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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

[Redacted]

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128

1 March 1968

3.5(c)

~~TOP SECRET~~

3.5(c)

Information as of 1600
1 March 1968

3.5(c)

HIGHLIGHTS

An enemy ground assault on the Khe Sanh base has been repulsed. The Communists have suffered a serious reverse in their largest effort at sea infiltration to date.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Communist troops launched a ground attack against the allied outpost at Khe Sanh early on 1 March (Paras. 1-3). Scattered enemy actions were reported throughout the remainder of the country (Paras. 4-6). There are indications that the Communists are planning large-scale activity in the western highlands on 3 March (Paras. 7-9).

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Three enemy trawlers were sunk off the coast of South Vietnam (Paras. 12-18). Both allied and enemy casualties continue to rise sharply (Paras. 19-21).

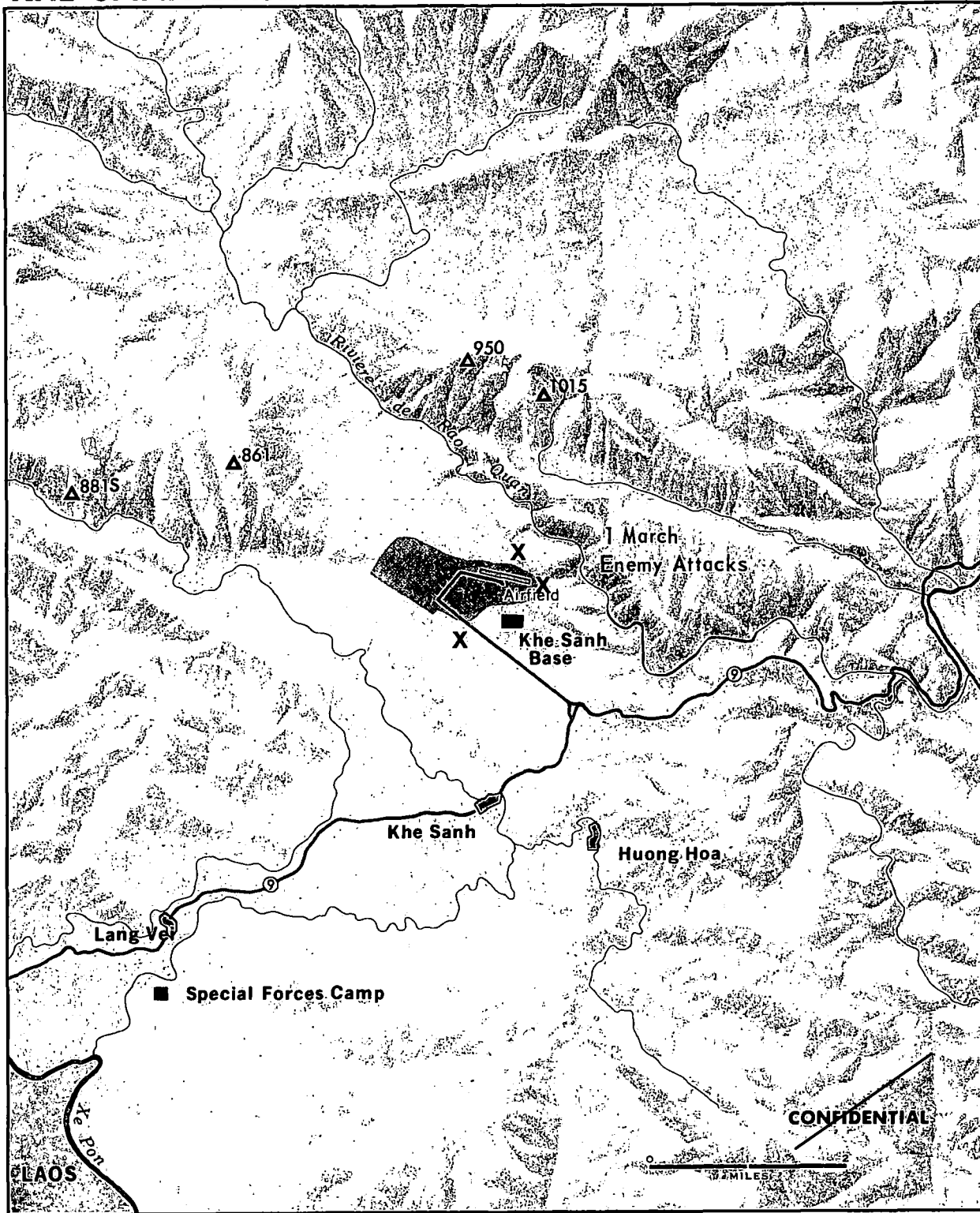
II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: The Communists may have snared a prominent Buddhist to support their new front (Paras. 1-2). A Communist mass atrocity has been unearthed in Hue (Paras. 3-4). The merger of the Thieu-endorsed Popular Front for National Reconstruction with Senator Tran Van Don's People's Committee to Save the Nation appears in the offing (Paras. 5-7). The Lower House on 1 March overwhelmingly rejected Thieu's request for sweeping powers in the economic area (Paras. 8-9).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: There is nothing of significance to report.

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KHE SANH BASE



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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Communist military activities were at a near-normal, pre-Tet level throughout most of the country on 29 February - 1 March. Aside from a ground attack at Khe Sanh, enemy efforts were limited to small-scale skirmishes and some shellings.

2. At the Khe Sanh Base, North Vietnamese regulars launched a ground probe early on 1 March. Communist infantrymen, led by sappers, who placed explosive charges under the barrier wire, hit the eastern perimeter which is defended by the South Vietnamese 37th Ranger Battalion. Enemy troops also made small probes against the northeast and southern sections of the base.

3. Sixty-seven North Vietnamese were killed before they withdrew from battle in the face of heavy allied firing. Allied casualties were reported as light. As the Communists, aided by extensive tunneling, edge close to the allied base, similar probes to test the camp's defenses can be expected.

4. In the central part of the country, Communist forces continue to maintain pressure on the highland provinces of Kontum, Darlac, and Pleiku. Pleiku city and a nearby air base were hit by mortars on 1 March and enemy units staged several light probes north and northeast of Kontum city on 29 February.

5. Seven enemy-initiated military actions were reported on 29 February - 1 March in South Vietnam's III Corps. The majority of these incidents occurred in Hau Nghia Province. One was a large-scale mortar barrage against a US Army base camp some 15 miles west of Saigon.

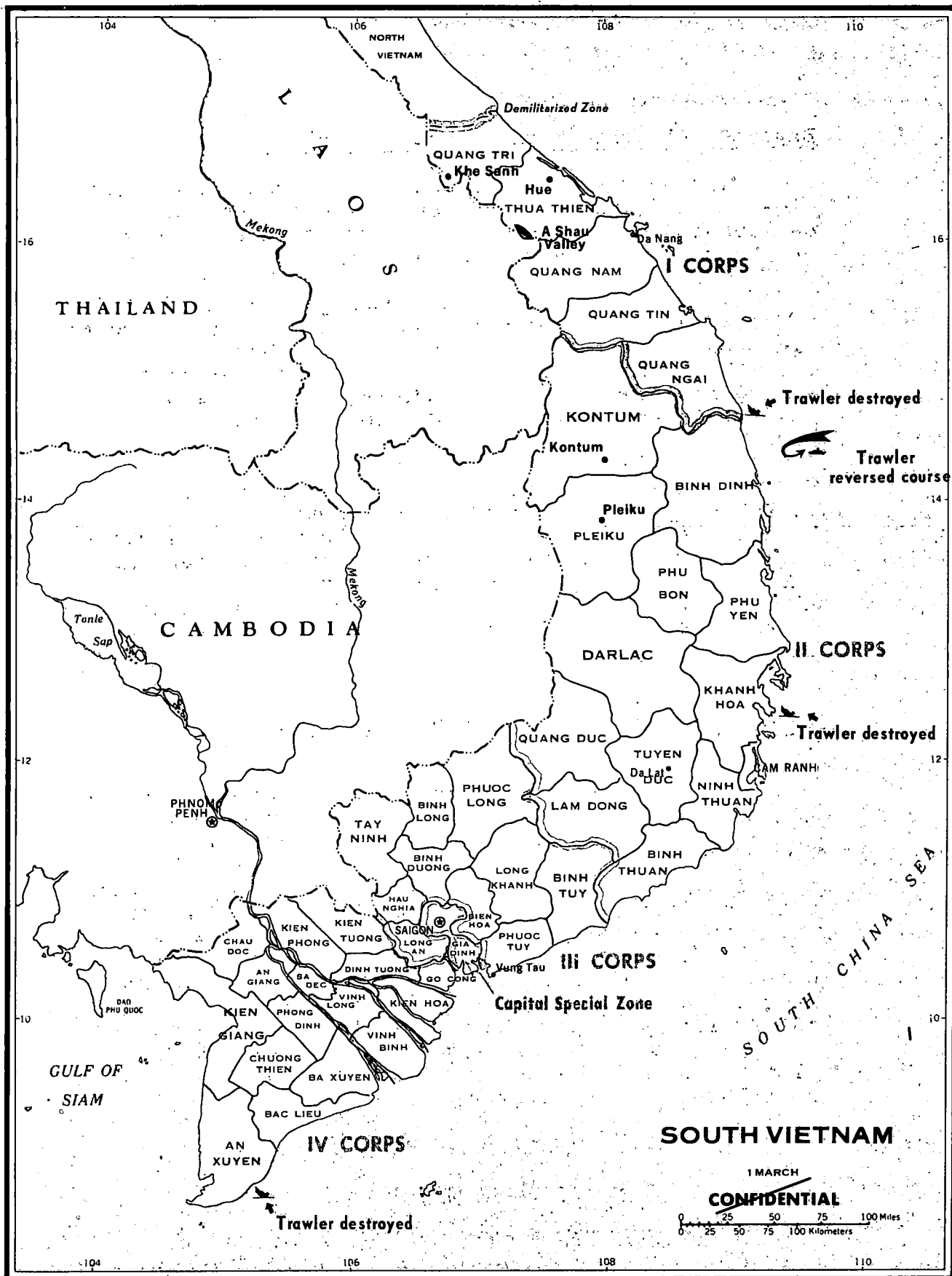
6. In the delta provinces, scattered skirmishes and shellings of outposts and district towns by the Viet Cong took place on 29 February. Most of the incidents were concentrated in Vinh Long and Dinh Tuong provinces.

1 March 1968

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Communist Sea Infiltration Thwarted

12. A large-scale Communist sea infiltration effort ended in apparent failure when three 100-foot steel-hull trawlers were destroyed by explosions during the night of 29 February - 1 March on South Vietnam's coast. A fourth trawler headed toward Binh Dinh Province sensed trouble and reversed course. According to late reports, the vessel was in international waters and under allied surveillance.

13. The trawlers apparently attempted to land supplies in coastal areas of Quang Ngai, Khanh Hoa, and An Xuyen provinces, all of which have long been suspected entry points for maritime infiltration. Following procedures observed in previous Communist waterborne supply operations, one of the vessels was blown up after it had been fired upon by allied forces. The other two trawlers were apparently destroyed by allied mortar and naval gunfire.

14. One of these trawlers can transport up to 100 tons of munitions to South Vietnam in a matter of days. The risk of detection and loss of cargo is high, however. In contrast, it would take weeks to move similar amounts to coastal South Vietnam through the overland infiltration corridors. Accordingly, the magnitude of the sea infiltration effort, the largest yet detected in Vietnam and the first seen in eight months, and the clear willingness of the Communists to accept the risks of such a venture suggest enemy forces in these coastal areas have an urgent need for supplies, possibly to support another series of attacks.

15. Four enemy 40-foot junks also were sighted on 1 March at the mouth of the Cua Viet in northeastern Quang Tri Province. One junk containing arms and ammunition was captured. Late reports indicate three others were located less than a mile off the river mouth and are under surveillance.

1 March 1968

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3.5(c)

16. These junks may have attempted to supply major elements of North Vietnam's 324B Division now in this general area. The use of junks in this instance decreases the risk of cargo loss to the Communists and suggests enemy supply requirements in this area are less urgent than farther south.

17. Recent unusual activity by Chinese naval forces in the northern Gulf of Tonkin suggests the Chinese may be assisting in enemy trawler operations. Since 9 January, four Chinese minesweepers have been operating north of Hainan Island. [REDACTED]

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18. Chinese vessels have assisted North Vietnamese sea infiltration missions through the Hainan Straits in the past and may have done so in the case of four trawlers detected on 29 February - 1 March.

Allied and Enemy Casualties Rise Sharply

19. Both allied and enemy battle deaths continue to rise sharply. During the first two months of 1968 nearly 3,000 American troops have been killed. The weekly average of US combat deaths this year is about 350, nearly double the figure for 1967 when an average of some 180 US troops were killed each week. In 1966 the weekly average of US deaths was 96; in 1965, 26.

20. South Vietnamese and other allied casualties have also been high this year, continuing the upward trend since 1965. The South Vietnamese have lost approximately 510 killed per week so far this year, compared with 206 per week last year and 182 in 1966. Third country allies have lost 28 men killed per week so far this year compared with 21 killed per week in 1967 and 11 per week in 1966.

21. Reports of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army casualties have reached unprecedented highs.

1 March 1968

I-4

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3.5(c)

this year. Nearly 50,000 enemy reportedly have been killed. This is more than half the number of enemy reported killed in all of 1967--86,710.

Combat Deaths

	<u>US</u>	<u>SVN**</u>	<u>Third Country</u>	<u>VC/NVA</u>
1968*	2,987	4,400	240	49,442
Per Week	350	510	28	5,800
1967	9,353	10,739	1,105	86,710
Per Week	180	206	21	1,688
1966	5,008	9,469	566	55,524
Per Week	96	182	11	1,065
1965	1,369	11,243	31	35,436
Per Week	26	216	--	680
Cumulative From Jan 1961	19,009	56,386	1,943	296,676

*As of 29 February.

**Data on South Vietnamese casualties this year are subject to revision because reporting from irregular forces in rural areas is incomplete.

1 March 1968

I-5

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3.5(c)

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3.5(c)

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Liberation Radio on 28 February carried the first known endorsement by a prominent Vietnamese of Communist political objectives in South Vietnam. The statement of support was allegedly signed by Thich Don Hau, doyen of the Buddhist hierarchy in Hue and in the entire I Corps region. It appealed to all Buddhists to join the new Communist-inspired National Alliance Front for Democracy and Peace of Hue city, surfaced during the Tet offensive. Citing purported repressions under past and present Saigon regimes, Hau's statement declared that association with the new front was the "correct path" for settling the war and achieving Buddhist aspirations.

2. There have been indications that at least some Buddhist militants in Hue cooperated with the Communist attack, but the activities and whereabouts of Hau have not been established. It is possible that his statement was not voluntary. Regardless of the circumstances, however, the use of his name should bring the Communists advantages by influencing Buddhist fence-sitters and by fostering increased friction between the Buddhist militants and the Thieu government.

Communist Atrocity in Hue

3. According to the Thua Thien province chief, Colonel Pham Van Khoa, 77 bodies were recovered from a mass grave in Hue on 28 February. The victims were found shot in the back and their hands tied. Khoa told a US Embassy officer that the bodies were mostly civilians but included a large number of police and civil servants. Khoa also speculated that a number of the dead were South Vietnamese who had worked for Americans.

4. The victims apparently had been dead about ten days and may have been executed after trials by a Communist "citizens court" which was reported [redacted] to have been operating in the vicinity of the mass grave site.

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1 March 1968

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Front Merger in the Offing

5. [redacted] the Thieu-endorsed anti-Communist alliance, the Popular Front for National Reconstruction, may be merged with Senator Tran Van Don's People's Committee to Save the Nation. Tran Van An, who heads the former organization, reportedly has already discussed the possible merger with Don and Thieu's brother Nguyen Van Khieu, as well as other members of his organization. Another meeting is scheduled with Don for 1 March when An will indicate his agreement for a merger of the two groups.

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6. An does not intend, however, to submerge his group totally in the new alliance or to lose control of his following. [redacted] he proposes to take the line that Don should continue as president of the combined front, but there should be a joint controlling committee composed of representatives of both groups. An will, at least initially, take steps to ensure the organizational integrity of his group while indicating publicly that it is an integral part of the combined front. [redacted]

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[redacted] Don is amenable to An's conditions, even though An would remain in a position to pull his followers out of the united front. An reportedly feels that his precautions will dispel President Thieu's fears concerning the creation of a large political front over which he has no control.

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7. The prognosis for the new joint front still does not appear good. An's efforts to pressure his organizations' integrity will probably sap the new front of any genuine strength. It is also possible that the whole effort by An to merge with Don's front may be a ploy inspired by President Thieu to cripple a potential source of political competition on the national level. Since Thieu is known to feel that the Don organization is a vehicle for Vice President Ky's political ambitions, he may feel that the crippling merger will serve a dual purpose.

1 March 1968

II-2

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3.5(c)

Lower House Refuses President Thieu Economic Powers

8. The Lower House today, in a move that was not unexpected, rejected President Thieu's request for emergency decree powers in economic and financial spheres. The only surprises were the lopsided size of the vote, 85 to 10, and the fact that it was taken on an alternative proposal of the Lower House joint economic and finance committee which would have scaled down Thieu's emergency power from a requested 12 months to 90 days.

9. The motives behind the Lower House's rejection appear to be threefold: 1) reluctance to relinquish any of its prerogatives; 2) unwillingness to give the appearance that the assembly cannot deal with emergency situations; and 3) concern that the granting of decree powers to the President is unconstitutional. It puts the House under the gun since it must now live up to its promise to give priority consideration to economic measures proposed by the government.

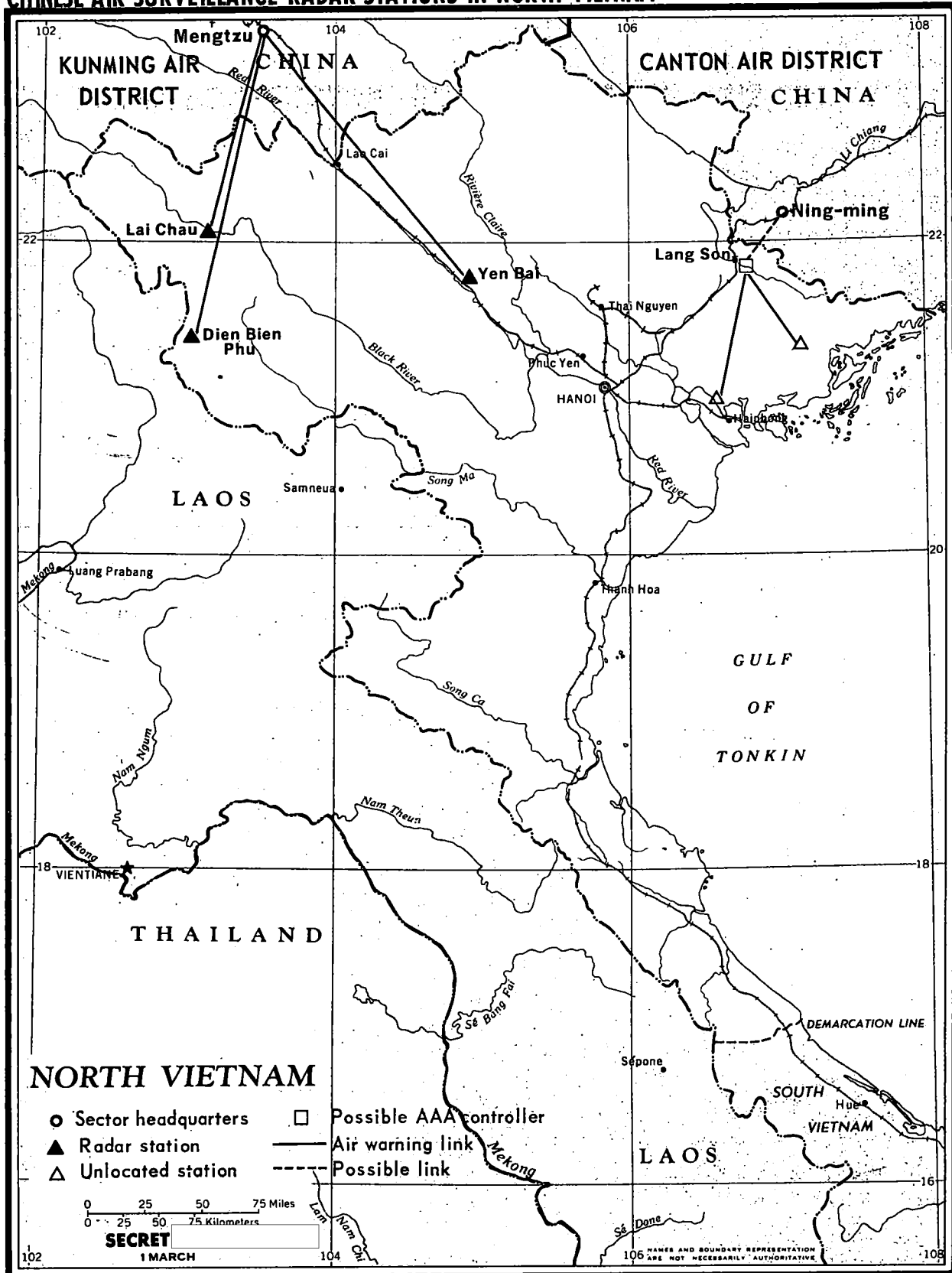
1 March 1968

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CHINESE AIR SURVEILLANCE RADAR STATIONS IN NORTH VIETNAM



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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Recent analysis has identified two Chinese Communist air surveillance radar stations in north-eastern North Vietnam. Both transmit tracking data on US aircraft approaching North Vietnam from the Gulf of Tonkin between Haiphong and the China border.
2. These stations may have been in North Vietnam for some time since they are located at the same place as two Chinese antiaircraft artillery stations active since November 1966 and August 1967. The radar stations are probably subordinate to the air defense sector headquarters at Ning-ming in the Canton Air District.
3. They are also in direct contact with a possible antiaircraft observation post controller in the Lang Son area of North Vietnam and probably provide tracking data for immediate use by Chinese anti-aircraft units. Their broadcasts are probably monitored by the Ning-ming sector headquarters for local early warning purposes.
4. Since December 1966 three Chinese Communist air surveillance radar stations have been identified in northwestern North Vietnam. They are controlled by a Kunming Air District sector located in the Mengtzu area, and are probably used primarily to provide early warning of US aircraft approaching from Thailand. Although they have not been directly associated with Chinese antiaircraft operations in North Vietnam, the station in the Yen Bai area probably coordinates also with local Chinese antiaircraft units.

1 March 1968

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3.5(c)

