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NSC BRIEFING

24 June 1954

INDOCHINA

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- I. [REDACTED] paints dismal picture  
French future in Tonkin delta.

A. Failing American intervention or Geneva cease-fire,  
he foresees inevitable withdrawal French expeditionary  
corps from delta.

1. This coincides recent reported consensus 35  
French officers in Indochina, who believe  
withdrawal to Haiphong perimeter will be  
followed by mass Vietnamese desertions, and  
that even beachhead would soon be lost.

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2. [REDACTED] preparations already well under way,  
including bulldozing of beaching points for  
landing craft east of Haiphong.
3. He points out that parts of Hanoi-Haiphong  
LOC now open only two to three hours daily;  
in event evacuation Hanoi, depot stocks amount-  
ing to 600 train loads would have to be abandoned  
or destroyed; road-bound forces have only one  
route to Haiphong.

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- II. [REDACTED] considers Viet Minh could make all-  
out attack any time after 1 July.

A. Thinks, however, this more probable after 15  
September for following reasons:

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1. Enemy can significantly improve its delta position during next few months at small cost.
2. Battle corps has many replacements needing additional training.
3. Minimum of two months' detailed preparations usually made by Viet Minh before major attacks.

B. He believes, however, that if enemy sees evidence improvement civilian morale or probable internationalization of war it would immediately commit battle corps for early decisive victory.

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III. [REDACTED] French believe 500 potential Viet Minh truck drivers, sent from delta to Thai Nguyen area, will replace borrowed Chinese drivers.

25X1X7 A. [REDACTED] interpretation: Preparation for possible inspections by neutral nations following agreements Geneva. 25X1X6

IV. General Cogny, [REDACTED] believes enemy battle corps on delta perimeter ready to move against French "at any time."

A. He not sure when assault might come but said if he were Viet Minh commander, he would have attacked delta two weeks ago.

1. Cogny thinks political considerations might explain delay.

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V. [REDACTED] large quantities Chinese aid crossed border past several weeks.

A. Materiel largely ammo and heavy weapons; in mid-June, 36 to 50 105mm howitzers received.

B. French opinion: materiel destined for Thai Nguyen area, where enemy's nine battalions in training may eventually constitute new division, possibly artillery.

VI. Regardless plans for major assault, early intensification Viet Minh activity in delta forecast by several reports.

25X1X7 A. [REDACTED] "indications" that Division 320 plus some irregular units have been ordered prepare for action on 1 July in southern delta area. One regiment Division 304 also may be involved.

1. French undecided whether this would be part of attack on entire delta or only limited campaign.

B. French also expect strong additional attacks against Hanoi-Haiphong LOC by several enemy battalions.

1. These units may first turn against Ke Sat-Hung Yen route, in attempt isolate Hung Yen whose loss would cripple southern delta defense, increase vulnerability Hanoi and Haiphong.

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- C. Report of 37mm AA defenses near Haiduong, just east of Ke Sat, suggests enemy plans for increased action that area, possibly in conjunction with interdiction Hung Yen route.
  - 1. Bridge across Thai Binh River at Haiduong most vulnerable link in Hanoi-Haiphong LOC.
- VII. Altered French defense plans now call for French units to remain southern delta area, rather than turn zone over to Vietnamese army.
  - A. French apparently wish avoid major reorganization while enemy has strong attack capability, also fear Vietnamese troops could not hold area alone.
  - B. Extent of present insecurity southern delta area indicated by recent closing large spinning and weaving mills in Nam Dinh; this was one of largest manufacturing enterprises in Indochina.
- VIII. Meanwhile, security in five once-safe provinces in South Vietnam said by prominent Vietnamese army officer to have deteriorated markedly over last half year.
  - A. He blames poor pay, inadequate arms of local militia and corruption, incompetence of local governments; says Vietnamese army "concerned much more with tailoring of uniform and unearned decorations than with primary purpose of combatting Communist enemy."

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B. His opinion--unless remedial action taken, "all would be lost" these provinces within two or three months.

IX. Re Bao Dai, it becoming less likely he will return Vietnam. 25X1X4A

A. [REDACTED] most French and Vietnamese plans call for his dismissal.

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