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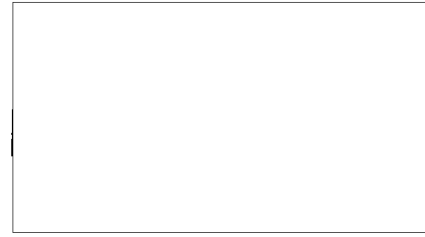
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Soviet diplomats in Vientiane are pushing for an early cease-fire in Laos.

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LAOS

The Communists are increasing the pressure in the central panhandle.

CAMBODIA

The government is not making much progress on Route 2.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In discussing last Tuesday's session of the Vientiane peace talks, the Soviet Deputy Chief of Mission in the Lao capital told his US counterpart that the Soviets are interested in maintaining substantive contacts with the US concerning a Lao settlement. He said that Moscow expected a Vietnam settlement soon and that this would lead to an early cease-fire in Laos. The Soviet diplomat stated that the two sides were not very far apart on the issues and that their differences could probably be settled in several negotiating sessions. These comments may represent a bid to encourage US support for a quick settlement.

The Soviet official spent much of his time unsuccessfully probing US attitudes on the talks and the issues related to them. He tried, for example, to elicit comments on the Pathet Lao demand for a provisional political council and the question of a Thai troop withdrawal from Laos after a cease-fire. For his own part, he would not be drawn out on Soviet attitudes regarding a strengthened International Control Commission in Laos or on the degree of Moscow's willingness to press for the removal of North Vietnamese troops from Laos.

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LAOS

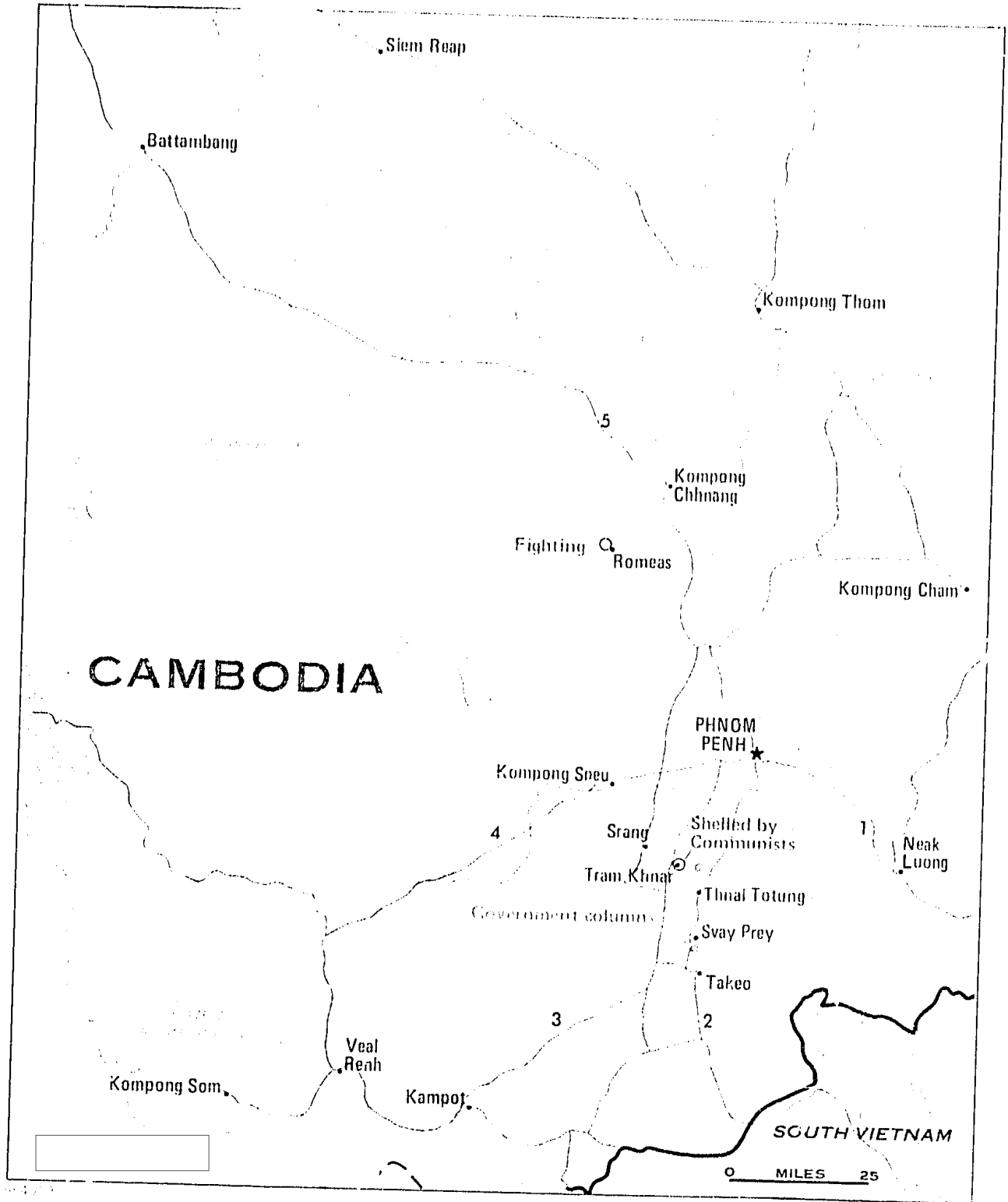
The Communists are increasing pressure in the central panhandle. Enemy ground attacks and shellings on 17 January dispersed two irregular battalions from positions some 15 miles southeast of Thakhek, a provincial capital on the east bank of the Mekong. These attacks were probably carried out by elements of several unidentified North Vietnamese units that have been increasingly active since they moved into the Thakhek area late last year. They may be designed to divert government attention while the North Vietnamese 29th Regiment completes preparations for a push farther east along Route 9 to retake Muong Phalane.

In the south, lead elements of a 3,000-man government force have begun moving back toward Saravane. The government troops are still too far west of the provincial capital to meet any strong opposition. On 17 January, they uncovered two enemy supply caches containing over 50 tons of ammunition, a number of heavy weapons, and large quantities of other supplies. [REDACTED]

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CAMBODIA

The two columns of government paratroops from Phnom Penh and Takeo attempting to reach Thnal Totung and Svay Prey on Route 2 have made no progress in the past few days. The northern column is stalled on the highway some four miles from Thnal Totung, and the southern column is about two miles from Svay Prey. The columns' ability to advance has been hampered by inadequate artillery support.

To the west, Cambodian troops are continuing sweep operations in the vicinity of Tram Khnar on Route 3. Tram Khnar itself was shelled by the Communists on 17 January. The nearby government garrison at Srang is still isolated, but it has been resupplied by air.

Badly needed supplies have also been dropped to beleaguered Cambodian soldiers at Romeas in Kompong Chhnang Province. The 200-man government force that was airlifted on 16 January to a position a few miles northwest of Romeas subsequently ran into strong opposition and was driven back after day-long fighting. Other government forces from the Route 5 area, now totaling seven battalions, are continuing their cautious advance toward Romeas.

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