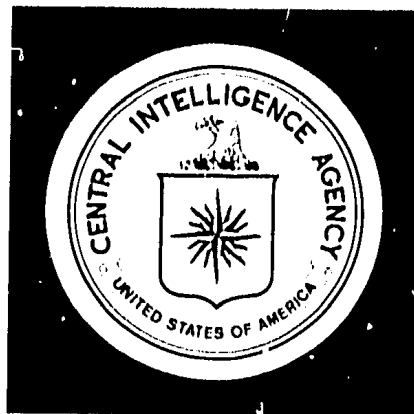


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Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review
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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1500)

Page

SOUTH VIETNAM

1

New road construction in the northern provinces appears designed to complete a supply road from the DMZ to the central highlands. The Viet Cong spokesman in Paris says the Communists will not talk about elections until Saigon releases all political prisoners.

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CAMBODIA

3

Lon Nol renews his offer to hold elections for a new legislature. Government troops are retreating from Chambak.

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LAOS

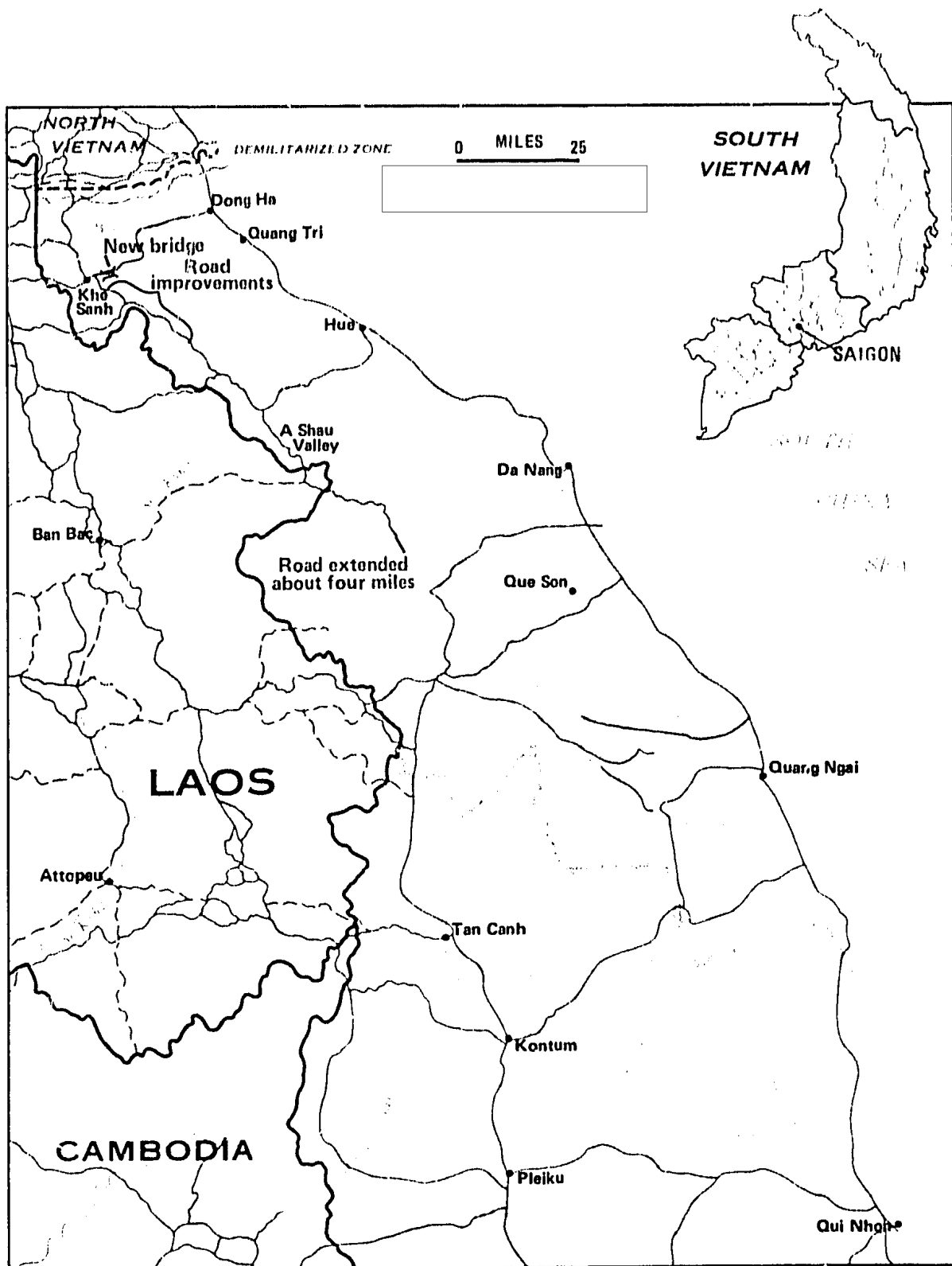
5

There is some increase in fighting near the Plaine des Jarres and in the South.

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SOUTH VIETNAMNew Supply Corridor

Aerial photography [] shows the Communists improving roads in the northern part of the country. The improvements include building a new dual lane highway bridge near Khe Sanh, and extending a road south from the A Shau Valley. If the Communists finish the bridges and extend the road another 12 to 14 miles, it will join roads to the coast and to the central highlands. The North Vietnamese would then have a through route from the Demilitarized Zone into the central highlands. Moreover, this road corridor is east of the mountains and not affected by the heavy rains that flood many of the supply routes in southern Laos in the late spring and summer. []

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PRG Tactics at the Paris Bilaterals

Ly Van Sau, a PRG spokesman, has given some idea of the kind of linkage the Viet Cong will try to establish between issues at their talks with the GVN in Paris next week. He told newsmen on 13 March that the Communists will not even talk about elections in the South until Saigon releases all political prisoners. The Thieu government has been calling for early elections on the grounds that the longer the elections are postponed, the better the Communists will do. []

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The Military Situation

Heavy artillery exchanges continue in northern Quang Tri Province. []

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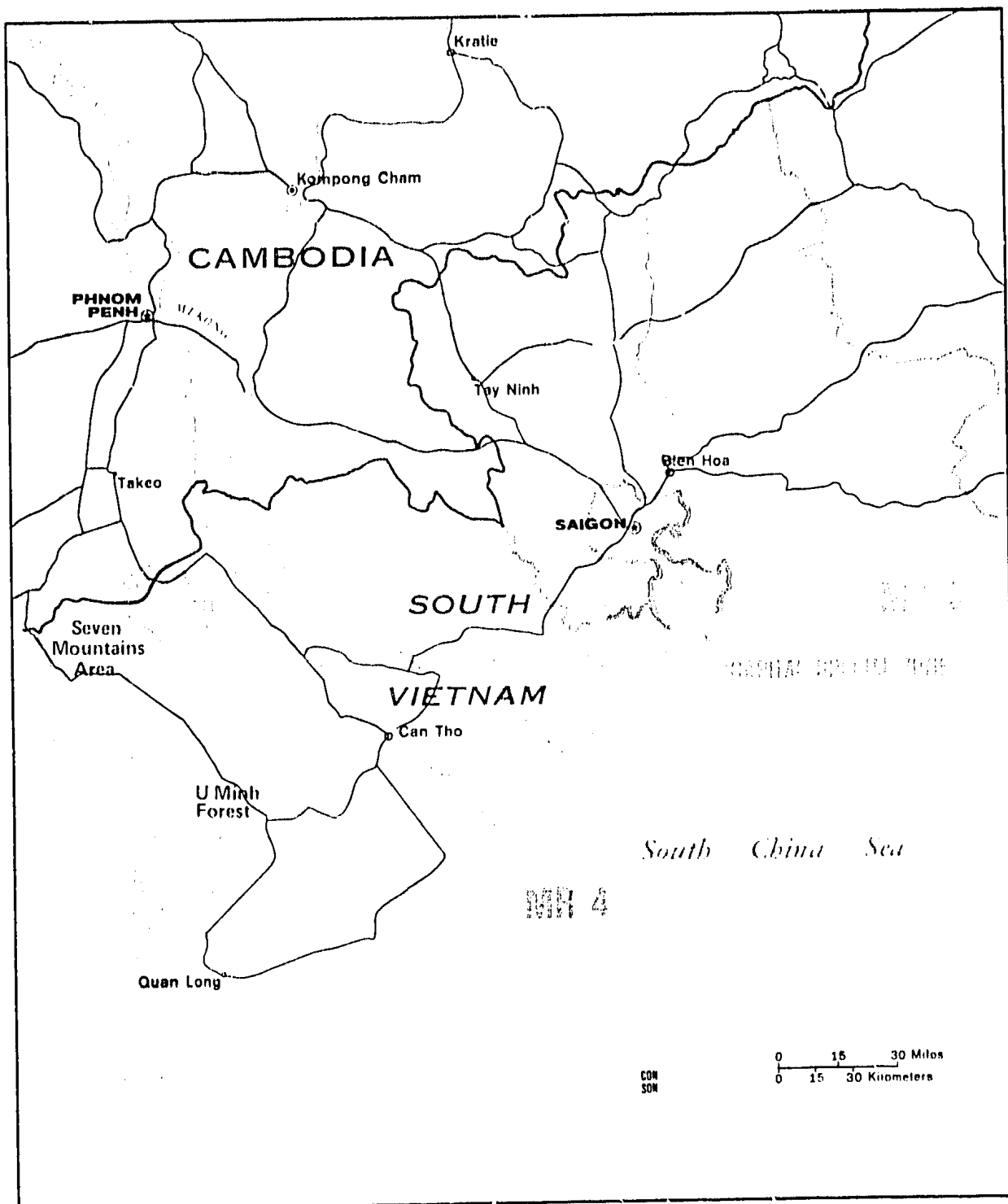
[] Fighting elsewhere in the country was light. []

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The Struggle in the Delta

The military situation in the delta is getting fewer headlines than the current heavier action in the northern provinces, but the low-level struggle in the southern provinces may be more characteristic of future enemy strategy.

In recent weeks, Communist forces have perceptibly increased both in numbers and in influence throughout the southern districts of Chuong Thien Province. According to US Embassy officials, government control has gradually been narrowed until the Communists now have unimpeded access to communications and supply routes, as well as a potential base for military and political operations in the central delta. Moreover, southern Chuong Thien borders Communist sanctuaries in the U Minh Forest area of Kien Giang and An Xuyen provinces.

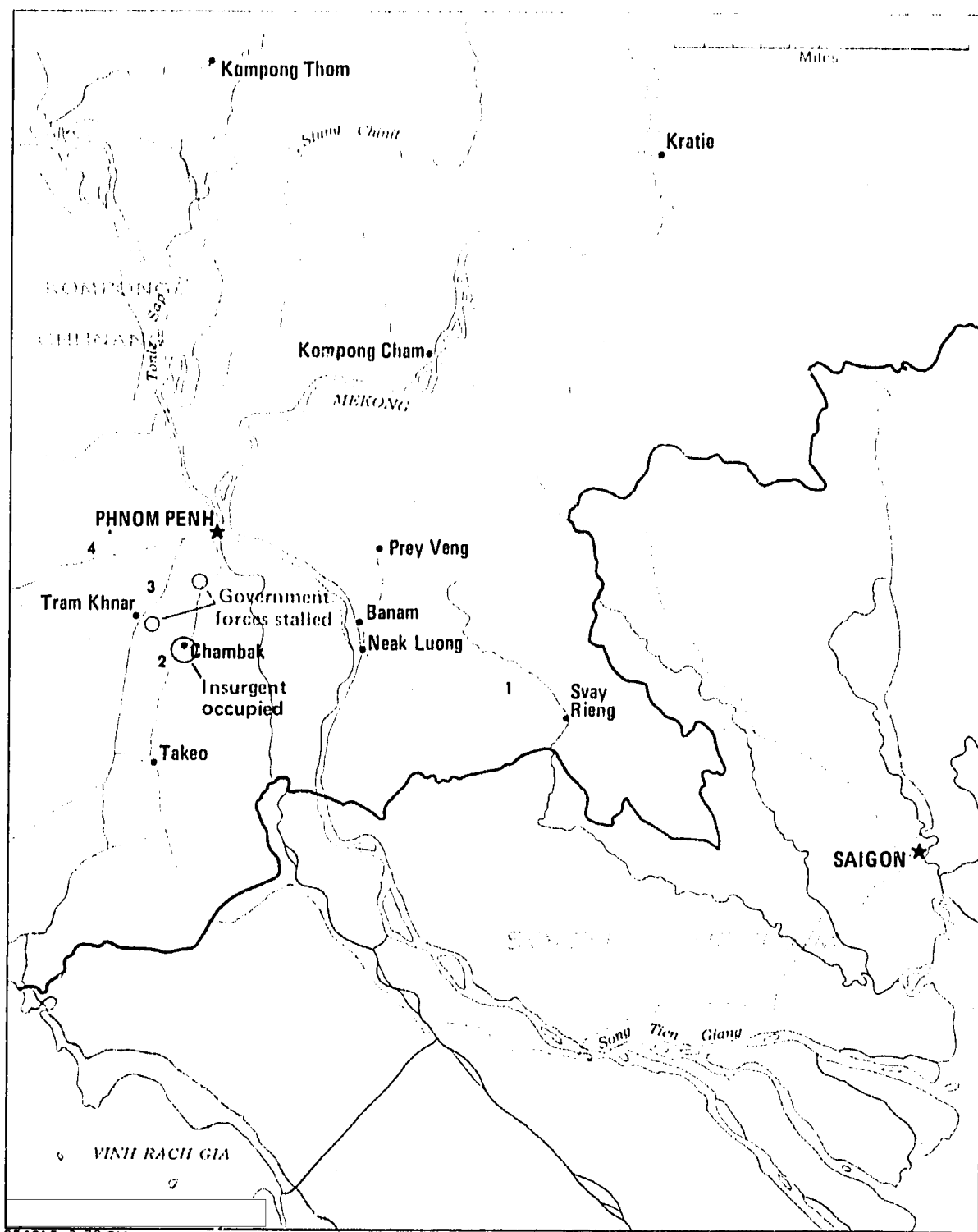
The Communists have also strengthened their base in the Seven Mountains area of Chau Doc Province, providing easier access to the delta from Cambodia. There has been considerable Communist activity in Bac Lieu and Ba Xuyen provinces, but the government appears to be holding its own in these areas.

In the northern delta provinces, the Communists have been less successful. Government forces have recovered most of the territory lost at the start of the cease-fire in Kien Tuong, Kien Phong, and Dinh Tuong provinces, and the South Vietnamese are now setting up outposts in some areas where there has been no government presence. Most of these areas, however, still harbor sizable Communist military forces.

Viet Cong activity in the delta contains a heavy mix of political threats and terror. Abductions, assassinations, and sabotage are more on the increase than in any other part of the country.

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CAMBODIANew Election Proposal

In a statement issued on 13 March, President Lon Nol again declared the government's willingness to hold new legislative elections with the participation of all political elements--including the insurgents. The statement did not indicate when the elections would be held, but is in line with a similar proposal first floated in early February. That proposal included two important preconditions: the prior withdrawal of all Vietnamese Communist troops from Cambodia and the exclusion of Sihanouk from any political role.

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The Military Situation

Little fighting was reported along Route 2 on 13 March. The nearly 700 government troops who had abandoned the town of Chambak on 12 March continued to move south along the highway toward the provincial capital at Takeo. A Cambodian brigade from Tram Khnar on Route 3 began moving east toward Chambak on 13 March, advancing only a few miles before making contact with the insurgents. Other government forces trying to clear a section of Route 2 north of Chambak remain stalled.

Elsewhere, the government is moving a brigade from Kompong Chhnang Province to the east bank of the Mekong south of Neak Luong.

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LAOS

The Military Situation

The pace of military activity increased somewhat around the Plaine des Jarres on 13 March. Two enemy companies, supported by mortar fire, drove elements of two government battalions from positions some eight miles northeast of Pha Dong.

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two enemy companies, supported by heavy weapons fire, attacked irregular positions 13 miles southeast of Thakhek. The irregulars had only recently arrived in this area and the attack was almost certainly meant to discourage them from beginning offensive operations to clear Route 13, the main road to Savannakhet.

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