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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

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THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
19 March 1965

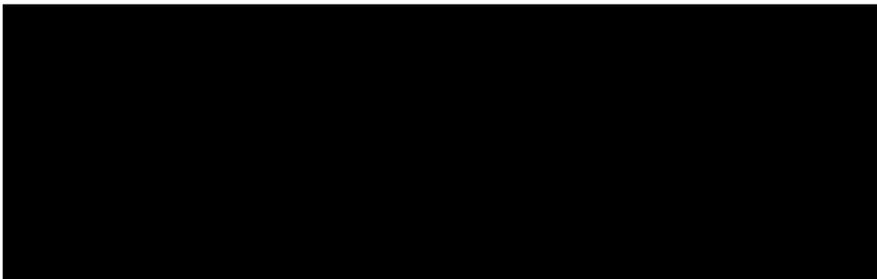
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
19 March 1965.

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

The US Air Strikes on Phu Van and Vinh Son

1. Approximately 160 US Navy and Air Force planes struck the Phu Van ammunition depot and the Phu Van and Vinh Son supply depots 160 miles north of the demilitarized zone at 1445 local Vietnam time (0145 EST) on 19 March.

2. According to preliminary reports, all buildings in the Vinh Son depot were hit. No aircraft losses have been reported.

3. The Phu Van ammunition depot contains storage space for an estimated five percent of stored ammunition in North Vietnam.

4. The attack aircraft were tracked by both Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese air defense radars. About five hours before the attack some Southern Fleet units of the North Vietnamese navy were alerted. They were told that "according to news, the enemy would possibly execute bombing operations."

5. At least three Communist fighters were scrambled from Phuc Yen airfield near Hanoi, apparently in reaction to the strikes. Their closest point of approach to the US aircraft was about 65 nautical miles.

6. Recent photography of the Quang Khe naval base in North Vietnam--attacked by the South Vietnamese Air Force on 2 March--reveals that 18 buildings were destroyed and 13 others were probably damaged.

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7. There have been no significant Soviet propaganda statements in the past 24 hours, but Soviet officials [REDACTED] have again indicated their grave concern over the course of US policy in Vietnam and its implications for Soviet-US relations. The flavor of these talks also reflected Moscow's appreciation of the limited leverage it has in the present crisis.

8. A senior Soviet official [REDACTED] told former New York Governor Dewey that the US may lose as many as half its aircraft in future air strikes on North Vietnam. The official asserted that in the next strike US losses would increase substantially; in a following raid losses might be as high as one-third; and in a third raid they might reach one-half.

9. The official expressed deep concern that US bombing might extend into Communist China. He maintained that under these circumstances the USSR would have to carry out its treaty obligations or lose all claim to leadership of the Communist bloc. He urged that the President summon Ambassador Dobrynin for talks. The Soviet official even hinted that the Brezhnev team could not remain in control of the Kremlin if it could not bring about at least a stalemate in Vietnam.

10. In another approach, the Soviet army attache in London told his US colleague that the longer and more deeply the US became involved in the Vietnam situation, the more difficult would be the possibility of reaching an honorable agreement. He called the situation "most serious" and said that the Soviet government was concerned that the conflict would spread.

11. The clearest North Vietnamese statement to date that negotiations are impossible at present was carried in the party daily newspaper on 18 March. This statement denounced the Tito-Johnson exchange of notes on a negotiated settlement as a "peace farce." It added that "there can be no question of negotiating with the US imperialists once they have openly declared a step-up of their aggressive war in South Vietnam and an extension of the war to North Vietnam, and are actually doing so."

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12. The Hanoi statement added: "To solve the South Vietnam problem the aggressor--US imperialism--must end his aggressive war and withdraw all US troops from South Vietnam. Without these conditions, no question can be solved." The statement bitterly denounced Tito as a US "stool pigeon."

13. Peiping's latest comment on deployment of South Korean troops to Vietnam takes a somewhat less threatening line than the initial Chinese reaction in January. An article in People's Daily on 18 March charges that the move is evidence that the US has "gone farther down the path of fighting a Korean-type war" but avoids any implication that Peiping is considering countermeasures.

14. The article asserts that the US is unable to command support of most of its allies and that only "flunkeys" such as the South Korean leaders can be counted on to provide "cannon fodder" in exchange for "payment in dollars."

Communist Military Developments

15. No unusual North Vietnamese, Chinese Communist or Soviet military moves have been noted in the past 24 hours.

16. It now appears that only one Soviet aircraft--an AN-24 transport--is scheduled to fly to North Vietnam. [REDACTED] the plane is to depart Irkutsk for Hanoi on 20 March and is to return to Irkutsk on 28 March. Whether this flight is related to the possible delivery of Soviet equipment to North Vietnam cannot be determined.

17. [REDACTED] that two Soviet AN-12 aircraft might fly to North Vietnam are now believed to have reflected confusion on the part of the North Vietnamese civil air personnel as to the type of aircraft involved.

18. Hanoi radio announced on 18 March that special committees have been set up to ensure adequate water and rail transportation under conditions of air and sea attacks on North Vietnam. The broadcast claimed that small boats have already been armed to assure continued coastal transportation.

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19. The first [REDACTED] DRV radar station located in Laos [REDACTED]. The location of this station, about 20 miles southeast of Sam Neua, and the area it covers indicate that it could provide back-up for some stations in North Vietnam. This station could also provide the DRV air defense system with a secondary means of reporting hostile flight activity over southern North Vietnam should the Vinh center become inoperative.

South Vietnam Political Developments

20. Premier Quat has told the US Embassy that the three detained leaders of a pro-Communist peace movement are to be taken today to the demilitarized zone with reporters present and ordered to cross a bridge into North Vietnam. An official in I Corps, where the prisoners are now held, stated that the government has authorized revocation of its expulsion order if the three appear, under interrogation, to be sincere nationalists.

21. The I Corps official, who has heard reports that North Vietnam intends to exploit the three for a major propaganda campaign, believes South Vietnam should allow them to repent at the bridge and launch its own publicity campaign on their unwillingness to go north.

22. The US Ambassador has approved an ARVN recommendation for crop destruction in northern Binh Dinh Province, the largest such operation to date. An estimated 3,500 to 13,500 villagers live in the target area. Although the Viet Cong may not allow the population to evacuate, the embassy recognizes that their resettlement could add to the already serious refugee problem in the province. Despite this, however, US officials believe the crop destruction program, scheduled to begin on 22 March, is justified by the serious military situation in the province.

Viet Cong Military Activity

23. There have been no significant Viet Cong attacks reported in the past 24 hours. Press reports [REDACTED] claim the Viet Cong are massing to attack Da Nang and Quang Tri, but MACV has no confirmation.

24. In Saigon today, a grenade thrown at a truck carrying American military personnel wounded four US servicemen and four Vietnamese civilian bystanders.

NORTH VIETNAM

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