

**Top Secret**

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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# MEMORANDUM

## *The Situation in Vietnam*

25X1



**Top Secret**

112

30 January 1967

**Page Denied**



Information as of 1600



30 January 1967

25X1

HIGHLIGHTS

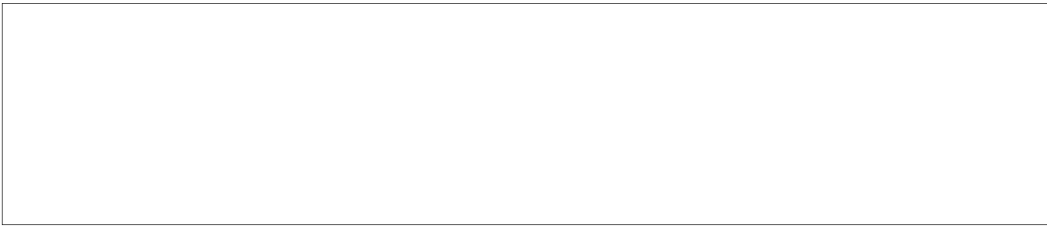
Local elections for village councils and hamlet chiefs in South Vietnam are now scheduled for April, May, and June of this year.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

No major engagements were reported between allied and Communist forces on 30 January (Para. 1). Two US Marine companies battled an enemy force of unknown size for more than 13 hours yesterday (Para. 2). A South Vietnamese Regional Force company engaged the Viet Cong in a 15-minute battle in Kien Hoa Province on 28 January (Para. 3).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Elections for local village councils and hamlet chiefs are now scheduled for April, May, and June of this year in accordance with a government decree on local administrative reforms (Paras. 1-2). Y Bham Enoul, leader of the dissident tribal autonomy movement FULRO, failed to attend a recently scheduled conference with GVN and US representatives concerning his request for exile in Thailand (Paras. 3-4).



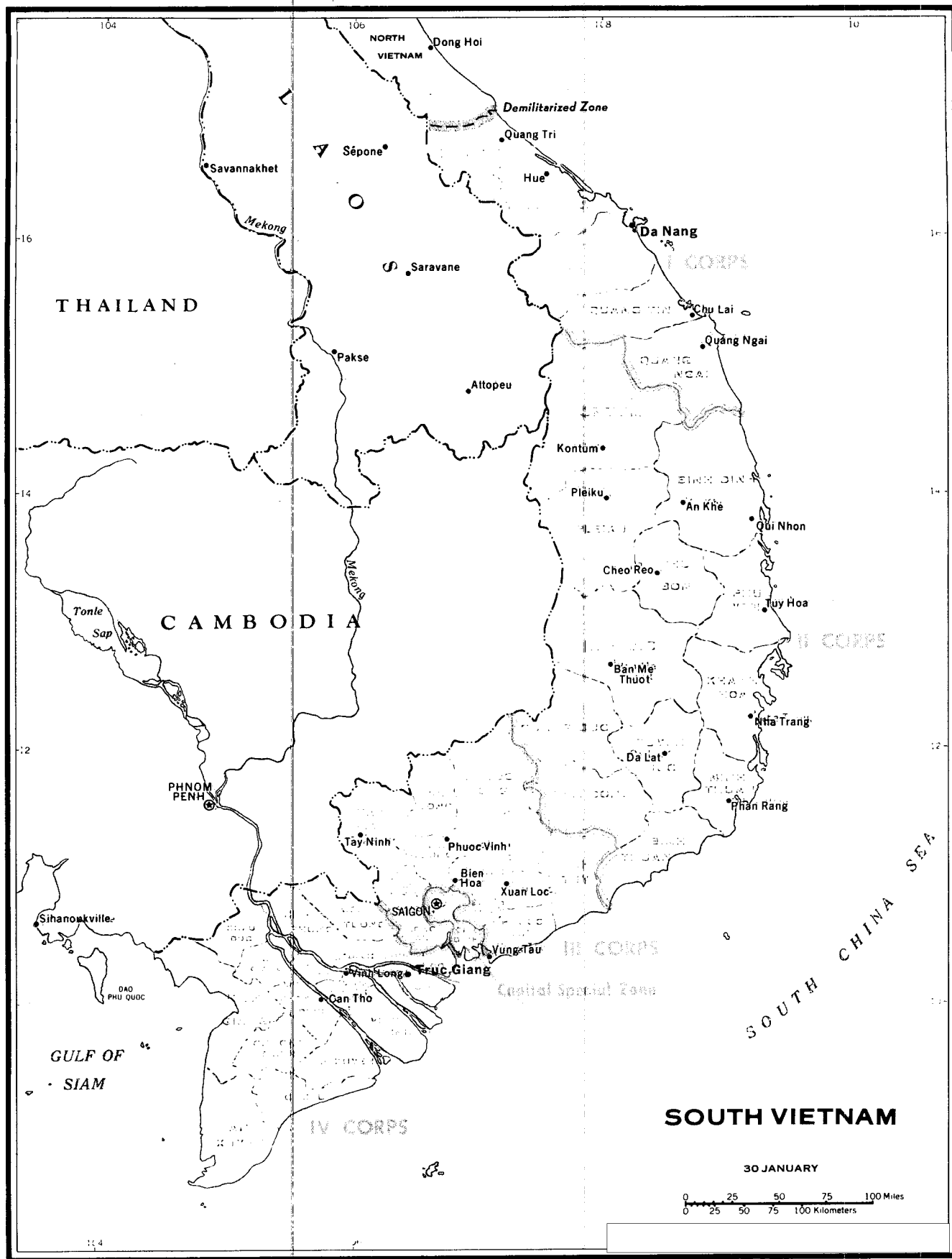
25X1

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

V. Communist Political Developments: An analysis by the US Embassy in Saigon finds that the recent Hanoi commentary on the DRV foreign minister's remarks on the DRV reaction to a US bombing halt are "a most significant signal" (Paras. 1-3).



25X1



65594 1-67 CIA

25X1

I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. US combat forces are participating in 11 of the 32 battalion-size or larger allied ground operations currently in progress throughout South Vietnam. No significant contact was reported in any of these operations on 30 January, however.

2. Two reinforced US Marine companies, patrolling an area about 12 miles south of Da Nang in the coastal flatlands of Quang Nam Province on 29 January, encountered an enemy force of undetermined size. A 13-hour battle followed. While the marine units were in blocking positions on 30 January, an artillery barrage was conducted against the enemy force. Preliminary reports for the action indicated that five Americans were killed and 19 wounded, with Communist losses of 26 killed, one captured, and seven suspects detained.

3. According to a delayed report, a South Vietnamese Regional Force company briefly engaged a Viet Cong force of unknown size on 28 January about 13 miles southeast of Truc Giang in the Mekong Delta province of Kien Hoa. As a result of the 15-minute encounter, four South Vietnamese were killed and five are missing. Enemy losses were reported as 10 killed and one captured.

NOTE: The 722 Viet Cong listed as "taken prisoner" in Operation CEDAR FALLS in the 27 January Situation in South Vietnam included 210 captured and 512 suspects detained.

30 January 1967

I-1

25X1

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Local elections for village councils and hamlet chiefs are now scheduled for April, May, and June of this year in accordance with a government decree on local administrative reforms promulgated in late 1966. The timing of these elections will be phased so that 30 percent of the villages in each province will elect councils on 2 April, 30 percent on 9 April, 20 percent on 16 April, 10 percent on 23 April, and 10 percent on 30 April. Similarly, 30 percent of the hamlets in each province will elect chiefs on 14 May, 30 percent on 21 May, 20 percent on 28 May, 10 percent on 4 June, and 10 percent on 11 June. These percentages apply to hamlets and villages under government control.

2. Presumably, the advantage in phased elections is that security forces can be concentrated to protect the elections from Viet Cong harassment. In most other respects, the elections will resemble the Constituent Assembly elections of last September. Refugees will be permitted to vote if they are in areas where elections are held. Although there is no length of residence requirement for voters, candidates for village councils and hamlet chiefs must have resided in their areas for at least one year prior to filing for candidacy.

FULRO Leader Fails to Appear at Scheduled Meeting With GVN and US Representatives

3. Y Bham Enoul, leader of the dissident tribal autonomy movement FULRO, failed to attend a scheduled conference with US and GVN representatives on 28 January. Y Bham, who has been in hiding in Cambodia, recently had requested assistance in seeking political asylum in Thailand, and the meeting on 28 January had been set up for this purpose. It is not yet clear whether Y Bham deliberately passed up the meeting, or whether his couriers failed to reach him in time to confirm the time and date of the meeting. US officials estimate that it could be a week or ten days before an explanation becomes available because of poor communications with Y Bham.

30 January 1967

II-1

25X1

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4. News of the prospective meeting between Y Bham and GVN and US representatives caused a highly favorable reaction among FULRO supporters and other montagnards in the Ban Me Thuot area of Darlac Province. Montagnards apparently interpreted the government's willingness to attend such a meeting as another indication of the government's recent responsiveness toward montagnard affairs. The outcome of an additional return of FULRO supporters to government control, scheduled for next week, should provide more concrete indications in this regard.

30 January 1967

II-2

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25X1



25X1

65593 1-67 CIA



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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

30 January 1967

IV-1

25X1

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The US Embassy in Saigon has analyzed the 29 January Hanoi commentary on the DRV foreign minister's statement to Wilfred Burchett that "it is only after the unconditional cessation of US bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV that there could be talks between the DRV and the US." The embassy comments that this appears to be "a most significant signal, indicating either an effort to have the bombing of North Vietnam suspended, or a possible shift toward the opening of direct dialogue with the US on a settlement of the war."

2. The embassy points out that the DRV treatment of the foreign minister's statement, including underlining of the above quote, indicates that his remarks are meant as an important official statement. The North Vietnamese commentary, however, constitutes more of a gesture that involves a softening of the formulation rather than any issue of substance, according to the embassy analysis. The embassy also points out that the timing of these "signals," just before the Tet truce, is obviously calculated to exploit the possibility of prolonging any cessation of bombing.

3. The vagueness of the wording by the DRV foreign minister still leaves open the key question of Communist reciprocity on the military side, according to the embassy. The embassy analysis concluded that these latest public signals by Hanoi may reveal, however vaguely, some slight movement in Hanoi's heretofore implacable position. On the other hand, according to the embassy the tenor and method of their presentation are carefully calculated to put maximum pressure on the US to give something of substance while Hanoi gives no more than a vague statement that talks "could" begin.

30 January 1967

V-1

25X1