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Approved For Release 2004/01/16 : CIA-RDP79T00975A001500340001-7

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20 April 1954

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Copy No. 76

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

DOCUMENT NO. 34
NO CHANGE IN CLASS.
 DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 2009
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 29/10/79 REVIEWER: A rectangular box with a black border, used for redaction.

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Office of Current Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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DOS, ARMY review completed

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GENERAL**1. Moscow reaffirms Viet Minh willingness to open cease-fire negotiations:**

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[Redacted]

Moscow radio's 18 April statement that the Viet Minh "is prepared to begin negotiations on a cease-fire" is merely another reference to Ho Chi Minh's 29 November interview with the Swedish newspaper Expressen in which he declared his readiness to consider a French armistice proposal. This seems to be but a further attempt by the Soviet bloc to represent itself as anxious to "reduce tensions" and to depict the United States as seeking to increase them and to expand the Indochina war. The broadcast offered no elaboration on possible terms of an Indochina settlement or on Ho's demands that a cessation of French "aggression" is a prerequisite for any peace negotiations.

This reminder of Ho's alleged readiness to negotiate is the latest move in a concerted Communist effort to induce France to take the initiative in opening truce talks with the Viet Minh, thereby extending de facto recognition to a regime which Soviet propaganda describes as "the only lawful and sovereign government in Vietnam."

In view of the imminence of the Geneva talks, it is unlikely that France would now modify the cease-fire conditions which Premier Laniel on 6 March purposely made too strong for the Viet Minh to accept. If the French military position in Indochina worsens, France will be increasingly susceptible to any conciliatory gestures of the Communist bloc at Geneva.

The Ho interview has received much less attention in Viet Minh than in Soviet and Chinese Communist comment, but as recently as 9 March, the Viet Minh foreign minister reaffirmed Ho's statement as the government's "present fundamental policy!"

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2.

[Redacted]

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

4. French expect main attacks at Dien Bien Phu on eastern strong points:

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[redacted] estimates that [redacted] the Viet Minh will make only limited objective attacks against the northern and western French defenses at Dien Bien Phu, and will conduct its main effort from the east and north against positions on high ground east of the river (see map, p. 6). The source believes that the enemy will not expend troops against Isabelle except in an attempt to neutralize that strong point's fire support of the main redoubt.

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French forces successfully evacuated Huguette position six on 18 April, and are establishing a new strong point east of the main airstrip opposite Huguette one.

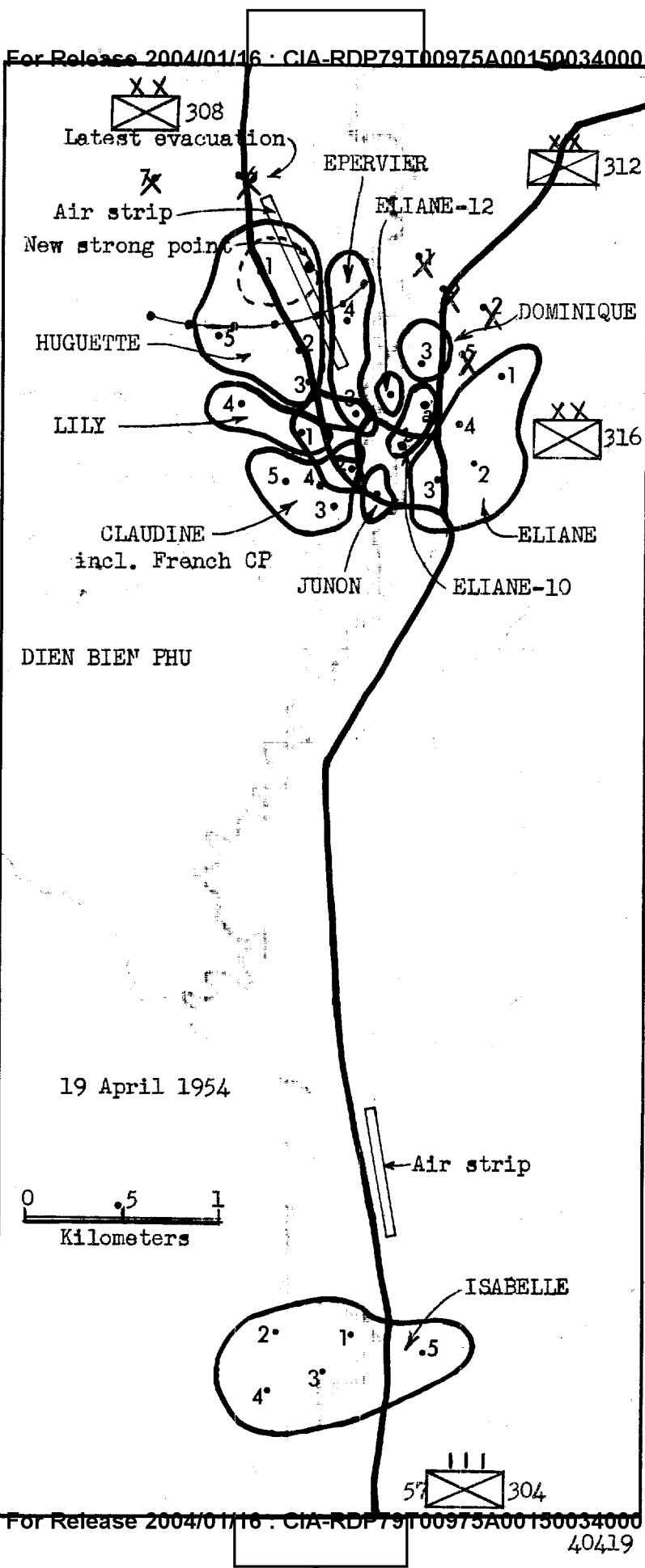
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6. [redacted] notes deterioration in Tonkin delta.

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[redacted] in Indochina, 25X1
who has just returned from a visit to the
Tonkin delta, feels that the situation there is
decidedly worse than it was a year ago,
according to the American army attaché in

Saigon. Viet Minh forces are carrying out methodical trenching opera-
tions, similar to those now being made at Dien Bien Phu, prior to their
attacks on isolated posts, and enemy mines and ambushes are taking a
heavy toll of French Union troops.

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[redacted] the enemy is
employing an increasing number of 12.7mm machine guns as antiaircraft
weapons to protect attacking troops and prevent French air resupply of
surrounded posts. This tactic forces the French to use fighter support
when C-47's are making cargo drops. Enemy fire also necessitates the
cancellation of light aircraft flights, made extensively for liaison pur-
poses in the delta, when a low ceiling makes hedgehopping necessary.

SOUTH ASIA

7. Ceylon may introduce "Indochina and Communism" as Colombo conference topic:

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[redacted]
The permanent secretary of the Ceylonese Foreign Ministry proposes to recommend that Prime Minister Kotelawala introduce "Indochina and Communism" as a topic for discussion at the Colombo conference of South Asian prime ministers.

The secretary told an American embassy official that he recognized the danger Communist conquest of the Indochina "rice bowl" would pose for the whole Southeast Asian region. He reiterated assurances that at the conference Ceylon would approach anti-Communist measures from a "positive" point of view rather than sharing India's "passive" attitude.

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Comment: The Colombo conference will open on 28 April and will be attended by the prime ministers of Ceylon, India, Pakistan, Burma, and Indonesia.

Prime Minister Nehru presumably would be pleased to have Ceylon rather than India initiate a debate on Indochina. This would create the impression that he has wide support in his concern over the situation in Indochina. The Ceylonese may believe that they can steal the show from Nehru if they introduced Indochina as a topic for discussion. Nehru, however, would probably be able to shift the emphasis of the talks from anti-Communism to an assault on American policy.

NEAR EAST - AFRICA

8. USSR offers to return Iranian nationals:

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The Soviet embassy in Tehran has notified the Iranian Foreign Ministry that the Soviet Union proposes to return 300 Iranian nationals recently amnestyed, and insists that the turn-over take place immediately.

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Foreign Minister Entezam has set up a joint military-civil commission to study the proposal.

Comment: Iranian repatriates would probably be persons who were detained after illegally crossing the border and may include elements of the pro-Communist Barzani force which fled to the USSR in 1946 when the Soviet-sponsored Azerbaijan regime collapsed. In view of Iran's generally poor security measures it is likely that a number of Communist agents would be among those admitted.

Following the amnesty decree of March 1953, the USSR repatriated various groups of foreign nationals. The USSR has for some time been attempting to improve relations with Tehran.

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9. Comment on Egyptian cabinet reshuffle:

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[Redacted]

With Colonel Nasr's assumption of the Egyptian premiership on 17 April and the accompanying cabinet changes, the Revolutionary Command Council has reduced civilian participation in the government. All important ministries, except Foreign Affairs, are now headed by council members.

Domination of the government by young inexperienced officers will further reduce administrative efficiency and increase the regime's difficulties in obtaining the cooperation of capable civilian officials. As a result, new authoritarian measures to bolster the council's position may be expected.

General Nagib has apparently accepted removal from the premiership but he still retains considerable popular following.

Despite the ban against them, the Moslem Brotherhood and the Wafd Party with their extensive organizations continue to oppose the military regime. The possibility remains, therefore, that a powerful opposition may develop to challenge the council.

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