

SNIE 10-1-66

Possible Effects of a Proposed US
Course of Action on DRV Capability
to Support the Insurgency in
South Vietnam

4 February 1966

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2005

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[Redacted]

TS 185926
SNIE 10-1-66
4 February 1966

(b) (3)

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF A PROPOSED US
COURSE OF ACTION ON DRV CAPABILITY
TO SUPPORT THE INSURGENCY IN
SOUTH VIETNAM

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As indicated overleaf

4 February 1966

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

4 February 1966

SUBJECT: SNIE 10-1-66: POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF PROPOSED US COURSES OF ACTION ON DRV CAPABILITY TO SUPPORT THE INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

THE PROBLEM

To estimate how DRV capabilities to support the insurgency in the South would be affected by increasing the scope and intensity of the bombing of North Vietnam, and how long it would take for the impact to be felt in the South.

CONCEPT OF THE COURSES OF ACTION

The immediate aims of the bombing would be:

1. To destroy those resources already in North Vietnam that contribute most to support of Communist forces in the South;
2. To block external assistance to the DRV;

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3. To harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and material through the southern DRV into Laos and South Vietnam.

Course A: The enlarged bombing program would include aerial attacks designed to:

1. Destroy all known POL facilities in the northern DRV;
2. Destroy all large military facilities in the northern DRV, except airfields and SAM sites;^{1/}
3. Interdict the land LOCs from China and close DRV ports by various means including mining;
4. Put and keep electric power facilities out of action;
5. Carry out armed reconnaissance against land and water LOCs and all identified military facilities. South of the 20th parallel, such reconnaissance would be particularly intensive and carried out day and night.

Course B: The program as above, but without closing DRV ports by mining or otherwise.

^{1/} Constant surveillance of the airfields would be maintained and their destruction undertaken whenever interference with our planned air operations, or any offensive air actions against our military forces in SVN, might be initiated. Any SAM installations threatening to interfere with these operations would be attacked.

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NOTE

This estimate considers only how DRV physical capabilities to support the insurgency in South Vietnam would be affected by certain assumed US bombing attacks on North Vietnam; it does not deal with the possible effect of these attacks on DRV will to continue the war.

CONCLUSIONS

A. The combined impact of destroying in-country stockpiles, restricting import capabilities, and attacking the southward LOCs would greatly complicate the DRV war effort. The cumulative drain on material resources and human energy would be severe. The postulated bombing and interdiction campaign would harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and material into South Vietnam and impose great overall difficulty on the DRV. However, we believe that, with a determined effort, the DRV could still move substantially greater amounts than in 1965.^{2/}

^{2/} Major General Jack E. Thomas, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, United States Air Force, believes that this conclusion and the tone of the estimate reflect an under-estimation of the overall impact of the postulated bombing program and closing of the DRV ports. He believes that the cumulative interacting effect of such bombing and port closure on the economy, the military structure and the political and psychological fabric of North Vietnam would degrade the DRV capabilities to support the war in the south to a greater extent than this estimate indicates. By excluding consideration of the North Vietnamese will to continue the war, a very important effect of the postulated bombing and port closing has been eliminated.

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B. However, the cumulative effect of the campaign would almost certainly set a limit to the expansion of PAVN and VC mainforce units and activities in South Vietnam. There are too many uncertainties to permit an estimate of just where that limit would be set.

C. If the main ports were not closed, supply of DRV needs from the outside would be greatly simplified, and the problem of moving goods within the DRV would be eased.

DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The two key elements in this problem are the logistic requirements of the Communist forces in South Vietnam and the capability of the DRV to acquire and move supplies to those forces, while at the same time meeting essential requirements in North Vietnam and Laos. Presently available intelligence permits assigning only rough orders of magnitude to either the requirements or the capability.

2. Requirements for external supply of the Communist military forces in South Vietnam have thus far been small. Petroleum products (POL) and food for these forces come almost entirely from within South Vietnam. Supplies received from the DRV in 1965 almost certainly totalled well under 10,000 tons, possibly less than 5,000; some portion of these imports probably went into stockpiles. Because of the numbers of PAVN

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troops infiltrated during the year, increased standardization on the 7.62 mm. family of weapons, and the introduction of heavier weapons, the call on outside supply rose greatly during the latter part of the year; the total 1966 requirement is likely to be substantially higher than that of 1965. The main requirement is for arms and ammunition, the remainder being communications equipment, quartermaster goods, medical supplies, and small amounts of other items. Only minor quantities of all these items originate in the DRV; most come from Communist China.

3. Intelligence on actual movement of supplies shows that existing lines of communication (LOCs), under the levels of aerial attack carried out prior to the bombing pause, were not used at anywhere near their estimated capacities. Nevertheless, the Communists have been making major efforts to increase these capacities. We believe this is done partly in anticipation of increased requirements and partly to provide a maximum margin of excess capacity to absorb reductions which might be caused by intensified aerial attack.

II. IMPACT OF COURSE A

4. Destruction of In-Country Resources. Successful implementation of the campaign against in-country resources, especially the destruction of most of the electric power facilities, would practically paralyze the small modern industrial sector of the DRV's economy. However, this would

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not critically weaken the traditional subsistence economy upon which the majority of the population depends. And, because so little of what is sent south is produced in the DRV, an industrial shutdown would not very seriously reduce the regime's capability to support the insurgency, though it would complicate maintenance and repair of transport and other equipment.

5. Destruction of the nine major remaining POL storage facilities would deprive the regime of some 168,000 tons of bulk storage capacity and whatever POL is now stored there. This would leave probably less than a month's normal consumption (about 15,000 tons in 1965) in distribution facilities and dispersed storage -- drums and small buried tanks. Destruction of the major military facilities in the DRV would mean the loss of some stockpiled munitions, although most such storage is now well dispersed and concealed. In general, the regime would respond to the loss of stored reserves by tightening the priority system, and resorting to substitutes where possible. Nevertheless, the loss of these reserves, especially POL, would force the DRV to almost complete dependence on current imports to sustain its operations.

6. Cutting the LOCs for Outside Supplies. In 1965 the DRV received about a million tons of imports, two-thirds by sea and nearly one-third by rail, the small remainder coming by road, trail, and river. Closing the main seaports to normal shipping, whether by bombing, mining, or both, would necessitate a reduction in imports and diversion to railroad, highway,

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small-craft, and coastal shipping. An industrial shutdown in the DRV would remove some strain from the rail system, as about half of the 300,000 tons imported by rail in 1965 was coal for the Thai Nguyen blast furnaces, and other raw materials accounted for further tonnage. About 100,000 tons of military equipment are estimated to have arrived by rail in 1965, mostly for DRV air defense.

7. The effectiveness of the interdiction campaign would not be the same for all means of transport. While ocean shipping would be stopped from using the ports, some supplies could be offloaded by lighters and other small craft. The use of shallow-draft coastal shipping could probably be increased over present levels even if harassed by a fairly high intensity of armed reconnaissance. Rail transport south of the Chinese border could be reduced drastically, but the experience of World War II and Korea indicates that a 100 percent shutdown is most unlikely. Road transport, which now plays only a small part in the import trade, could be expanded.

8. The effect of the postulated US course of action would be to reduce substantially the level of imports into the DRV. But a substantial portion of current imports are for supporting the modern sector of the economy and other uses not critical to the survival of the regime or the support of essential military tasks. We believe that sufficient supplies for these vital purposes could be brought in. This would include the small quantities necessary for transshipment to South Vietnam. Importation

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of POL would be a key problem, but would be surmountable in a comparatively short time, probably a few weeks, since quantities involved would not be large, even if increased somewhat over previous levels. Soviet POL could be unloaded from tankers at Chan-chiang in South China, moved thence by rail to the DRV border and from there to the Hanoi area by truck. It could also move from the USSR by rail directly across China, or down the coast from Chan-chiang in shallow-draft shipping.

9. Restricting the LOCs in North Vietnam South of the Hanoi Region.

Over these routes -- both sea and land -- must move: (a) the relatively small amounts of materiel that are forwarded to South Vietnam; and (b) the considerably larger amounts required for the North Vietnamese Military Region IV (roughly, that part of the DRV south of the 20th parallel). The crucial problem would almost certainly be POL; at the end of 1965 the forces in Military Region IV were consuming POL at the rate of about 1,500 short tons a month. This supported three main activities: (a) maintenance of LOCs and local transport within the Military Region itself; (b) operation of the Region as a training and staging area; and (c) actual movement of men and supplies into Laos and on to South Vietnam. We believe that despite air attacks, a combination of trucks, shallow-draft coastal shipping, and other means of transport, moving at night and hiding by day, could bring into the region 1,500 tons of POL a month plus other essential supplies.

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Overall Impact in North Vietnam

10. Obviously the combined impact of destroying in-country stockpiles, restricting import capabilities, and attacking the southward LOCs would greatly complicate the DRV war effort. Life in North Vietnam would be on a stringent wartime footing. Supply and maintenance of air defense, PAVN, and coastal defense installations, supply of Communist units in Laos, and maintenance of internal LOCs would be given the highest priorities. All these activities would involve a great expenditure of time and effort, and the cumulative drain on material resources, human energy, and morale would be severe. But so long as the regime was determined to continue, Communist China and the USSR would almost certainly feel compelled to make the necessary material support available. We believe also that China, at least, would if necessary send in additional personnel to aid in maintenance of LOCs and equipment and in the movement of supplies within North Vietnam. The experience of previous wars, as well as our analysis of the situation in Vietnam itself, leads us to believe that the DRV would be able to move essential supplies to the places needed for a prolonged period of time.

11. Specifically, while the bombing and interdiction campaign assumed in this paper would harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and material into South Vietnam and impose great overall difficulties on the DRV, we believe that, with a determined effort, the DRV could move substantially greater amounts than it did in 1965.

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Impact On The War In The South

12. Especially in the first few weeks of the intensified aerial campaign, the supply operation would almost certainly suffer dislocations and disruptions. The deliveries would probably be irregular and there might be considerable uncertainty as to whether key materiel destined for particular military units would arrive as scheduled. Considering the VC/PAVN penchant for long and detailed planning of offensive operations, the irregularity of deliveries and doubt as to the reliability of resupply might lead to the postponement or cancellation of some large-unit offensive operations. However, tactics could be adjusted to meet the problem of irregular supply.

13. Beyond these tactical consequences, the cumulative effect of the postulated aerial campaign would almost certainly set some limit to the expansion of PAVN and VC mainforce units and activities in South Vietnam. During the past year, the requirements of these forces have already gone up considerably. We believe that the Communists intend to expand them further and provide them with heavier weapons. If so, logistic requirements would rise, not in proportion to the numbers of additional troops infiltrated, but much faster, for several reasons. For one thing, PAVN regular forces almost certainly require greater amounts and more diversified

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kinds of external supply than do VC forces. The introduction of heavier mortars (120 mm) has already begun and some light antiaircraft artillery may be moving in. The latter is increasingly needed to counter the effect of US/VNAF close air support. These weapons create heavier logistic demands.

14. During the last year, the Communists have lost stockpiles of food, weapons, and other stores in South Vietnam to ground action and bombing. Moreover, to the extent the Communist forces try to intensify hostilities in the South or are compelled to meet expanded US/GVN offensive operations, they will use up supplies at a higher rate. This effect would be particularly noticeable in the category of ammunition. In the categories of food and weapons, we do not know enough about the amounts and distribution of stockpiles to estimate what reserves the Communist forces still have, but they can probably continue to obtain their essential POL and food from sources within South Vietnam.

15. All these factors taken together indicate that an attempt by the Communists to increase their strength in South Vietnam might raise supply requirements to a level beyond the practical ceiling imposed on their logistic capabilities by the bombing campaign. In short, whereas the proposed US course of action would probably not force reduction of present levels of support, it would probably place an effective ceiling on

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Communist capabilities to expand their military effort in the South. We believe that the level of reinforcement previously projected for 1966^{3/} -- i.e., about 4,500 men per month with necessary supplies -- would still be possible despite the postulated bombing program. There are, however, too many uncertainties to permit estimating at just what level the limit on expansion would be. Among these uncertainties are the extent to which the Communists might infiltrate men and materiel into the South by sea, through Cambodia, or by alternate LOCs.

16. As for the time at which the impact of these effects would be felt in South Vietnam, we cannot on the basis of the above considerations estimate that we could detect any impact in the sense of a consistent and appreciable diminution of previous general levels of activity.

^{3/} Reference SNIE 10-12-65, "Probable Communist Reactions to a US Course of Action," Annex A, paragraph 6, which reads as follows: "There are an estimated 38 infantry regiments in the North Vietnamese army, of which 15 would probably be reserved for home defense. Of the remainder, about half could be used to train new units and replacements for infiltration to South Vietnam. With a force of this size available to furnish instruction and training, about 36 new PAVN regiments or regimental equivalents of approximately 1,500 men each could be trained and infiltrated into South Vietnam during 1966. This would amount to an average of 9 battalion equivalents a month.

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III. IMPACT OF COURSE B -- i.e., THE SAME PROGRAM, BUT WITHOUT CLOSING NORTH VIETNAMESE PORTS

17. During the past year about two-thirds of total imports into North Vietnam came by sea. If the main ports were not closed, these or larger amounts could continue to arrive, though foreign shipping would almost certainly be somewhat inhibited by doubts as to whether the US would continue to leave the ports unmolested. The problem of improvising land transport from the China border to the Hanoi area would scarcely arise at all if necessary supplies could come by sea into Haiphong. Additional trucks would then be available for use in other parts of the DRV. The difficulties of importing POL would be greatly alleviated, even though bulk storage facilities were destroyed. The problems of distribution within North Vietnam and of forwarding supplies to South Vietnam would be eased, but they would remain substantial. In general, supply of DRV requirements from outside sources would be easier and more effective, and much of the impact of the previously considered course of action would be diminished.

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