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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
30 May 1966

ARMY review(s) completed.

NAVY review(s) completed.

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

There are tenuous indications that the military support which the Buddhists have enjoyed in the I Corps area of South Vietnam may be weakening. The moderate leader of the Buddhist Institute in Saigon has urged a halt in self-immolations, but has linked this to a call for the resignation of Thieu and Ky. In the highlands, US troops have been engaged in heavy fighting with PAVN forces in Pleiku Province, and are moving to meet a reported PAVN build-up in Kontum Province.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: In Pleiku Province, heavy fighting took place on 28-29 May between US troops and Communist elements believed to be part of the PAVN 33rd Regiment (Paras. 1-2). US and ARVN troops are being airlifted to northern Kontum Province where a PAVN build-up is reported (Para. 3). Two skirmishes between US Marines and Communist troops were reported in the Hue area on 28 May (Para. 4). South Vietnamese troops claimed to have inflicted heavy losses on the Viet Cong in a 29 May raid on a suspected staging area south of Da Nang (Para. 5). Operation WAHIAWA in Hau Nghia Province was terminated on 28 May (Para. 6). Two sharp Communist attacks were reported in the area south of Saigon on 27 and 28 May (Paras. 7-8). MACV's latest report on infiltration tends to confirm earlier estimates of heavy North Vietnam troop infiltration into South Vietnam during the first four months of this year (Paras. 9-10).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: A rash of Buddhist suicides and self-mutilations appears designed to apply further pressure on both the Vietnamese military and the US administration to bring about a government change in Saigon (Paras. 1-3). The situation in Hue has been generally quiet, but a confrontation may be developing between dissident students and the mayor of Hue who reportedly commands army troops remaining in the city (Paras.

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4-6). Scattered demonstrations and a strike of food markets have occurred in Saigon (Para. 7). Buddhist Institute Chairman Thich Tam Chau, after a meeting with Institute leaders following his return to South Vietnam from abroad, has issued a communiqué endorsing the demands of Buddhist extremists for resignation of the Thieu-Ky government (Paras. 8-9).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: Communist China has protested an alleged attack by US aircraft on Chinese fishing boats in the Tonkin Gulf on 29 May (Paras. 1-3).

V. Communist Political Developments: Delegations from both the North Vietnamese Communist party and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam arrived in Prague over the weekend to attend the 13th congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (Para. 1). Communist propaganda is claiming that the dry season proved the Viet Cong can successfully wage large-scale battle against US forces (Paras. 2-4).

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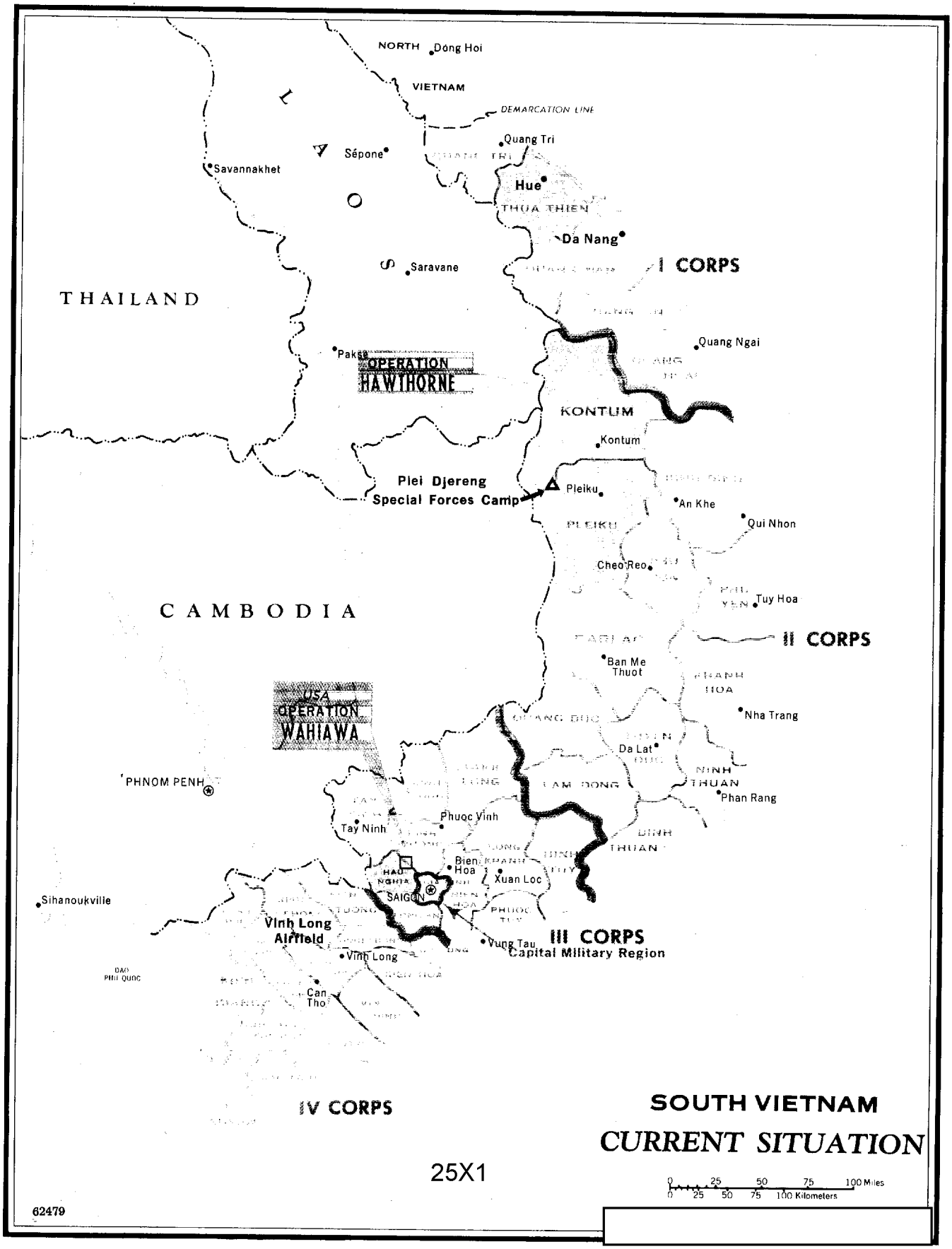

I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Several sharp engagements have been reported this weekend between Communist and allied forces in widely separated areas of South Vietnam. In the northern section of South Vietnam, sporadic but heavy fighting was reported on 28-29 May in Pleiku Province between one battalion of the US 25th Infantry Division and elements of the PAVN 33rd Regiment. Contact was broken off today with casualties standing at 12 US killed and 35 wounded against enemy losses of 127 killed and three captured.

2. The action took place some ten miles south of the Plei Djereng Special Forces camp, which had come under heavy enemy attack on 24 May. US and ARVN troops have been conducting a sweep operation in this area near the Cambodian border. [redacted] 25X1 25X1 revealed Communist intentions to mount major attacks against Plei Djereng and other strategically located government positions in Pleiku Province during the rainy season.

3. Farther north, elements of the 1st Brigade of the US 101st Airborne Division and one ARVN battalion are being airlifted to northern Kontum Province where Operation HAWTHORNE will be initiated in response to recent reports of a PAVN build-up in the area.

4. In Thua Thien Province, a platoon of US Marines made sharp contact with an enemy force of undetermined strength on the night of 28 May while conducting a harvest protection operation some 10 miles northwest of Hue. Two additional Marine platoons were brought in as reinforcements and artillery support was provided against substantial enemy fortifications discovered in the area. Air support was precluded by bad weather. Initial reports put US casualties at 21 killed and 16 wounded against two enemy killed and four suspects captured. In other action south of Hue, a US Marine platoon

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ambushed an enemy force killing 14 on 28 May. There were no US casualties.

5. On 29 May, a reinforced South Vietnamese company raided a suspected Viet Cong staging area approximately 45 miles southeast of Da Nang and fought a two-hour engagement with an estimated three enemy companies. The South Vietnamese claim they killed or wounded approximately 100 Viet Cong without taking any casualties. US advisers verified that the South Vietnamese troops captured 56 enemy weapons.

6. Operation WAHIAWA, a US ground sweep in Hau Nghia Province, was terminated on 28 May. The 12-day operation, targeted against an estimated 3,700-man Viet Cong main force contingent and a 1,000-man local force in the Ho Bo woods area, resulted in 144 Viet Cong killed, ten captured, and a substantial quantity of foodstuffs, medicines, and assorted equipment captured or destroyed.

Communist Activity

7. An enemy force of undetermined strength attacked the Vinh Long airfield with mortar and recoilless rifle fire on the night of 28 May. US forces at the airfield, which include two helicopter companies, suffered four wounded and seven helicopters damaged. The enemy lost 11 killed and two captured as a result of a subsequent government reaction operation.

8. An estimated Viet Cong battalion, supported by a weapons company, launched a sharp attack against a US - South Vietnamese Special Forces camp west of Saigon in Hau Nghia Province on 27 May. South Vietnamese troops sustained seven killed and 41 wounded against 20 Viet Cong killed. There were no US casualties.

9. USMACV's latest report on infiltration tends to confirm earlier estimates that North Vietnam was sending men into South Vietnam at a high rate during the first four months of this year. According to

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MACV's estimate, more than 19,000 men may have been infiltrated between January and April of this year. Of these 19,000 almost 7,000 are considered by MACV as either confirmed or probable. The rest are carried as possible. MACV noted that there are reports of about 16,000 additional infiltrators during this period, but it does not consider these reports firm enough to be included in its listing. In comparison, there were an estimated 19-20,000 infiltrators during the entire year of 1965. The MACV report does not distinguish between native northerners and regrouped southerners among the infiltrators, but presumably they are for the most part North Vietnamese.

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There is generally a time lag of several months between the actual infiltration of a unit and its discovery in South Vietnam. Thus it may be several months before the current infiltration picture is clear.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The rash of Buddhist suicides this weekend is apparently designed to reinforce Buddhist pressures on both the Vietnamese military and the US for a change of government in Saigon. There are some indications, however, that the military support which the Buddhists have enjoyed in I Corps may be weakening.

2. On 29 May, two elderly Buddhist nuns--one in Hue and one in Saigon--committed suicide by burning. This was followed on 30 May by the self-immolation of two monks at pagodas in Saigon and Da Lat. In addition, several Buddhist monks have slashed themselves, and one monk, attempting to set himself afire near the Buddhist Institute in Saigon, was rescued.

3. Although the Buddhist hierarchy has claimed no official responsibility for the suicides, it has fostered an atmosphere intended to encourage self-sacrifice and, in at least one instance, monks were seen assisting an immolation and later setting the victim's remains on fire again for the benefit of press photographers. Following the first suicide in Hue, Thich Tri Quang called a press conference at which he asserted that President Johnson would be held responsible for such suicides unless he changed US policy of supporting a "militaristic dictatorship" whose purpose was to annihilate Vietnamese Buddhism.

Hue

4. Except for the suicide on 29 May, Hue has been generally quiet for the past three days. A conflict appears to be shaping up, however, between rebel students and Colonel Khoa, who is concurrently mayor of Hue and Thua Thien Province chief. Khoa's opposition to dissident activity in the city appears to be hardening since the evacuation of his family from the area.

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5. Khoa has vowed to regain or disable the Hue radio station, which is in the hands of student "struggle forces," but his initial attempt to order troops to retake the radio on 28 May was countermanded by General Dinh. The students, meanwhile, have issued statements declaring their determination to hold the radio, and have warned that they plan to attack the vacated US Consulate on 31 May and to impose an "economic blockade" against American officials remaining in the city.

6. Khoa has set up his headquarters in a village outside of Hue and plans to organize "counter-struggle" demonstrations. He claims to have support of nearly 1,000 Thua Thien paramilitary troops. He is also reported in command of two battalions of the 1st Division remaining in Hue to guard US installations and keep order. The 1st Division commander, General Nhuan, has kept out of the limelight for the past several days, pleading illness, but either he, Khoa, or General Thi has obtained the withdrawal of all other pro-"struggle" 1st Division units from the Hue area. Elements of the composite pro-"struggle" battalion sent to guard the approach to Hue from Da Nang have also reportedly been returned to Hue and disarmed.

Saigon

7. Several scattered demonstrations have occurred daily in Saigon since 28 May. On at least two occasions, several thousand Buddhist followers attempted to march beyond the vicinity of the Buddhist Institute, but were dispersed by police and troops using riot-control measures. A Buddhist-inspired strike of the Saigon food markets was successful on the morning of 30 May, but there have been no other work stoppages in the city.

8. The chairman of the Buddhist Institute, Thich Tam Chau, returned to Saigon on 29 May, after nearly a month's absence from the country to attend an international Buddhist conference in Ceylon. Despite prior indications that Chau's return might lead to a toning

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down of Buddhist protests, a communiqué issued by Chau on 30 May, following a top-level Institute conference, offered little prospect of a more conciliatory stand. Chau did urge Buddhist followers to cease immolations and mutilations, but he called on Chief of State Thieu and Premier Ky to turn over power to an interim government, and hinted that immolations would otherwise continue. A second communiqué, issued on 30 May in the name of Thich Phap Tri, deputy chairman of the Institute, accused the US of plotting with the Thieu-Ky government to bring about civil war in South Vietnam.

9. Since both Chau and Tri have previously indicated some dissatisfaction with the current actions of the Buddhist militants, their statements appear to be a measure of the influence which Tri Quang's supporters now exercise over the Institute in Saigon. Chau may, however, feel that only by avoiding an open split with the extremists can he retain some control in the situation. Chau has held out some prospect for settling the present conflict "diplomatically," and he is scheduled to meet with Premier Ky on 31 May.

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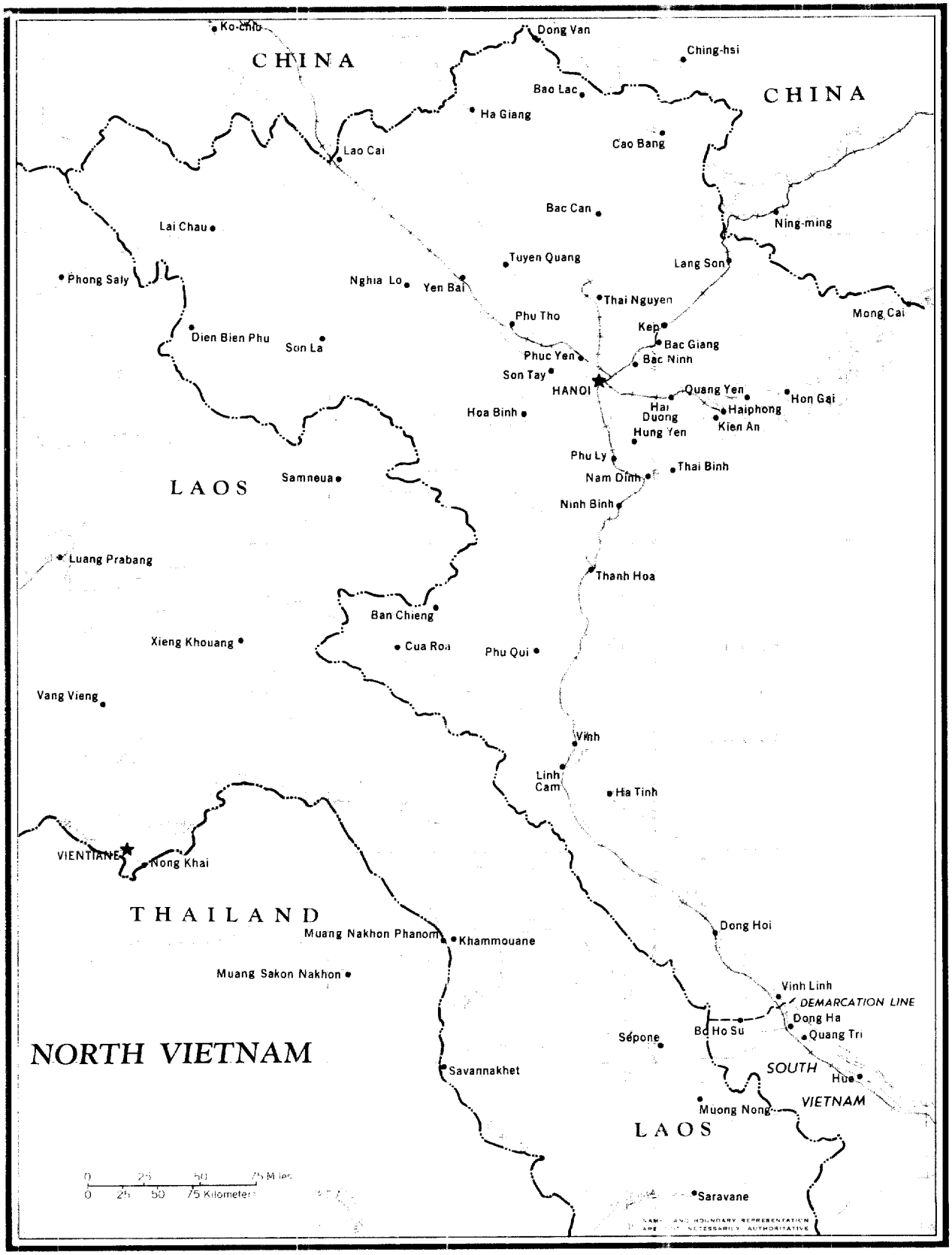

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Communist China's Ministry of National Defense issued the "strongest protest" on 29 May against "flagrant, serious provocations" by US military planes in the Gulf of Tonkin. The protest charged that US planes had bombed and strafed Chinese fishing boats on the high seas, killing three persons, wounding 18, and sinking one of the boats. NCNA claimed the boats were flying the flag of Communist China when attacked. The protest "sternly warned" the US Government that these "blood debts" must be repaid.

2. US operations reports indicate that two F4Bs overflew 14 heavily laden motorized cargo vessels east of Thanh Hoa, North Vietnam, at the time of the alleged attacks. The pilots reported they were fired on from the boats, sustaining minor damage, but did not return the fire. A US naval ship took the Chinese boats under observation during the evening of 28 May. The ship reported some 20 boats flying the Chinese Communist flag. They appeared to be carrying crates when first observed but the crates were not visible when the US ship came closer.

3. Despite the strong language, the protest was similar to others in the past and mentioned two other alleged attacks on Chinese Communist ships on the high seas earlier this year. Peking gave no indication that any specific action is contemplated to give force to the protest.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Delegations from both the North Vietnamese Communist party and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam arrived in Prague over the weekend to attend the Czechoslovak Communist Party's 13th congress. The North Vietnamese delegation is headed by Politburo member Le Duc Tho. He led a party delegation through Eastern Europe in 1965 and has participated in talks in Hanoi with foreign party delegations. The NFLSV delegation is headed by Dang Quang Minh, its chief representative in Moscow.

2. The latest in the continuing propaganda effort by the Vietnamese Communists to prove that the Viet Cong can defeat the US forces in South Vietnam came in a Liberation Press Agency editorial, quoted by Hanoi radio on 29 May. The editorial asserted that the results of the "dry season" fighting have proved that the "Liberation Army" can fight and win large-scale "annihilation" battles against the US forces. The question of whether the Viet Cong are capable of fighting large-scale battles or must restrict themselves to guerrilla tactics has been a sore point for the Vietnamese Communist military command for some time now.

3. There have been hints in the past that the Viet Cong command has come under some criticism from its own rank and file because many soldiers do not believe the Viet Cong is strong enough to fight large-scale battles successfully against the US forces. On the other hand, there have been indications that the Chinese Communists have complained that the Viet Cong can never hope to win unless they launch large-scale "annihilation" attacks.

4. The 29 May broadcast also sought to counter concern on the part of the Viet Cong over further possible increases in the strength of US forces in South Vietnam by claiming that "if the US increases its troops, the Liberation Army will increase theirs." Moreover, the broadcast added, "in this race, realities in recent years have proved we are also the winner."

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