

~~TOP SECRET~~*Pres file*

Thursday, June 22, 1967 -- 9:00 pm

Mr. President:

This summary of recent air operations against North Viet Nam is in part factual and in part arguing a case for continued heavy bombing in the northern part of North Viet Nam.

The argument is: we are beginning to get some significant cumulative effects in the northern part of North Viet Nam and "air power for the first time began to realize the sort of effectiveness of which it is capable." (pp. 5-6) The argument presented should not, on the face of it, be accepted; but the evidence cited justifies a fresh, dispassionate analysis of what has and has not been accomplished in recent weeks.

W. W. Rostow

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4  
NLJ 92-86  
By 110, NARA, Date 6-15-93

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Thursday, June 22, 1967

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NJ 92-88

By W, NARA, Date 5-29-92

TEXT OF CABLE FROM CINCPAC

SUBJECT: Air Operations: North Vietnam

General Westmoreland recently provided a summary of recent operations in South Vietnam and an estimate of enemy actions in the near future. The following is an assessment of operations in North Vietnam during the past several months.

On February 24, 1967, Rolling Thunder 54 authorized strikes against important power targets and the Thai Nguyen Steel Plant. Strikes against these targets were delayed by weather. There were three operational flying days in February, four in March, and six in April. As a result, additional critical targets were not assigned until April 22.

In late April 1967, and continuing on into May and June, periods of good weather provided the opportunity to maintain a more consistent level of effort in Route Package Six. The JCS targets assigned in Rolling Thunder 55 on April 22 and in Rolling Thunder 56 on May 2 were destroyed or disrupted in a relatively short period. Armed reconnaissance flights against other vital fixed targets and key lines of communication increased in numbers of targets struck and in numbers of sorties flown.

Starting in late April and over a period of five weeks, the air campaign in the northeast quadrant increased the level of damage in that area and the consequent stress on the Hanoi government more than during the entire previous Rolling Thunder program.

Twenty JCS controlled targets were struck in this period compared with a total of 22 in all of 1966. In an effort to bring any and all weight to bear in a challenge to our air offensive, MIG fighters were committed in substantial numbers. In less than five weeks, 30 were destroyed in air-to-air combat, only 12 less than had been shot

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down in the 22 months preceding. Three jet-capable airfields were struck, additional MIG aircraft destroyed on the ground, and continuing strikes disrupted use of the airfields.

The northeast rail line was heavily struck and effectively interdicted for 20 days in the period. Continuing strikes have resulted in its being interdicted an estimated 10 additional days between June 1 and June 15.

The effect of continued offensive force presence, coupled with new tactics, improved CBU-munitions and improved ECM capability shows a major increase in the impact and effectiveness of operations as compared to strikes against the northeast rail line last summer. At that time, 43 aircraft were lost on 1557 combat sorties. In a seven-week period in April, May and June of this year, 11 aircraft were lost on approximately 1600 sorties.

From late April until May 23d, our air campaign, comparatively speaking, was in high gear and effectively using our available resources. A program was in effect periodically authorizing new critical targets. Weather was favorable for continued presence in the key Haiphong-Hanoi complex.

However, on May 23, strikes within 10 miles of Hanoi were prohibited except when specifically authorized. This denied us the option of maintaining air presence in the key Hanoi area. From that date to the present, no new controlled JCS targets have been authorized with the exception of the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant Walleye Strikes. With these limitations in effect, the Route Package Six is now concentrating on armed reconnaissance, with strikes on such fixed targets of value as we are permitted to attack.

The importance of the northeast quadrant to the North Vietnamese is reflected in part by their air defense efforts. Of 1370 SAM sightings from January 1 through June 19, 1967, or 77 percent, have been in Route Package Six. Over 60 percent of the anti-aircraft order of battle is in Route Package Six. Practically all MIG activity has been confined to Route Packages Five and Six. In spite of this concentrated air defense, the aircraft loss rate for the first five and one-half months of 1967 has been 6.2 combat aircraft lost per 1000 combat sorties, a marked improvement over the 10.0 rate for the last six months of 1966.

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- The increased level of effort in the northeast quadrant with the advent of good weather has not been at the expense of armed reconnaissance throughout the remainder of North Vietnam nor at the expense of the concentrated interdiction effort in Laos and Route Package One. For example, the combat sorties in Route Package Six increased from a low of 500 in February to 3200 in May, 1800 of which were attack sorties, and this rate is continuing in June. During the same period, there have been 4300 attack sorties flown in Route Package One, primarily on interdiction. In May and continuing in June, we have approached a level of effort more nearly in consonance with the importance of the northeast area.

A review of the number and value of targets remaining in Route Package Six indicates what is likely the reason for the North Vietnamese air defense effort in this area. Of the 246 targets currently carried in Annex Alfa to CINCPAC's Rolling Thunder basic operational order, we view 166 in the northeast area as vital and an additional 57 are major or significant. These latter are being analyzed for determination of relative importance to the enemy systems and thus priority for attack. The important thing to note is that there is no lack of critical targets in this area.

Since February, Rolling Thunder has shown a continued high degree of success in the interdiction program. Damage inflicted on vehicles, watercraft and rolling stock has reached a new high. The rail system's capabilities have deteriorated due to strikes against several significant targets. Truck replacement has not kept pace with truck destruction. The number of secondary explosions in Route Package One, although indicating the enemy's continued ability to move materiel south, confirms our capability to locate with improving accuracy his supply stations.

The cumulative results of our strikes have caused multiple management supply and distribution problems. A meaningful share of the modern industrial base has been destroyed. The electrical power system has been disrupted which in turn has caused the shut-down of a number of major industrial facilities and hampered port operations. The loss of cement production has reduced the enemy's repair and construction capabilities, and has deprived him of an important foreign exchange earner. Imports being carried on the rail lines have been destroyed. Port congestion is increasing as noted by pile-up of materials and increased off-loading time for ships.

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The continuing strikes over the northeast rail line during the past several weeks have slowed down imports from China. From May 1st through June 13, there have been 1371 combat sorties flown against the northeast rail line and associated road network, inflicting the following damage: 478 railroad box cars destroyed/damaged; 19 railroad yards interdicted; 2 bridges destroyed and 5 damaged. Many rail yard strikes resulted in multiple secondary explosions, indicating destruction of valuable targets. As stated above, loss rates were considerably lower than for a comparable number of strikes in the same area a year ago.

Complementing Rolling Thunder operations, Sea Dragon forces coupled with the mining of river estuaries have been effective in reducing waterborne logistic craft activity. During April, May, and until mid-June, 505 waterborne logistic craft were destroyed or damaged, and 564 targets ashore were hit by Sea Dragon ships.

The most significant aspect of Rolling Thunder operations is the changed situation that has developed since late April, when weather first became suitable for more continued air operations over Route Package Six. These changes are having important effects on the efficiency of our operations and the further degradation of the North Vietnamese capability to support the war. The following are considered the more important changes:

A. MIGs: MIG air order of battle has been reduced 50 percent. Three MIG fields have been attacked periodically and can no longer be used effectively. Their attempt to challenge us in air-to-air combat resulted in the loss of thirty aircraft in less than five weeks. Strike aircraft are now seldom forced to jettison bomb loads because of MIG activity.

B. SAMs: There is increasing evidence of launches without effective guidance. In some cases there is no apparent target. Ineffective barrage-type firings indicate they are attempting any means to achieve better results. Although about 1800 combat sorties have been flown this month to date in Route Package Six, there has been only one aircraft lost to a SAM.

C. Anti-Aircraft Artillery: Since mid-May, ground fire in several areas with a long history of heavy intensity is frequently

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less intense and less effective. Our experience along the important northeast rail line is a prime case in point, as described above. Based on our evaluation of operations over the recent brief period, we judge that our improved weapons systems coupled with a concentrated weight of effort is largely responsible for this changed environment. The CBU-24 in particular has been extremely effective against gun sites and enemy anti-aircraft capability in general and with its effectiveness, must be devastating to enemy troop morale. These various factors may add up to one thing -- when we operate in force in an area over a period of time, enemy defenses fall off markedly in effectiveness.

D. Attrition: It is apparent as previously noted that loss rates are changing in our favor. The combination of degraded MIG, SAM and anti-aircraft artillery capability is noticeably lowering our losses.

E. Enemy resupply: The amount of tonnage entering the ports has greatly increased partly due to large amount of food now being imported. Replacement of items is not occurring in all cases. It is estimated that 2000 of 3500 trucks destroyed in the past ten months have not been replaced and a net reduction of 30 percent of the railroad rolling stock accomplished.

F. Weapons: New weapons which add to our advantage are reaching the field in more adequate quantities, particularly CBU-24. The Walleye has been introduced and adds a new degree of accuracy and effectiveness to our attacks.

The above changes indicate that there is an upward trend of strategic impact against North Vietnam. It is most significant that these changes are recent and have occurred since early May when we stepped up our air operations in the North and made our presence felt on a much more continuous basis in the enemy's rear support area, the Hanoi-Haiphong complex and the northeast quadrant. Although much remains to be done, we believe that our targeting systems concept, our stepped up combat air effort over the Northeast and the continued high sortie rate applied against enemy infiltration is paying off. With the exception of Rolling Thunder 55 and Rolling Thunder 56, air power for the first time began to realize the sort of effectiveness of which it

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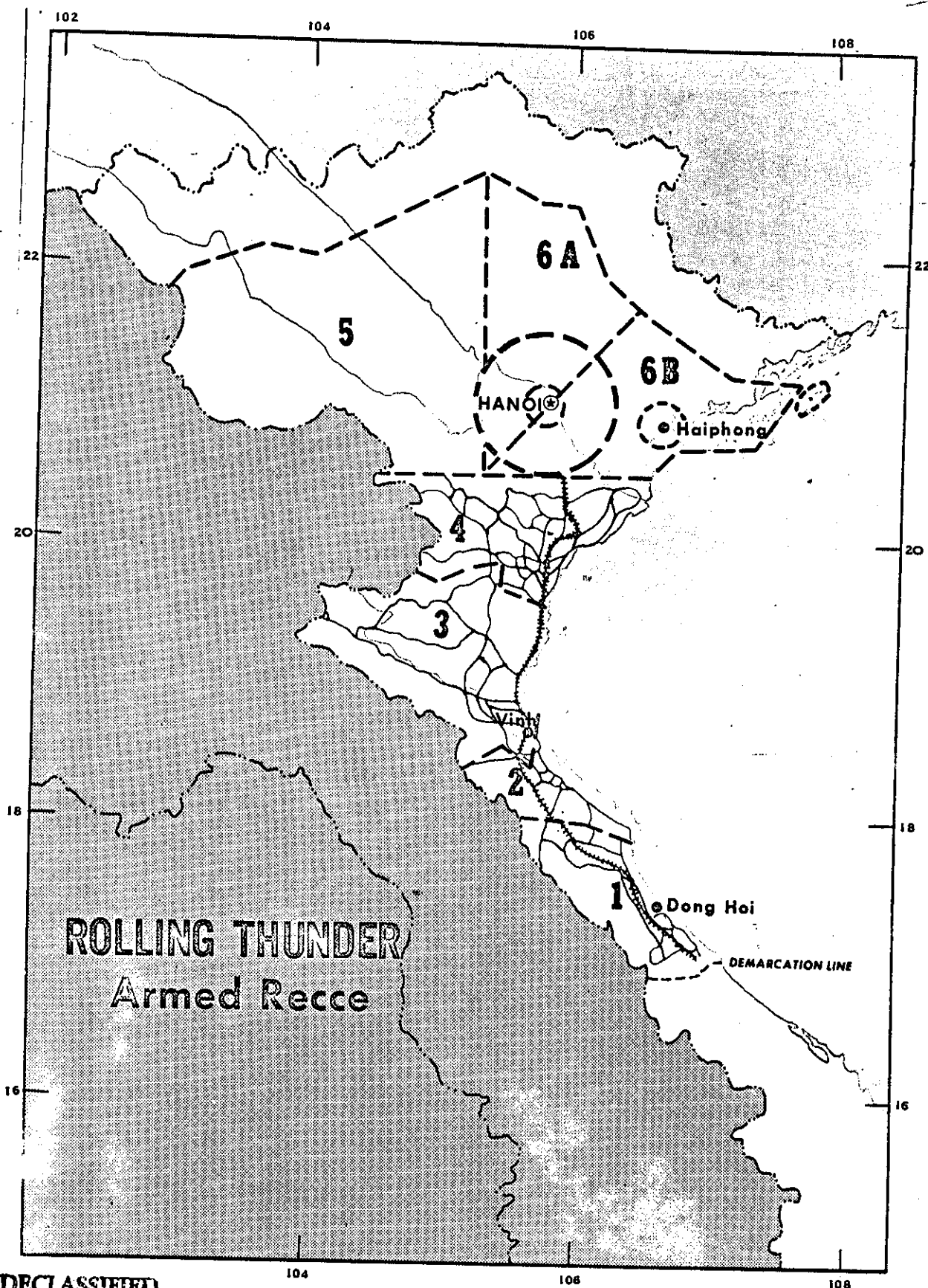
is capable. This effectiveness can be maximized if we can be authorized to strike the many important targets remaining.

We are at an important point in this conflict. We have achieved a position, albeit late in the game, from which a precisely executed and incisive air campaign of depth and sustaining persistence against all the target systems will aggregate significant interrelated effects against the combined military, political, economic, and psychological posture of North Vietnam. In our judgment the enemy is now hurting and the operations to which we attribute this impact should be continued with widest latitude in planning and execution in the months of remaining good weather.

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