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III. Policy decisions in the area where we agree

In this agreed area of policy, our task is to do what we have been doing better and faster than in the past. In effect, this is the assignment we have given the new team of Bunker-Locke-Abrams-Komer.

So far as Washington is concerned, we face:

-- The question of enlarging our own military manpower in Viet Nam and deciding, with the Saigon team, how best it should be disposed;

-- Enlarging the contribution of military manpower from others;

-- Taking a fresh high-level, coordinated look at all our measures to inhibit or harass interdiction, with an eye to making them more efficient; bombing in Route Packages 1 and 2; inhibiting infiltration of manpower in the western part of the DMZ; enlarging and making more efficient our efforts against the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos; doing more about the flow of supplies from Cambodia; improving, if possible, the naval blockade;

-- Pressing Ky to seek to defect high-level Viet Cong figures, and to consider more explicit offers about future political possibilities for those now fighting with the Viet Cong, within the framework of the constitution, both in the rural areas and in national politics.

IV. Policy issues in contention: Choices in bombing the North

Essentially there are three strategies we might pursue in bombing the North. I shall try to assess in each case the advantages and the risks:

A. Closing the top of the funnel

Under this strategy we would mine the major harbors and, perhaps, bomb port facilities and even consider blockade. In addition, we would attack systematically the rail lines between Hanoi and mainland China. At the moment the total import capacity into North Viet Nam is about 17,200 tons per day. Even with expanded import requirements due to the food shortage, imports are, in fact, coming in at about 5700 tons per day. It is possible with a concerted and determined effort that we could cut back import capacity somewhat below the level of requirements; but this is not sure. On the other hand, it would require

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a difficult and sustained effort by North Viet Nam and its allies to prevent a reduction in total imports below requirements if we did all these things.

The costs would be these:

-- The Soviet Union would have to permit a radical increase in Hanoi's dependence upon Communist China, or introduce minesweepers, etc., to keep its supplies coming into Hanoi by sea;

-- The Chinese Communists would probably introduce many more engineering and anti-aircraft forces along the roads and rail lines between Hanoi and China in order to keep the supplies moving;

-- To maintain its prestige, in case it could not or would not open up Hanoi-Haiphong in the face of mines, the Soviet Union might contemplate creating a Berlin crisis. With respect to a Berlin crisis, they would have to weigh the possible split between the U. S. and its Western European allies under this pressure against damage to the atmosphere of detente in Europe which is working in favor of the French Communist Party and providing the Soviet Union with generally enlarged influence in Western Europe.

I myself do not believe that the Soviet Union would go to war with us over Viet Nam unless we sought to occupy North Viet Nam; and, even then, a military response from Moscow would not be certain.

With respect to Communist China, it always has the option of invading Laos and Thailand; but this would not be a rational response to naval and air operations designed to strangle Hanoi. A war throughout Southeast Asia would not help Hanoi; although I do believe Communist China would fight us if we invaded the northern part of North Viet Nam.

One can always take the view that, given the turmoil inside Communist China, an irrational act by Peiping is possible. And such irrationality cannot be ruled out.

I conclude that if we try to close the top of the funnel, tension between ourselves and the Soviet Union and Communist China would increase; if we were very determined, we could impose additional burdens on Hanoi and its allies; we might cut capacity below requirements; and the outcome is less likely to be a general war than more likely.

B. Attacking what is inside the funnel

This is what we have been doing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area for some weeks. I do not agree with the view that the attacks on Hanoi-Haiphong have

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no bearing on the war in the South. They divert massive amounts of resources, energies, and attention to keeping the civil and military establishment going. They impose general economic, political, and psychological difficulties on the North which have been complicated this year by a bad harvest and food shortages. I do not believe that they "harden the will of the North." In my judgment, up to this point, our bombing of the North has been a painful additional cost they have thus far been willing to bear to pursue their efforts in the South.

On the other hand:

-- There is no direct, immediate connection between the bombing the Hanoi-Haiphong area and the battle in the South;

-- If we complete the attack on electric power by taking out the Hanoi station -- which constitutes about 80% of the electric power supply of the country now operating -- we will have hit most of the targets whose destruction imposes serious military-civil costs on the North.

-- With respect to risk, it is unclear whether Soviet warnings about our bombing Hanoi-Haiphong represent decisions already taken or decisions which might be taken if we persist in banging away in that area.

It is my judgment that the Soviet reaction will continue to be addressed to the problem imposed on Hanoi by us; that is, they might introduce Soviet pilots as they did in the Korean War; they might bring ground-to-ground missiles into North Viet Nam with the object of attacking our vessels at sea and our airfields in the Danang area.

I do not believe that the continuation of attacks at about the level we have been conducting them in the Hanoi-Haiphong area will lead to pressure on Berlin or a general war with the Soviet Union. In fact, carefully read, what the Soviets have been trying to signal is: Keep away from our ships; we may counter-escalate to some degree; but we do not want a nuclear confrontation over Viet Nam.

C. Concentration in Route Packages 1 and 2

The advantages of concentrating virtually all our attacks in this area are three:

-- We would cut our loss rate in pilots and planes;

-- We would somewhat improve our harassment of infiltration of South Viet Nam;

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-- We would diminish the risks of counter-escalatory action by the Soviet Union and Communist China, as compared with courses A and B.

V. Recommendations

I do not recommend at this time course A: closing the top of the funnel. The returns do not, on present evidence, seem high enough to justify the risks of Soviet and Chinese countermeasures and heightened world tensions. On the other hand, I do not believe it would lead to general war; and in this judgment I believe I am supported by the conclusions of the intelligence community.

It is a course of action which, if undertaken, should be pursued with great determination and against a background of highly mobilized U. S. strength so that Moscow and Peiping would be forced to decide whether it wished to take on total U. S. strength or bring about an early end to the war. While, as I say, I would not recommend it, it is a line of policy which deserves the most careful and professional staffing out in the government, perhaps for later application.

With respect to course B, I believe we have achieved greater results in increasing the pressure on Hanoi and raising the cost of their continuing to conduct the aggression in the South than some of my most respected colleagues would agree. I do not believe we should lightly abandon what we have accomplished; and specifically, I believe we should mount the most economical and careful attack on the Hanoi power station our air tacticians can devise. Moreover, I believe we should keep open the option of coming back to the Hanoi-Haiphong area, depending upon what we learn of their repair operations; ^{and} what Moscow's and Peiping's reactions are; especially, when we understand better what effects we have and have not achieved thus far.

I believe the Soviet Union may well have taken certain counter-steps addressed to the more effective protection of the Hanoi-Haiphong area and may have decided -- or could shortly decide -- to introduce into North Viet Nam some surface-to-surface missiles.

With respect to option C, I believe we should, while keeping open the B option, concentrate our attacks to the maximum in Route Packages 1 and 2; and, in conducting Hanoi-Haiphong attacks, we should do so only when the targets make sense. I do not expect dramatic results from increasing the weight of attack in Route Packages 1 and 2; but I believe we are wasting a good many pilots in the Hanoi-Haiphong area without commensurate results. The major objectives of maintaining the B option can be achieved at lower cost.

The turn-around in policy can be managed, over a period of some weeks, in the context of Buddha's birthday, etc., fairly easily; but if we get no diplomatic response in that period -- and I do not expect one -- and if we set aside

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option A (closing the top of the funnel), we shall have to devise a way of presenting our total policy in Viet Nam in a manner which is consistent with diminished attacks in the Hanoi-Haiphong area; which is honest; and which is acceptable to our own people. Surfacing the concept of the barrier may be critical to that turn-around, as will be other measures to tighten infiltration, an improved ARVN effort in pacification, and the provision of additional allied forces to permit Westy to get on with our limited but real role in pacification -- notably, with the defense of I Corps and the hounding of provincial main force units.

Air field attacks are only appropriate to the kind of sustained operations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area associated with option A.

Walt W. Rostow

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