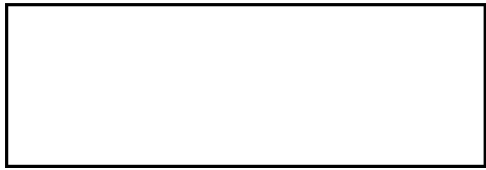
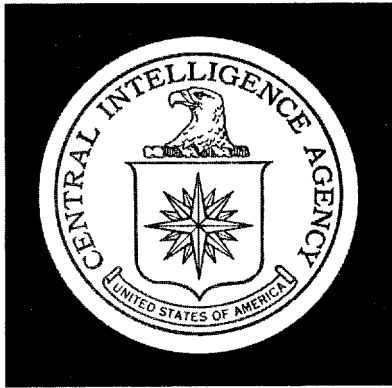


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DIRECTORATE OF
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MEMORANDUM

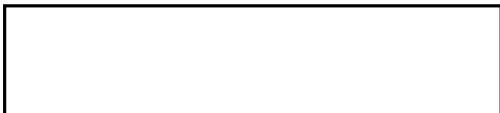
The Situation in Vietnam

State Department review completed

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110

10 March 1967



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Information as 1600
10 March 1967

HIGHLIGHTS

North Vietnamese air defense units gave stiff resistance to a US air attack on the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Plant. At least one DRV MIG was shot down. The Viet Cong may have acquired a 175-mm. rocket.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A large--possibly 175-mm.--rocket may be in the possession of the NVA 84A Artillery Regiment, according to a recent rallier (Paras. 5-8). A Viet Cong district in Darlac Province has formulated plans for increased military, political, and economic activity in the coming months (Paras. 9-11). Captured Communists have reported differences between northerners and southerners in Viet Cong ranks (Paras. 12-14).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: The Vietnamese Veterans Legion, a potential grass roots political organization for the military, is currently experiencing some friction among its leaders (Paras. 4-6). No official details are available concerning the most recent Constituent Assembly sessions in which the final chapter of the constitution was reportedly completed (Para. 7).

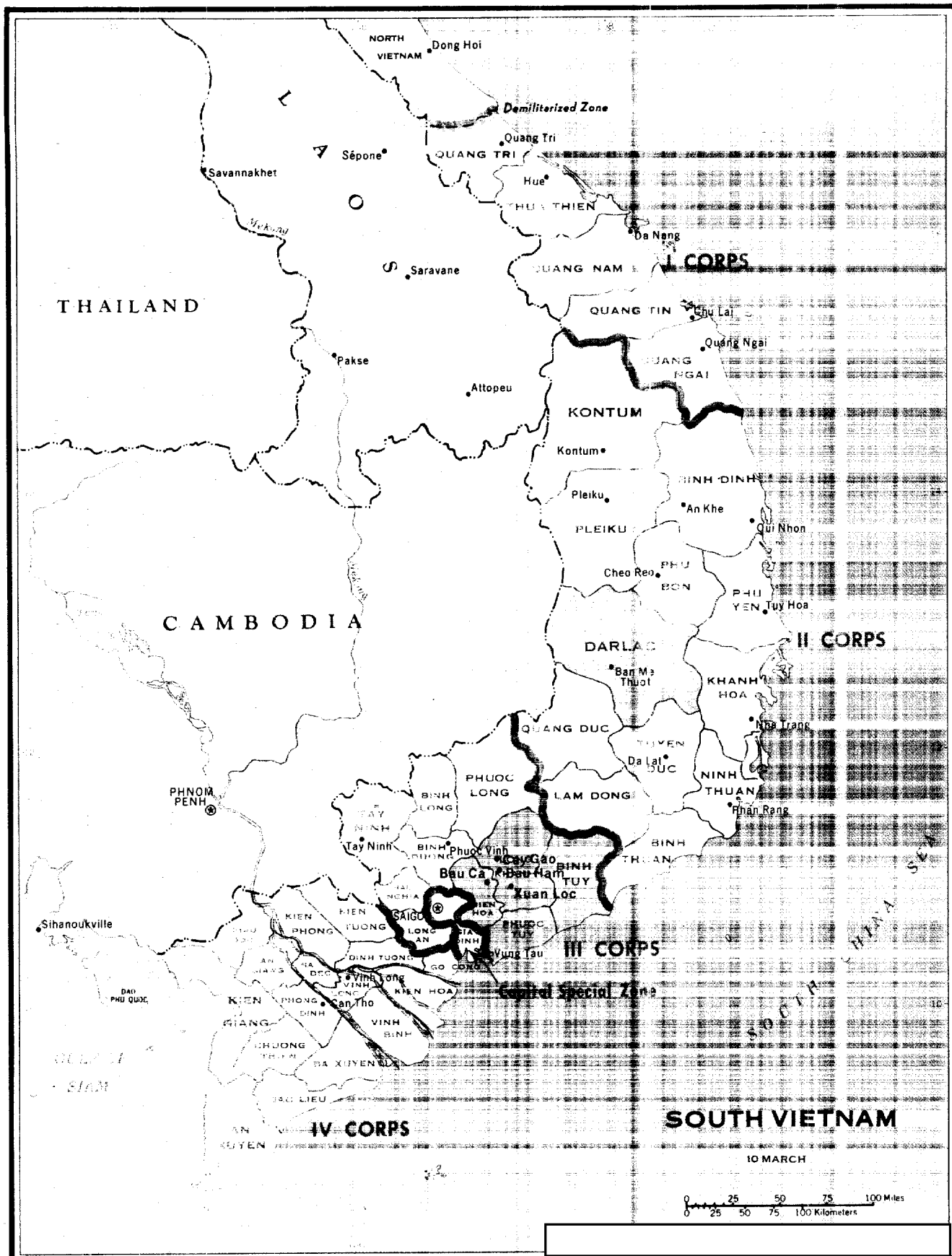
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Preliminary pilot reports indicate that the air attack on Thai Nguyen was successful (Para. 1). North Vietnamese air defense units offered stiff resistance and lost one MIG in this attack (Paras. 2-4). Pilots also report success in an air attack on a thermal power plant and an explosives storage site near Hon Gai (Para. 5).

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

V. Communist Political Developments: Unconfirmed press reports allege that a change has been effected in the leadership of the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front in order to smooth the way for peace talks with the US (Paras. 1-3). The Liberation Front representative in Hanoi in an interview with AFP has discussed Communist demands for US troop withdrawal, a postwar coalition government in the South, and possible areas of North-South cooperation prior to reunification (Paras. 4-8).

VI. Other Major Aspects: North Vietnam is using small lightweight railroad equipment south of Thanh Hoa (Paras. 1-2).

10 March 1967



25X1

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Approved For Release 2005/06/01 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001700010040-3

Possible Communist 175-mm. Rocket in South Vietnam

5. Recent interrogation of a North Vietnamese rallier suggests that Communist forces in South Vietnam may possess a rocket larger than the 140-mm. type which was used in the attack against the Da Nang Air Base on 28 February. The rallier claimed that he had been trained in North Vietnam in the use of a 175-mm. fin-stabilized rocket designated "DKZ-66."

6. A Soviet-made fuse, larger than any known Soviet artillery shell or recoilless rifle fuse, was recently discovered in South Vietnam, packed in a container marked "DKZ-66." Its physical characteristics resemble the 140-mm. Soviet-designed rocket fuse, but it is much larger.

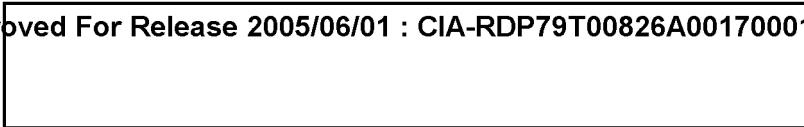
7. According to the source, the 175-mm. rocket is the principal armament of the North Vietnamese Army's 84A Artillery Regiment which left the North last March and arrived in South Vietnam's III Corps in August. Although such a weapon has not been identified in the Soviet military inventory, the existence of the recently discovered fuse lends credence to the report. It is doubtful, however, that such a rocket would be the "principal" weapon of an entire regiment.

8. A rocket of this size could be used against static allied installations with a limited degree of success. Rockets are considered an area weapon and cannot be directed against specific targets as can mortars and recoilless rifles. Nevertheless, the psychological impact of a large-scale rocket attack against a major American installation cannot be discounted.

10 March 1967

I-2

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Future Viet Cong Plans in Darlac Province

9. A description of the military, political, and economic plans of a Viet Cong district in Darlac Province was provided in early March

[redacted] These plans, which seem genuine, place increased emphasis on the support of a Viet Cong main force independent battalion located in the province. In addition, four guerrilla companies were scheduled to be formed and, upon completion of their training, were to be assigned to villages to organize defenses, destroy roads, and reconnoiter allied movements and positions. In late March, [redacted] these guerrilla units, together with a 400-man Viet Cong main force battalion, are to attack GVN outposts and New Life hamlets.

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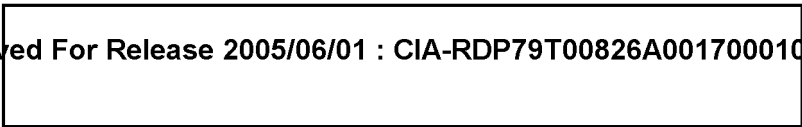
10. Other plans of this three-pronged--military, political, and economic--concept include the collection and storage of rice by the district's task teams. Attempts will also be made to persuade pro-GVN families to resume cooperation with the Viet Cong revolution and to motivate the people to stage "struggle" movements.

11. The major part of Darlac Province is currently insecure and subject to Communist control except for the key towns and other isolated pockets of government control. These Viet Cong efforts are designed to maintain tight control over the people in the province and to provide maximum support to enemy military operations.

Reported Friction Between Northerners and Southerners In VC Units

12. Continuing reports of friction in Viet Cong ranks between native southerners and infiltrated northerners indicate that there probably is an undercurrent of tension within the Viet Cong organization. Although party discipline apparently keeps any frictions under control, two recent reports from captured prisoners indicate that differences are real and may be comparatively widespread within those units which have both northerners and southerners.

10 March 1967



25X1

13. These latest reports maintain that the frictions are based on traditional regional differences, on differences in military experience, and on the fact that northerners are often placed in positions of command over southerners.

Both characterize the problems between the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong in much the same way although in somewhat different detail.

14. According to both sources, much of the reported friction stems from traditional Vietnamese regional antagonisms. The southerners were described as more casual and outgoing people who look with dismay on the more formal, reserved, and disciplined northerners. The northerners in turn were characterized as tending to be domineering and critical of the southerners.

15. Another important problem, however, involved differences of age and military experience and their effect on career development. Most of the southern Communists who were not regrouped to North Vietnam in 1954-55 are younger men whose military experience is confined to the present Viet Cong movement, usually ranging from five to seven years. Many native northerners and regrouped southerners are professional military men with more than 20 years experience dating back into the Viet Minh conflict with the French. Most of them are regular North Vietnamese Army men with formal military training, and high standards of organization and discipline. When they are sent to South Vietnam to take over command positions, they often generate southern resentment, particularly when they consistently receive better assignments, better allowances and privileges, and better opportunities for career advancement.

10 March 1967

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Problems Within Vietnamese Veterans Legion

1. Lieutenant Colonel Pham Do Thanh, secretary general of the Vietnamese Veterans Legion, told a US Embassy officer on 6 March that the legion hopes to enter more than 30 candidates in the election of the future government's lower house. Thanh declared, however, that the legion has not done any serious planning, and blamed the inattention of the legion's president, General Pham Xuan Chieu, for this condition.

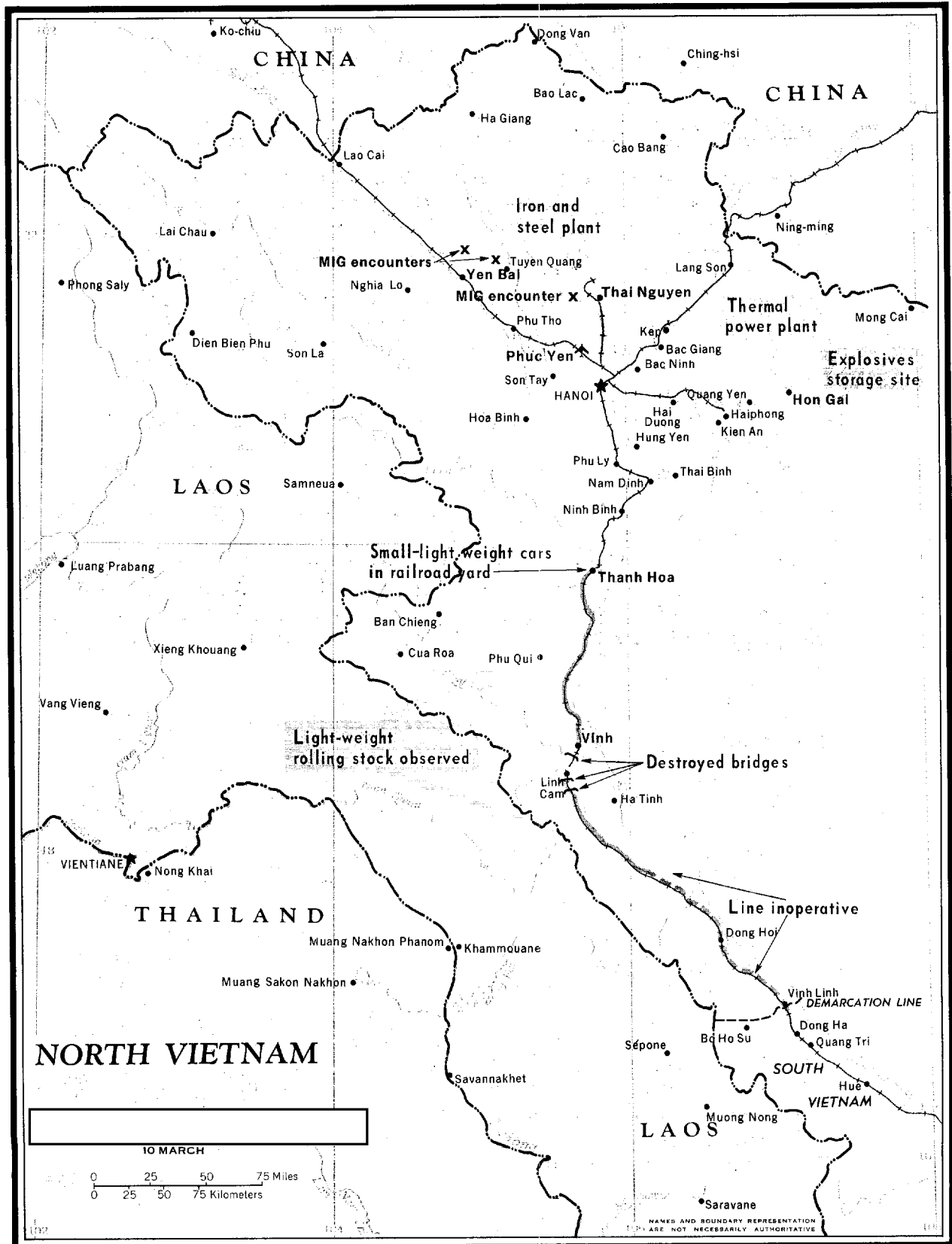
2. Thanh claimed that General Chieu is still absorbed in a recent unsuccessful attempt to open gambling stalls under legion auspices on the grounds of the Saigon Zoo, an attempt which Thanh said resulted in some bad publicity and created some problems for Chieu with other members of the ruling Military Directorate. Thanh, who is a strong backer of Premier Ky, further declared that General Chieu supports Chief of State Thieu, and then emphasized his own feeling that Premier Ky would be the best presidential candidate by far.

3. Although the legion is still weak and in an early stage of organization, it does have some 152 paid district workers throughout Vietnam, strong Hoa Hao and Cao Dai subsidiaries, and a small, full-time headquarters in Saigon. Although top legion officers differ on their preference for presidential candidates, there have been some previous indications that the military leaders view the legion as a key organization to be involved in any effort by the military to build a grass-roots political party.

Constituent Assembly Developments

4. No official reporting has been received as yet on the Constituent Assembly sessions of the past two days, during which the assembly is said to have completed work on the final chapter of the constitution. This chapter deals with the role of the assembly and the incumbent regime during the period of transition to elected government.

10 March 1967



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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. North Vietnamese air defense units gave stiff resistance to the strike on 10 March by US Air Force planes against the iron and steel complex at Thai Nguyen. Preliminary field reports indicate that the attack was successful, but photographs taken after the strike have not yet been analyzed.

2. Communist 85-mm. artillery shot down one F-105 flying a SAM suppression mission in support of the Thai Nguyen attack. Two F4Cs received extensive battle damage in the target area and went down in Laos as the pilots, later rescued, attempted to return to base. Pilots described encountering a layered barrage of heavy, accurate 37-, 57-, 85-, and 100-mm. AAA fire within six miles of Thai Nguyen, but reported that much of the ground fire was suppressed when cluster bomb units hit the target area.

3. At least three MIG encounters were reported by pilots involved in the raid. The first occurred as four F-105s headed for the target about 13 miles north of Yen Bai. One of two MIG-21s sighted fired an air-to-air missile which burned out before reaching the US flight. A second incident occurred as four F4C pilots were leaving the target and sighted a MIG-21 firing an AAM at an F-105. The Communist missile missed the F-105 and a Sparrow AAM launched by one of the F4Cs missed the MIG-21.

4. In the third MIG encounter reported, two F-105s engaged four Communist aircraft, thought to have been MIG-17s, about ten miles west of Thai Nguyen. In the air battle that followed, one Communist aircraft was shot down and two others were damaged.

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The area in which the Communist aircraft were encountered on 10 March is within the

10 March 1967

III-1

normal defensive patrol area of Phuc Yen. Pilot reports indicate that the F-105s initiated the attack in this engagement

5. US Navy planes conducted coordinated attacks on a thermal power plant and an explosives storage site near Hon Gai on the North Vietnamese coast. Initial pilot reports indicate extensive damage to both targets and no loss of US aircraft.

10 March 1967

III-2

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

10 March 1967

IV-1

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Alleged Change of Leadership of National Liberation Front

1. According to unconfirmed press reports from Saigon, Nguyen Huu Tho has been replaced as chairman of the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front by Huynh Tan Phat, the Front's secretary general. This change allegedly was made to smooth the way for peace talks between the Front and the US which would bypass the South Vietnamese Government.

2. The press accounts do not make clear why the change in leadership would make negotiations more feasible. One theory offered was that Phat would be more acceptable to the US as a negotiator; another was that Phat could be a scapegoat if the talks broke down, and that Tho could then resume his position without being tainted by failure. Neither theory seems particularly valid.

3. There have been no prior indications of any impending change in the Front's leadership, and no official reports from Saigon on this press account have been received. The South Vietnamese Government, however, is conducting a vigorous public campaign against any peace talks which would lead to a coalition government. It may be that the press accounts linking a purported switch in Front leadership with impending peace talks--which exclude the Vietnamese Government--may be more of the government's campaign.

Front Plans for Postwar Government

4. A French news account of an AFP interview with Nguyen Van Tien, the Liberation Front representative in Hanoi, provided Tien's views on US troop withdrawal and the political structure envisaged for postwar South Vietnam.

5. Tien emphasized that the Front did not expect the US to pull out its troops immediately

10 March 1967

V-1

or within a month after a settlement, but that the Front was willing to see the withdrawal take place "within a reasonable period of time." Such a withdrawal has always been a primary element in the Vietnamese Communist's demands for settling the war, but they have avoided spelling out any precise timetable.

6. On the question of the Vietnamese political structure following peace, Tien stated that an undetermined "transitional period" would precede reunification and that each part of Vietnam would have a separate government. In the South there would be a "neutral national coalition of the broadest base representing the most diverse tendencies, but with one common objective--getting rid of the US aggressors." Tien, however, reiterated that the Front is the "only authentic representative organ of the South Vietnamese people and that its role must be decisive in the settlement of the conflict." In this regard, Tien also claimed that in 1967 the Front would increase its political activity as a step toward the creation of a coalition government in the South.

7. During the transitional period between the advent of peace and the reunification of the two zones of Vietnam, Tien pointed out that there would be many such joint problems to settle as the free circulation of population and trade. He stated his personal opinion that these problems could be settled by "an all-Vietnamese Assembly with an equal number of representatives from the North and South." The Communists have not pushed the idea of setting up such North-South cooperation in years. This was a fairly common theme, with some variations, in the late 1950s.

8. Tien's remarks on a possible North-South group to handle interim problems prior to reunification were undoubtedly offered with the aim of furthering the Hanoi-inspired charge that the Vietnamese could settle their own problems if only they were left alone by the US.

10 March 1967

V-2

VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. [redacted] photography of the Thanh Hoa Railroad Yard indicates that material arriving from the northern provinces is being trans-loaded to small lightweight cars at Thanh Hoa for further transport into Military Region IV.

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2. Photography [redacted] showed meter-gauge cars in the northern portion and small, lightweight cars in the southern portion of the yard. Stockpiles of material were observed along a track connecting the two portions of the yard.

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3. The region south of Thanh Hoa has been more frequently attacked than any other part of North Vietnam. By using light cars, and locomotives converted from trucks, the North Vietnamese can build lighter replacement bridges on the line between Thanh Hoa and Vinh, camouflage cars more effectively, and replace losses of cars and locomotives at less cost.

10 March 1967

VI-1

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