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Developments in Indochina

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State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA
(Information as of 1500)

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VIETNAMESE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Negotiations between the government and PRG in Paris will be arduous. The PRG has named a Liberation Front leader to head its delegation to the talks.

VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

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Military activity in the South increased over the weekend.

CAMBODIA

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Government sweep operations are continuing. A Communist buildup may be occurring in Takeo Province.

LAOS

8

Negotiations to implement the cease-fire agreement are moving slowly.

VIETNAMESE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations in Paris

The government is preparing for difficult and protracted negotiations with the Communists in the forthcoming Paris talks.

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The Communists will be seeking to install a new constituent assembly and a new constitution through elections, while the government will be trying to ensure that any voting is held within the framework of the present constitutional system. The prospect for a quick resolution of these basic differences is at best slim.

Another vexing problem may arise in the formation of the Council of National Reconciliation and Concord (CNRC). According to Foreign Affairs Minister Tran Van Lam, the government does not recognize the third segment of the CNRC as a neutralist or independent entity; it believes the council must be composed of an equal number of pro-government and pro-Communist supporters. Lam said that he and the main Viet Cong negotiator at the preliminary talks between the two sides in Paris had agreed on this, but that Madame Binh was reportedly "very angry" when she heard about it and insisted on the inclusion of independents.

Thieu had ordered the South Vietnamese delegation to approach the talks in a spirit of reconciliation. The Viet Cong are to be treated as a "younger brother" who has lost his way and is now

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being brought back into the family. The delegation should try to divide the Viet Cong from Hanoi by convincing the Communist delegation that the conferees are "all South Vietnamese" and can work together with the Northerners.

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Moderate oppositionist Nguyen Noc Huy has told a US Embassy officer that he expects the Paris negotiations to be broad and quite protracted. Huy, head of the Progressive Nationalist Movement and a member of the government's delegation to the Paris talks, believes the main difficulty will arise over "guarantees," with each side striving for some sort of iron-clad assurance that the other will not at the first opportunity attack its personnel or subvert its position.

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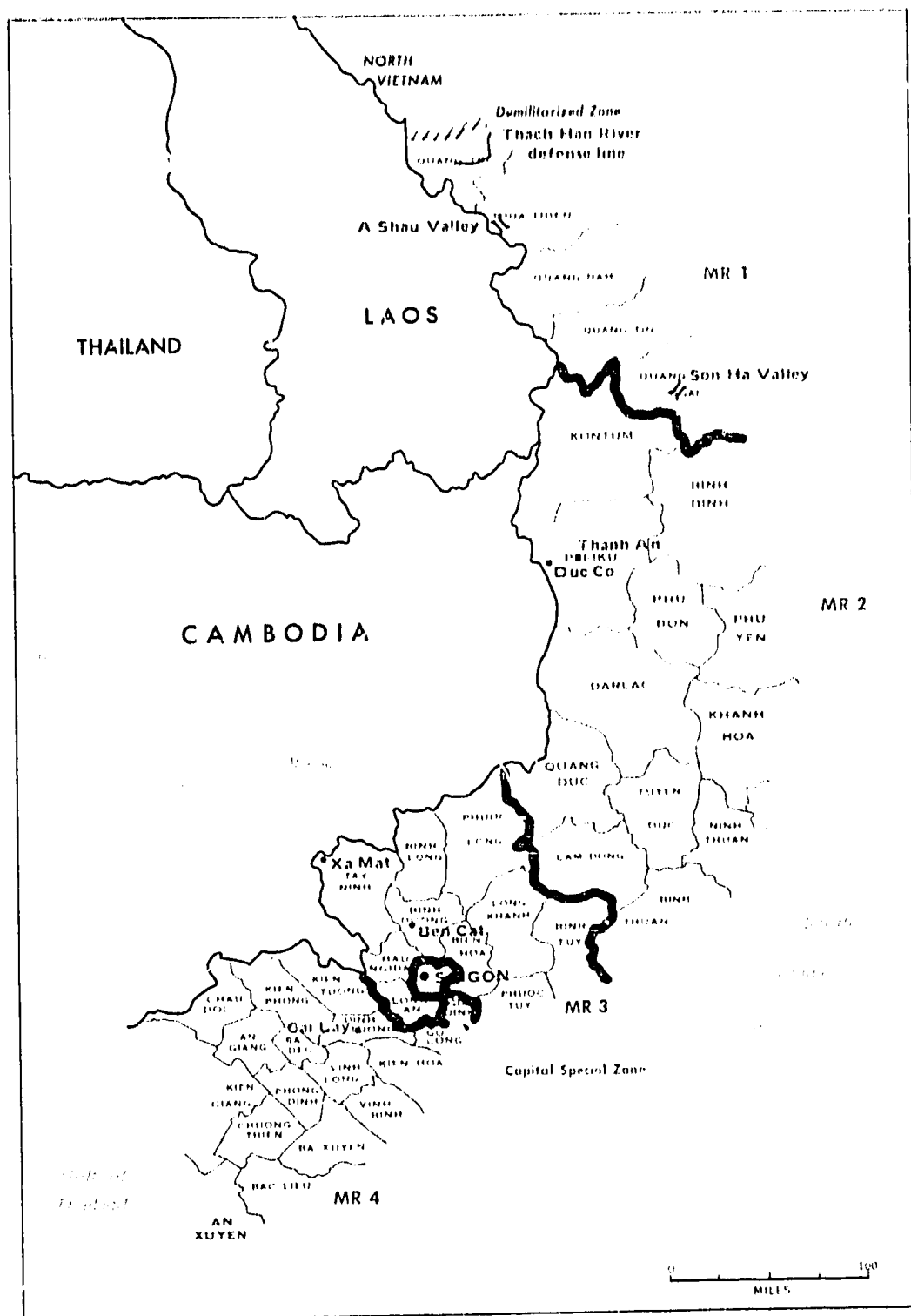
PRG Negotiator

Nguyen Van Hieu, who will head the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) delegation to the political talks with South Vietnam to be held near Paris beginning 19 March, is a long-time National Liberation Front (NLF) stalwart. Hieu is a member of the presidium of the NLF Central Committee, but apparently does not hold a PRG post. For a number of years he headed various NLF delegations traveling abroad. He served as NLF representative in Cambodia until that mission was withdrawn in early 1970. Since then, Hieu has not been in the limelight. The Communists usually use the Front to appeal to a broad strata of South Vietnamese, and this may be the cast they want to give to their delegation.

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The Military Situation

There was some increase in military activity over the weekend, mostly as a result of government clearing operations. In Dinh Tuong Province, South Vietnamese regulars claim they inflicted substantial losses on North Vietnamese units in a three-day series of battles near Cai Lay North of Saigon, several Communist shellings and light ground attacks were directed against government forces trying to reopen a provincial road west of Ben Cat. According to the US Embassy, Saigon claims that in early March South Vietnamese aircraft destroyed over 90 enemy-built shelters in this general area.

Several sharp clashes occurred in western Pleiku Province, as North Vietnamese units continue to resist government efforts to retake a fire support base midway between the Thanh An district capital and the ICCS checkpoint at Duc Co.

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In Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnamese rangers and artillery have been moved into the Son Ha Valley to interdict a recently detected Communist-built road. According to the embassy a senior

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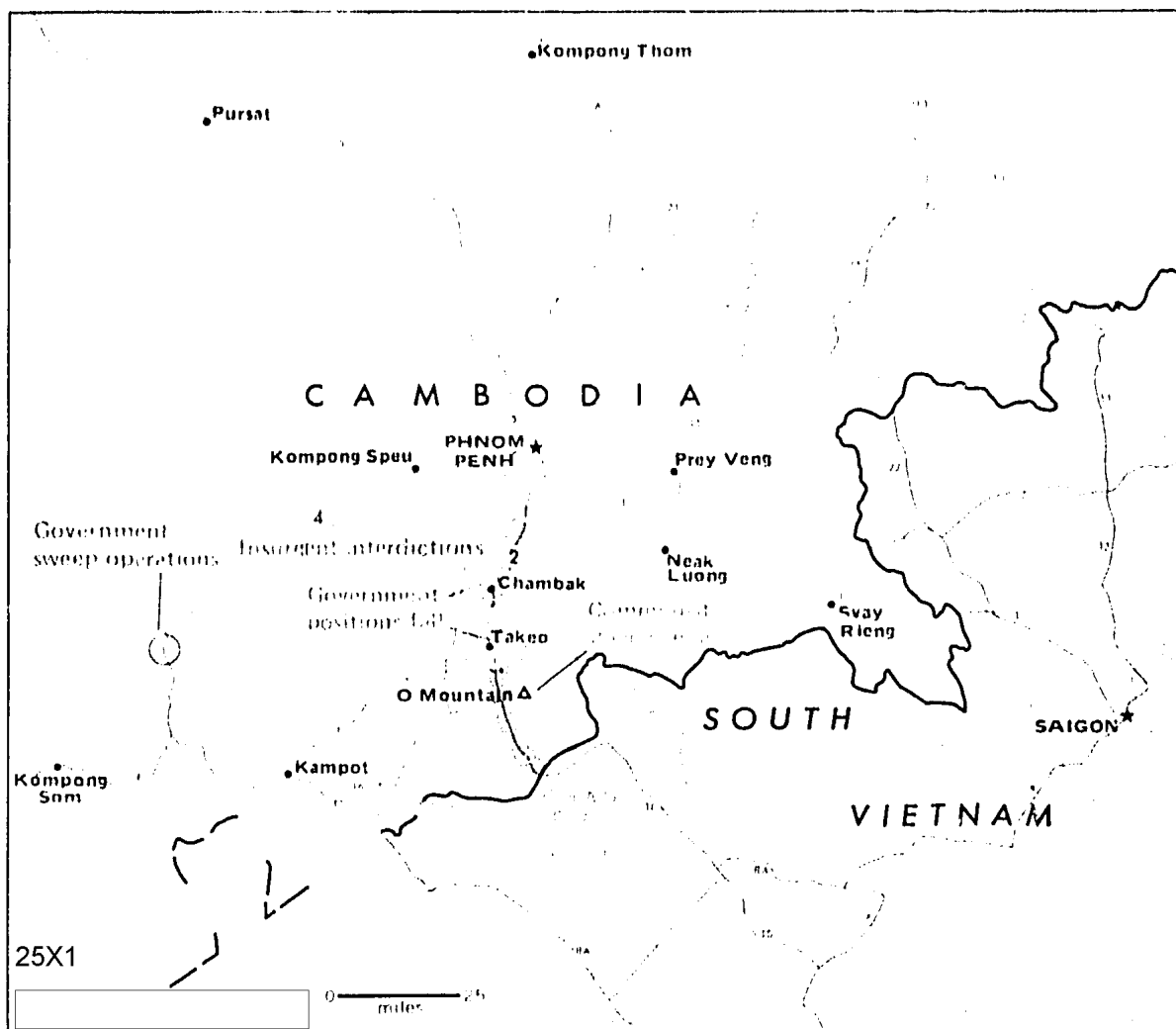
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South Vietnamese army officer in the area says that recent aerial reconnaissance has confirmed heavy traffic on the road.

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CAMBODIA

Government forces are continuing sweep operations some 55 miles northeast of the seaport of Kompong Som along a short section of Route 4 which was the scene of an insurgent ambush on 7 March. The operations are expected to end on 12 March, allowing regular truck convoys to move between Phnom Penh and Kompong Som.

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The insurgents are keeping up their attacks against dwindling government positions on Route 2. Two Cambodian positions near Chambak, north of the town on Takeo, were abandoned under heavy insurgent pressure on 10 March; two positions east of Takeo were also lost on the same day. The few remaining government outposts between Takeo and the South Vietnam border continue to be harassed.

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LAOS

The only notable military activity on 9 and 10 March occurred in the north, where the Communists forced smaller government units to abandon outposts in the hills some 40 miles east of Ban Houei Sai and also north of the Plaine des Jarres. Despite the limited ground action, Lao Air Force strikes continued against targets, such as enemy troop concentrations of no immediate threat to government forces. At least some of the enemy attacks in the past few days may have been in retaliation for air strikes. [REDACTED]

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The Negotiations

The joint committees to implement the peace agreement continue to make little progress. Government members of the political commission late last week attempted to start a dialogue with the Communists on the shape of a new coalition cabinet. The Communists seemed eager to get the government's views, but would make no commitments. The government negotiators on the military commission have had a similar experience.

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Although Prime Minister Souvanna [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] does not seem concerned over the commission's lack of progress. He almost certainly intends that all real decisions will be made privately between himself and Communist envoy Phoumi Vongvichit in summit discussions similar to those preceding the cease-fire agreement. Souvanna is aware that this procedure will rekindle the ire of the rightists. He may intend to delay agreement until the last minute to give them less time for troublemaking.

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