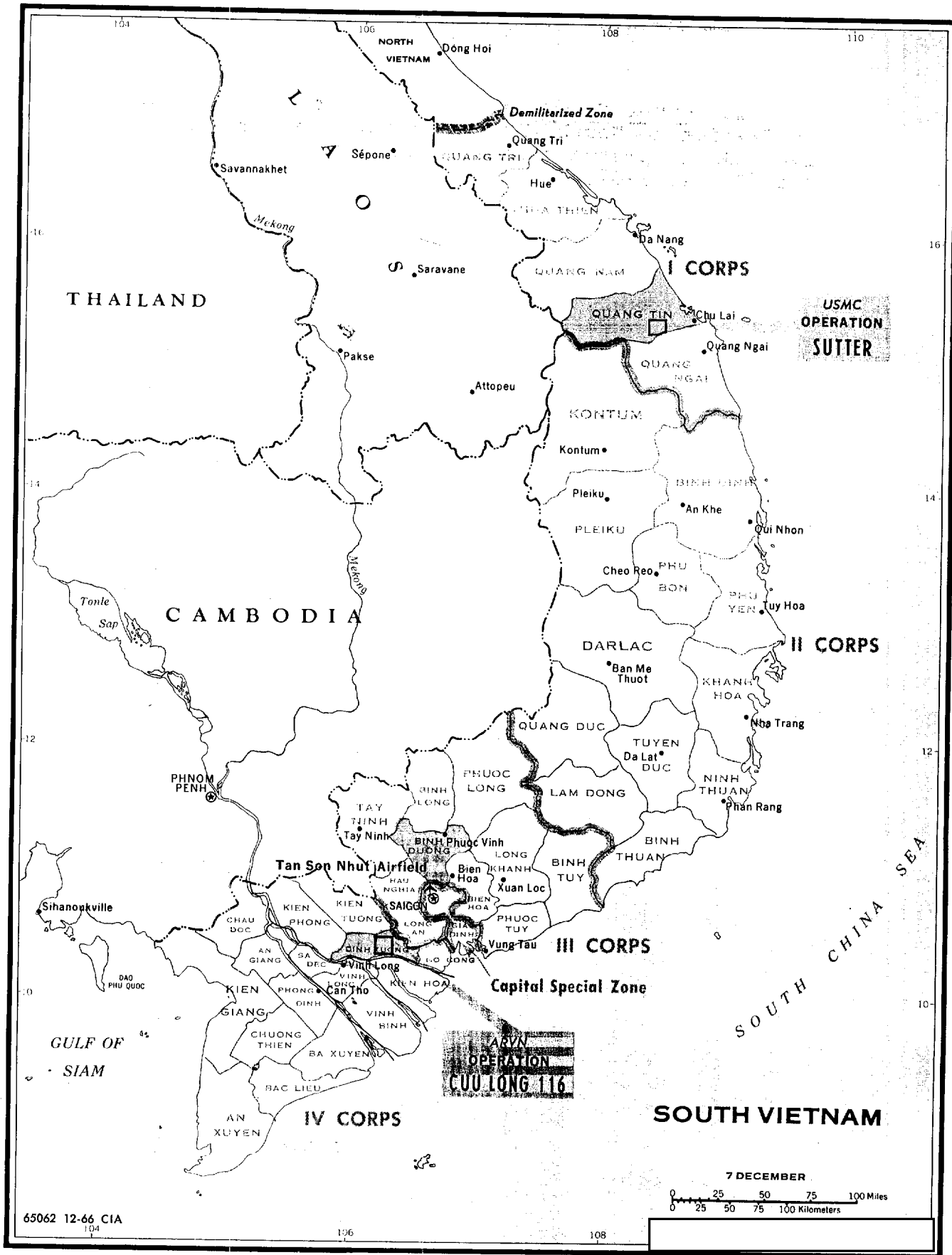
III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: North Korean pilots flew over North Vietnam once again on 5 December (Paras. 1-3). MIG-17 interceptors are reported to have fired air-to-air missiles on 4 December (Para. 4).

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

V. Communist Political Developments: Chinese Communists' claim that they will send political advisers to Vietnam unlikely to be fulfilled (Paras. 1-3).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Trains bringing aid deliveries to North Vietnam may have begun using recently completed standard gauge rail lines to Kep (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The one-battalion US Marine Operation SUTTER, which was conducted in an area about 10 miles west of Chu Lai in Quang Tin Province, ended on 6 December. Communist losses for this seven-day operation were 13 killed, one captured and six suspects apprehended. American casualties were one killed and 14 wounded.

2. South Vietnamese Operation CUU LONG 116, a one-day search-and-destroy operation in the Mekong Delta province of Dinh Tuong, resulted in Viet Cong casualties of 12 killed, nine captured, and 12 suspects detained. Only one South Vietnamese soldier was reported wounded.

3. Five South Vietnamese soldiers were killed when their outpost in Binh Duong Province about 18 miles northwest of Saigon was overrun late on 6 December. Friendly losses also included one soldier missing and six weapons lost. Viet Cong casualties are unknown.

4. Viet Cong guerrillas apparently have attempted another terrorist assault on the huge Tan Son Nhut Airfield northwest of Saigon. Two 62-pound explosive charges discovered at a base ammunition dump were disarmed early on 7 December.

VC Radio Reports on Operation ATTLEBORO

5. The Communist Liberation Radio on 2 December offered a commentary on the recently concluded US operation ATTLEBORO, calling it the "bitterest defeat" yet suffered by the US. The broadcast made extravagant claims of US casualties, asserting that "more than 3,000" were killed "or destroyed." The commentary went on to boast that the "liberation forces" would follow up on this "victory" with other similar successes.

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6. The broadcast said that the Communists should expect further such US operations as ATTLEBORO and offered some analysis of how the Communists plan to cope with them. The radio report suggested that the Communists do not intend to meet such operations head on, but plan to look for soft spots in nearby areas which can be exploited while US forces are tied down in a large operation. The commentary claimed that during ATTLEBORO, when the US "was locked up north of Tay Ninh," many successes were gained in nearby provinces.

7. The aim of the Communists, according to the broadcast, should be to "lure the enemy out of his bases" so that the Communists can attack and destroy him. The commentary asserted that the key to victory over such large-scale operations will be the Communists' ability to coordinate guerrilla attacks with mobile attacks.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Tran Van Van, an outspoken critic of the Ky regime in the Constituent Assembly, was shot to death in his car while en route to an assembly session on the morning of 7 December. One of two alleged assassins was captured when he fell off a motorcycle from which the fatal pistol shots were fired; the other man is reported to have escaped. Appearing later at a National Police press conference, the 20-year-old captured terrorist said he was sent into Saigon a week ago by the Viet Cong on an assassination mission.

2. If the killing was indeed a Viet Cong plot, as seems likely, the VC picked their target well. Van was a southern activist in the assembly and was one of the men acting as a thorn in the side of the northern-oriented Ky regime during the recent cabinet crisis. The Communists may have calculated that the murder of a major critic of the Ky government would draw suspicion to the regime itself and further exacerbate regional factions.

3. It has been evident that the Communists are well attuned to the nuances of political bickering between groups inside and outside the Saigon government. For example, during such periods of tension as the antigovernment "struggle movement" last spring, the cabinet crisis this fall, and the recent removal of General Quang from IV Corps, newscasts from the Viet Cong and Hanoi have done their utmost to agitate the opposing parties by siding with Ky's opponents. Moreover, the Viet Cong publicly threatened, prior to the 11 September elections, that they would assassinate candidates to the assembly.

4. Before learning of Van's death during its morning recess, the assembly heard the recommendations of the constitution drafting committee on

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the organization of the future government. The committee was in favor of a popularly elected president and vice president, a bicameral legislature, an inspectorate, and a nine-member supreme court. It also recommended the election of province chiefs and mayors, but had not yet reached a decision on whether to recommend the inclusion of a prime minister. The views of some of the other committee members were presented previously.

5. Following a brief assembly meeting, the deputies agreed to reconvene on the afternoon of 7 December in order to draft a resolution denouncing the murder of Van.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. North Korean pilots were in the air again over the DRV on the morning of 5 December. At least 17, possibly 19, North Korean pilots flew out of Phuc Yen Airfield probably in MIG-15/17 aircraft. The majority of their radio transmissions were in Korean.

2. The flight activity was mainly formation practice by flights of four aircraft. Although communications mostly concerned instructions for maintaining formations, references were made by the pilots to clearing their guns shortly after takeoff. One of the pilots also made an isolated reference to a practice firing. It would be a logical precaution for these aircraft to be armed in the event of an encounter with US aircraft.

3. That the planes were armed is not necessarily an indication that North Korean pilots are preparing to enter combat at this time. In fact, one flight on 5 December was instructed to return to Phuc Yen when US strike aircraft were noted operating northwest of that field. The activity of the 5th seems to be a continuation of that noted since the Koreans began their familiarization flights on 22 November.

MIG-17s Reported to Have Fired Air-to-Air Missiles

4. Additional information on the 4 December air engagement between DRV MIG-17 interceptors and US Air Force F-105s indicates that the MIG-17s were armed with air-to-air missiles (AAMs). Two of the MIGs were reported to have unsuccessfully fired their missiles at the US fighter/bombers. This is the first good evidence that other than DRV MIG-21 aircraft are armed with AAMs.

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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

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

There is little likelihood, however, that the North Vietnamese want or will accept assistance from the Chinese Communists in "political matters" or in "war strategy." The North Vietnamese have long insisted on maintaining a middle position between Peking and Moscow in political matters and are unlikely to abandon this position by accepting Chinese political advisers.

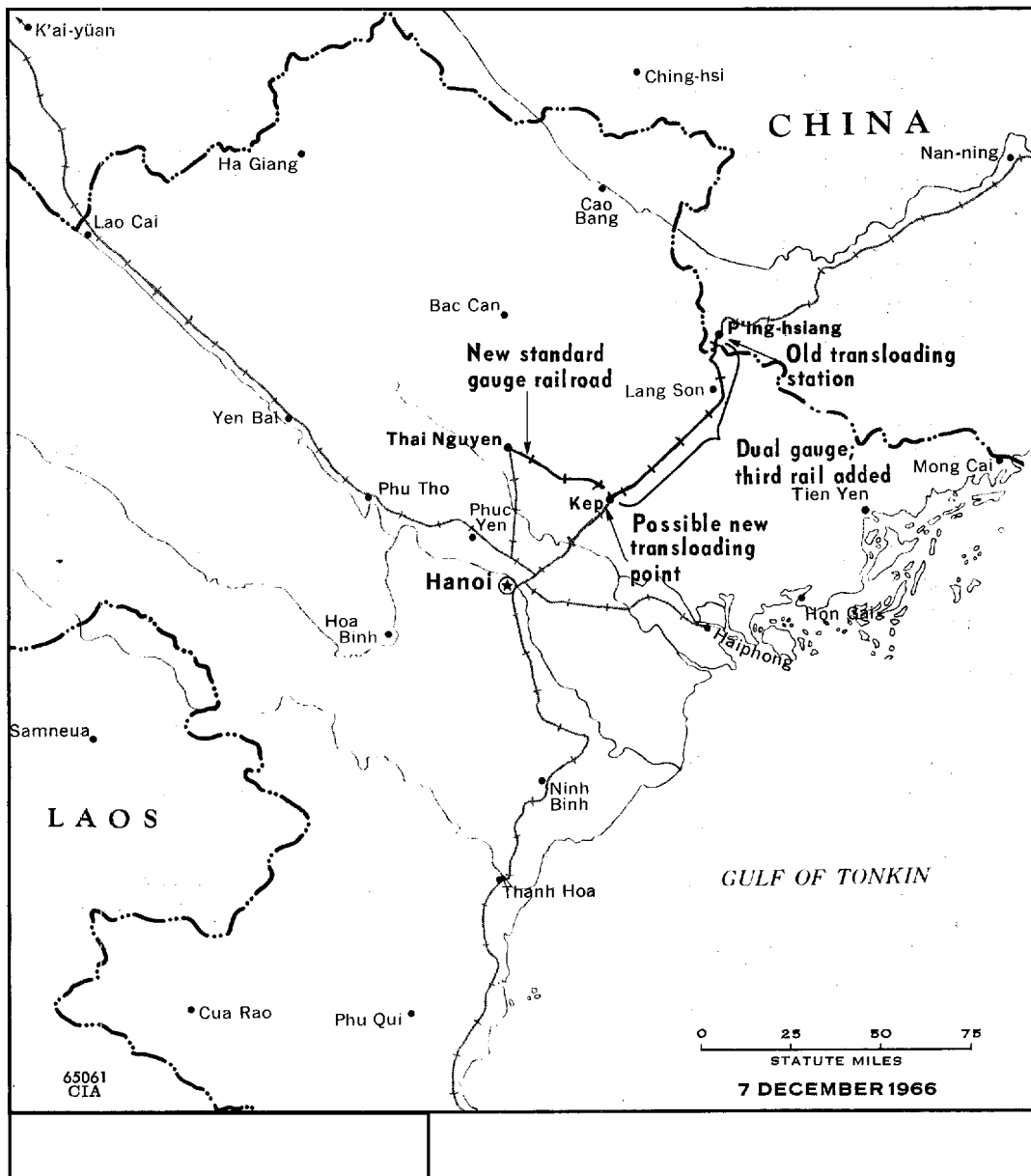
3. It is also unlikely that Hanoi would be responsive to Chinese advice on war strategy. The North Vietnamese have made a point of asserting their independent contribution to the concept of "people's war." A common theme in the writings of North Vietnamese leaders, whether moderates or militants, has been the need for Hanoi to develop its own independent line and to avoid blindly following the advice or experience of foreigners.

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NORTH VIETNAM: Railroads



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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The North Vietnamese may have begun to receive additional large rail shipments over the recently improved rail system in the northeastern part of their country.

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The addition of a third rail to the meter-gauge line between Ping-hsiang and Kep enables the line to carry both meter- and standard-gauge cars. In addition, an entirely new standard-gauge railroad has been constructed between Kep and Thai Nguyen. Standard-gauge trains from China may now be traveling as far south as Kep before their contents are transloaded to cars with meter-gauge trucks, although the old transloading station at Ping-hsiang is probably still also in use.

3. The new standard-gauge lines in North Vietnam make it possible for trains bringing aid deliveries to carry heavier loads. It also may enable North Vietnam to draw upon China's railroad car and locomotive inventory in case of need.

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