

SNIE 10-1-67

**Reactions to a Certain US
Course of Action**

13 July 1967

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SNIE 10-1-67
13 July 1967
TS 0039350

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2005

SPECIAL

(b) (3)

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 10-1-67

Reactions to a Certain US
Course of Action

Submitted by



DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

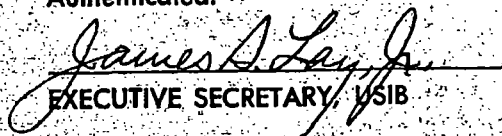
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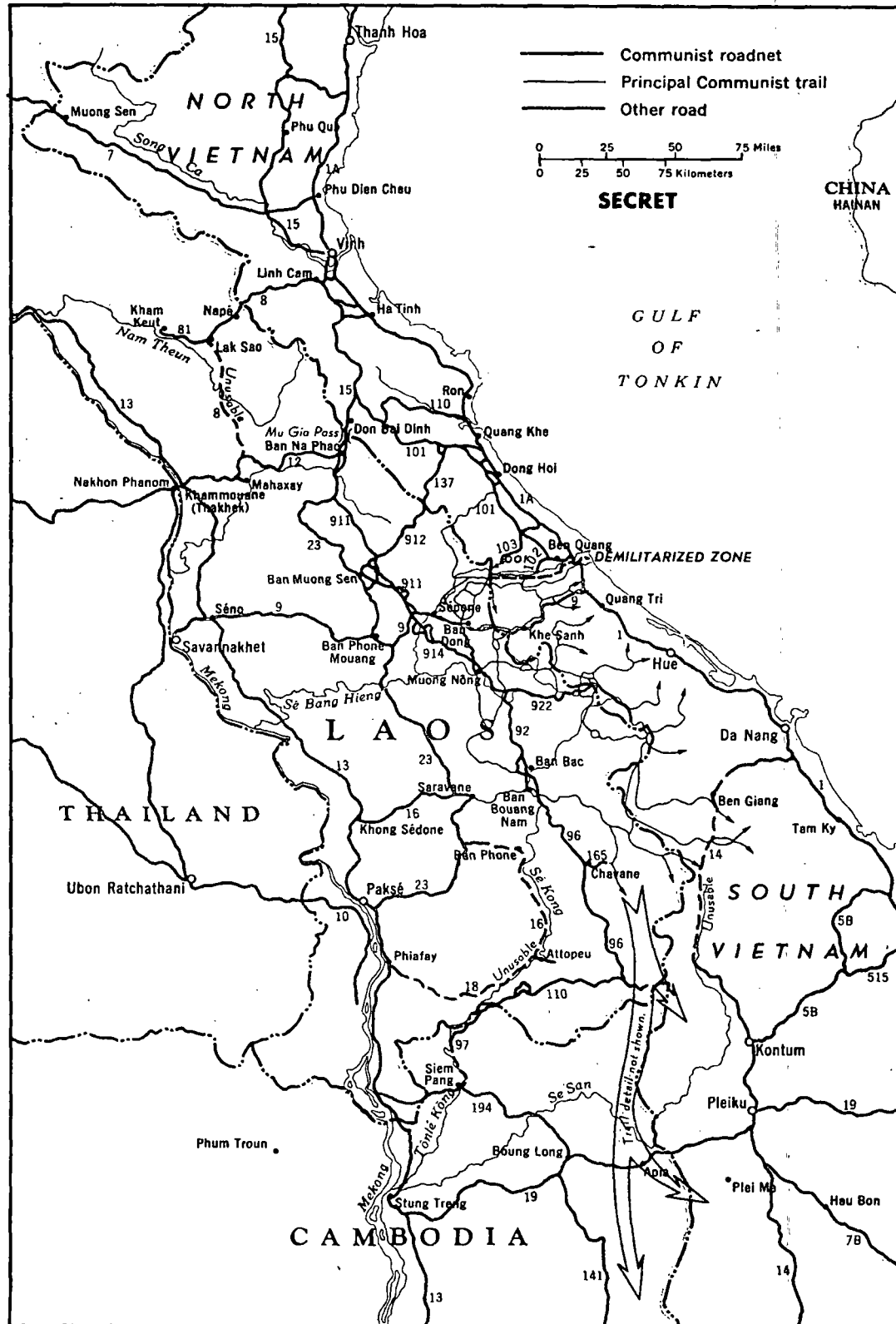
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VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST INFILTRATION SYSTEM



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1

REACTIONS TO A CERTAIN US COURSE OF ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable Communist and Free World reactions to the establishment of an anti-infiltration system in South Vietnam and Laos.

ASSUMPTION

This paper does not assess the degree of effectiveness of the anti-infiltration system. It merely assumes, for the purpose of estimating reactions, that the system will be sufficiently effective to require the North Vietnamese to take countermeasures.

CONCLUSIONS

A. At its present level the Communist war effort in South Vietnam is dependent on arms, ammunition and combat personnel moving from North Vietnam through Laos and the DMZ. The Vietnamese Communists would take direct and vigorous military countermeasures against all elements of any system designed to impede this movement. In such efforts they could count on technical and material assistance from the USSR and Communist China, but not on their active military participation.

B. The Communists would probably harass the manned physical barrier in South Vietnam intensively in order to tie down large US forces in the area. They would make a major effort to keep truck traffic moving along the roadnet and men along the trails. In particular, they would recognize the key role of air operations in installing and monitoring the airdropped portions of the system as well as in making air strikes. Therefore they would move to increase their air defenses in the DMZ area and in Laos.

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C. Should their countermeasures be ineffective or too costly, the Communists would be forced to attempt to extend their operations further west into Laos or resort to alternative routes. All of these measures would impose additional burdens on the Communists, but on balance, the US move in itself would probably not cause Hanoi to change its political and military strategy toward the conduct of the war in South Vietnam.

D. The intensity and nature of the Communist political response would depend on the effectiveness of the system and the publicity which accompanied its emplacement. Aside from propaganda charging the US with widening the war in Laos, the main Communist effort would be directed at the Laotian Government. The Communists would probably exert pressures on Souvanna to prevent any further US activities in Laos. It is unlikely that the Soviets would denounce the Geneva Agreements, demand on-site inspection, or withdraw as co-Chairman.

E. US relations with non-Communist countries, with the possible exception of Laos, are unlikely to be changed by the emplacement of the system. Some countries would see it as escalation, others as a defensive move. The hope would be expressed that the bombing of North Vietnam would no longer be necessary, and that a process of de-escalation, even negotiations, might begin. Souvanna, despite concern that Laos not become actively engaged in the war, would probably not oppose the installation of the system.

DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Laotian corridor is the primary route for infiltration of personnel, ammunition, weapons, and equipment to Communist forces in South Vietnam. It contains a road network for supplies and a network of trails for personnel.¹ The entire system is controlled by the North Vietnamese Ministry of Defense in Hanoi. The NVA 559th Transportation Group, currently based north of Tchepone in Laos, operates the logistic network and supplies the storage depots used by troops moving through the Laotian corridor. In mid-1966 the North Vietnamese also began to move military units and their supplies directly across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) into Quang Tri Province.

2. *The Anti-Infiltration System.* The proposed anti-infiltration system is designed to impede movement through Laos and the DMZ into South Vietnam. The system would extend from the eastern coast along the northern border of South Vietnam and into Laos. It would have three parts: in the east, a 20-mile wire and minefield barrier defended by ground troops; in the center, an airdropped antipersonnel system composed of mines and sensors, extending some 25 miles across the rest of South Vietnam and some 12 miles or so further into Laos; and in the west, an airdropped antivehicular system also composed of mines and sensors, straddling the truck routes from 15 to 40 miles inside Laos.² It is presently planned that the airdropped portions of the system would be emplaced during an eight day period in early November 1967; the physical

¹ See the frontispiece map for the Communist roadnet and the foot trails. Infiltrating personnel are not trucked over the roadnet; they walk over the trail system, usually in elements of company size, starting from Hill 1001 in North Vietnam (just above the northwest corner of the DMZ). Within North Vietnam they either walk or are trucked to the vicinity of Hill 1001, where they undergo final preparations for infiltration.

² See the centerspread map for a diagram of where the proposed anti-infiltration system would be emplaced. The airdropped portions of the system consist of a complex combination of mines and sensors. The mines to be used in the antivehicular sector are designed to damage trucks as well as to inhibit clearing of the sensors which would be emplaced near the roads. In the antipersonnel sector several types of mines are employed to prevent infiltrators from walking through the fields and woods and restrict them to fixed trails. In addition, small "button bomblets" would be scattered along the trails. These are designed not to injure but to make a sufficient noise when stepped on to activate the acoustic sensors, which would be dropped by parachute and are designed to hang in trees near the trails. Seismic sensors would be dropped without a parachute, in order to bury themselves in the ground. Other types of sensors, e.g., infrared and magnetic, would be implanted along the trails by special teams. All of the sensors contain radio transmitters, and when activated, their transmissions would be picked up by EC-121 aircraft which would monitor the system on a 24-hour basis, circling near the infiltration area. These aircraft would relay the signals to the project control center which would evaluate the sensings and call in strike aircraft. Frequent replacement of mines and sensors would be necessary because of their short life, and because many would be destroyed by the air strikes, or enemy action. Tentative plans are for the headquarters of the Infiltration Surveillance Center, and bases for the EC-121's and some other aircraft, to be in Thailand. Other components would be based in South Vietnam.

barrier—an enlargement of the “Ky barrier” now being built—would be completed at that time. The central and western sections of the system would rely on air strikes to attack the targets. Small teams, including some Americans, would be involved in emplacing certain types of sensors in Laos.

II. POLITICAL REACTIONS

A. Communist Attitudes

3. Although the US action would not come as a surprise to the Communists, they would criticize the US for widening the war in Laos, killing innocent people, and violating the Geneva Accords; these things they could do without referring to North Vietnam's own activities in the area. Hanoi, however, would have some reasons to limit its reactions since it has never admitted publicly to the presence of any of its forces in South Vietnam or Laos. Hanoi might also be concerned that the US action would lead to the introduction of Allied ground troops into the Laotian corridor. The Communists therefore probably would seek to put pressure on the Laotian Government and to play on Souvanna's fears of a wider war.

4. The intensity and nature of the Communist response would depend in considerable part on the effectiveness of the anti-infiltration system and the publicity which accompanied its emplacement. If it proved to be ineffective, there would be little or no reaction, particularly from Hanoi. If the system were effective, Communist pressures on Laos would be more severe, and the attempt to condemn the US before international opinion would be more vociferous. We think the Communists would also try to obtain some advantage from the situation by renewing arguments that US bombing of North Vietnam should be stopped. On balance, we believe the US move in itself would probably not cause Hanoi to change its political and military strategy toward the conduct of the war in South Vietnam.

5. Peking would be noisier than Hanoi in its propaganda. The Chinese might send technical advisors to assist the North Vietnamese in work against the system in Laos. We doubt that they would send any large number of Chinese personnel into Laos or North Vietnam. If the system proved to be effective, Peking would probably attempt to help expand supply channels through Cambodia as an alternative system, making use of the Chinese population and other assets there. The reaction of the Soviets would be influenced by their role as co-Chairman of the Geneva Agreements. They would exert pressures on Souvanna, but it is unlikely they would denounce the Geneva Agreements, demand on-site inspection, or withdraw as co-Chairman. Moscow might also re-emphasize its argument that the US should give up the bombing of North Vietnam.

B. Non-Communist Attitudes

6. Non-Communist reactions would be mixed but would generally follow along established lines. They would also be determined by the degree of

publicity concerning the system and, in the long run, by its effectiveness. Some non-Communist governments would see the action as escalatory and criticize the US with such terms as "Berlin Wall." Others would see the system as essentially defensive and would hope, particularly if the system proved to be effective, that the US would stop the bombing of North Vietnam and that a process of de-escalation, even negotiations, might begin. Except in the possible case of Laos, which we discuss below, we do not believe that the reactions would be likely to change US relations with any country in any significant way. The Thai would accept the installations required for the airborne aspects of the system but would expect to be compensated for the additional burdens imposed on them. Sihanouk might interpret the US move as evidence of increased determination to isolate VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam and he would probably fear that the next US move would be against Communist forces enjoying sanctuary in Cambodia. He would fear new Communist pressures for greater use of Cambodia and would be concerned that smuggling from and through Cambodia to the Communists would increase in any event, thus embroiling Cambodia deeper in the war.

7. The Laotian Government would be directly affected and Souvanna would have various fears and reservations about the action. He would be most concerned that there be no publicity and certainly no acknowledgment from any official US source, of US operations in Laos. This would permit him to deny responsibility for any incidents and to maintain his posture under the Geneva Agreements of 1962.

8. Souvanna might fear that if the manned physical barrier in South Vietnam turned out to be the most effective part of the entire system, pressures would mount to extend it across Laos, with supporting ground troops. He would probably oppose this in the belief that it would involve Laos in a wider war and would revive the traditional separatism in the southern part of the panhandle. Further, Souvanna would be concerned that if the system as a whole proved effective, the Communists would attempt to go around it to the west and possibly increase military pressures elsewhere in Laos. Despite these concerns, and given assurances of no public acknowledgment, we believe Souvanna would not oppose the installation of the system.

III. VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST MILITARY COUNTERMEASURES

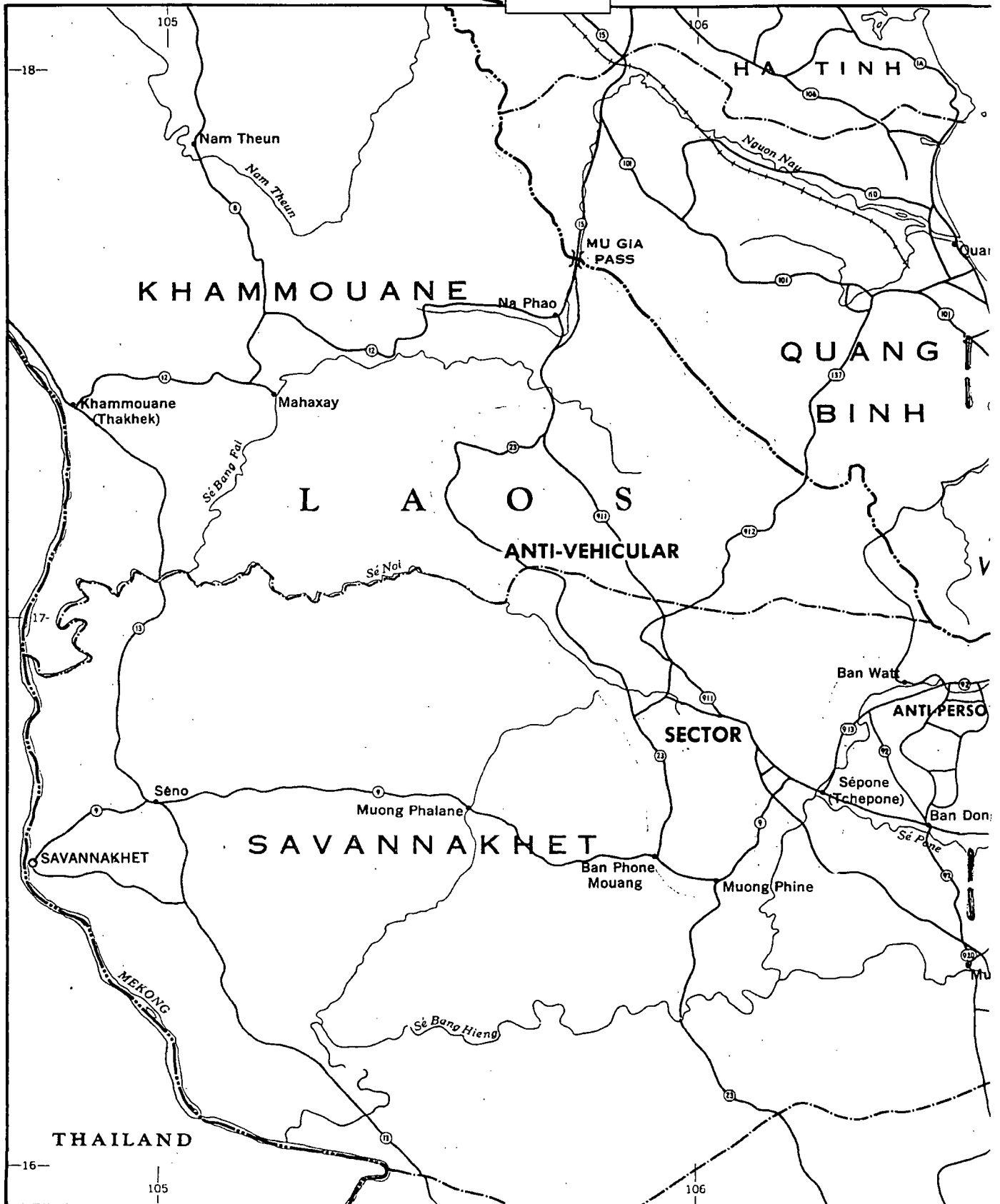
A. General

9. During the past several years North Vietnamese movement of materiel through the Lao corridor appears to have exceeded the external requirements for Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam, and some stockpiling has occurred. During the construction and installation of the barrier portion of the system, we would expect efforts to increase such stockpiling.

10. Once the remainder of the anti-infiltration system was emplaced, the North Vietnamese, of course, would have to determine how it worked. They might be somewhat surprised at its extent and form. They are already familiar, how-

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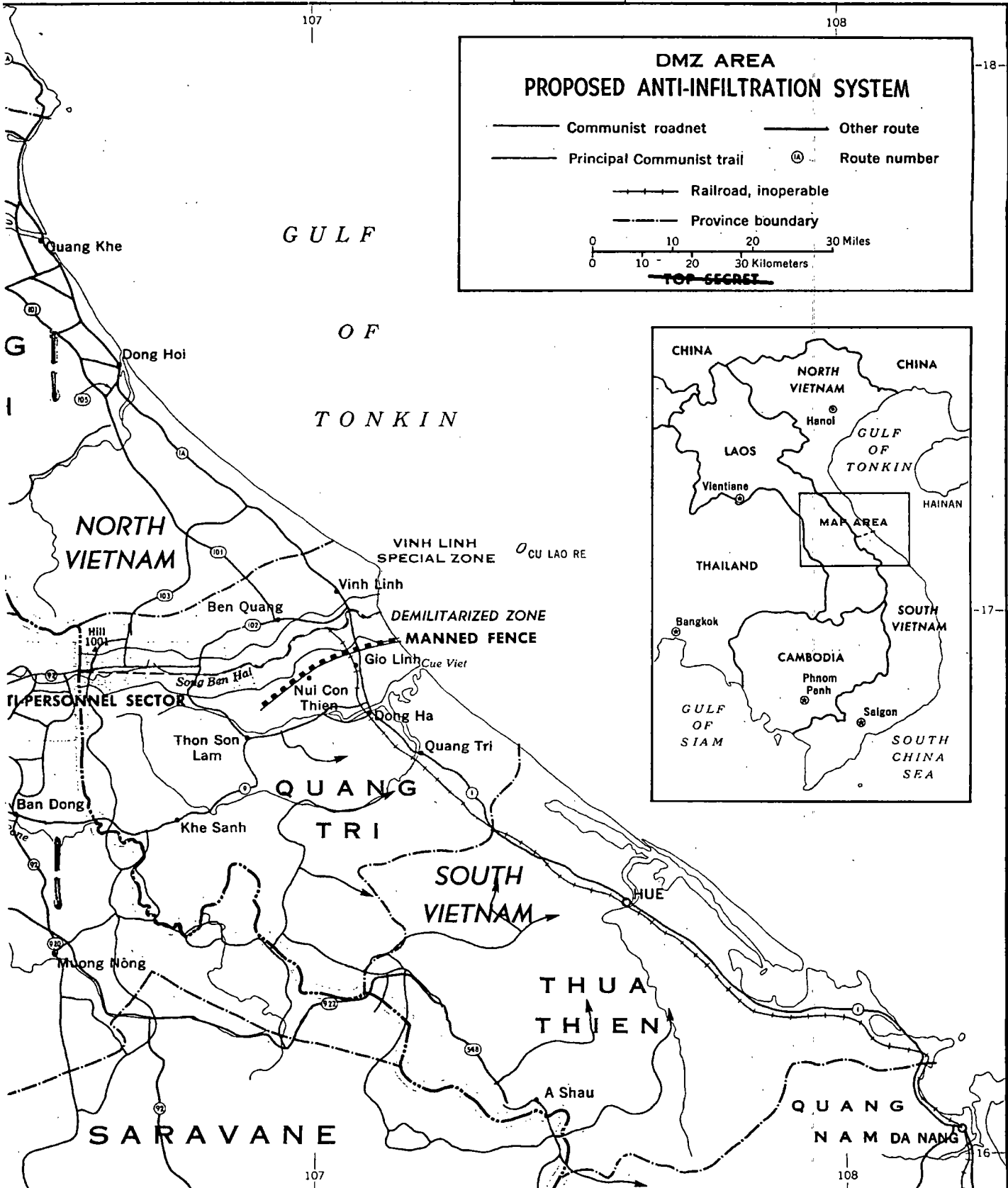


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ever, with some of the equipment which the system would employ (e.g., gravel mines), and would quickly identify the other types of mines employed. They would also soon realize the critical role of aircraft in the system. The sensors would probably be their greatest problem, not only because they would be difficult to locate, but because of their technical complexity and the number of different types. The North Vietnamese would probably seek Soviet and Chinese Communist assistance in devising countermeasures.

11. The specific countermeasures the Communists might employ would vary depending on the sector involved, the effectiveness of each system, and the developing Communist experience with countermeasures. In general, their countermeasures are likely to fall into three basic categories: (a) measures designed to impede the installation and exploitation of the system; (b) attempts to attack, thwart, or breach the system; and (c) attempts to use alternative routes, either within or outside of Laos.

B. The Physical Barrier

12. The Communists would probably regard the manned physical barrier as potentially the most effective part of the system. They would attempt to delay or prevent its construction by harassing work forces both from across the DMZ and from the rear. They are even now employing these tactics against the "Ky barrier." Once the barrier was installed, the Communists would probably attempt to achieve limited penetrations, but would probably not wish to risk high losses in order to breach it on a broad front. In any event, they would continue to harass the system. These actions would be taken with the hope of tying down large US forces in defensive positions.

C. The Antipersonnel Sector

13. The trail network to be covered by the central antipersonnel sector of the system is of great importance to the North Vietnamese. Due to the nature of the target, it has not been attacked extensively; the US has instead concentrated on the truck routes.

14. *Defensive Measures.* The Communists would probably recognize the key role of air support in the operation of the system and would probably make a major effort to increase their air defense in the area. Communist AAA fire in the Laotian Panhandle has shown a steady increase in the last year, although there does not appear to have been a significant increase in the number of AAA units. With continued supplies from China and the USSR, it is within Communist capabilities to augment substantially conventional AAA forces in the DMZ and Laos. The entire sector is well within the present zone of their GCI radar net. Depending on the location of the orbits of the aircraft which monitor the system, they might be vulnerable to Mig or SA-2 attack. The North Vietnamese already have some SA-2s in the vicinity of the DMZ and we think it likely they would increase the numbers of SA-2s there and deploy them nearer the northwest corner of the DMZ. It is also possible, but less likely, that they would deploy

SA-2s in Laos. Hanoi could attempt to use Migs if other measures to foil or breach the system failed, but we think this is least likely. The Communists might attempt to harass the control center in northeast Thailand.

15. *Thwarting and Breaching the System.* For some time, Hanoi would continue to move forces through the sensor zone, accepting the risk of losses and delays, until the effectiveness of the system was thoroughly tested. Hanoi would try to sweep some of the sensors and mines, and develop an ever shifting and expanding maze of concealed trails. The Communists would depend on the burgeoning number of trails and on unpredictable use patterns to complicate the US efforts to replace sensors and mines. They would probably also move in smaller groups, widely separated and at night, and to the extent possible concentrate infiltration in times of bad weather. The anti-infiltration belt through which they would have to pass is about 12 miles deep, and 35 to 40 miles wide. Thus, infiltrating troops could be dispersed so that they would present only low density targets.

16. Eventually, the Communists would probably also resort to a variety of noisemaking devices including rifles, mortars, and artillery, to activate the acoustic sensors and to call in US strike aircraft on false alarms. With Chinese or Soviet help they might in time develop several effective jamming techniques. Because the acoustic sensors near the foot-trail system are triggered by the noise of the button bomblets when stepped on, the Communists would probably devote some effort to making trails clear and hard-packed, so that button bomblets would be easily visible and avoidable. They would also take additional steps to camouflage such trails.

17. *Alternatives.* Should Hanoi's efforts to breach the antipersonnel sector turn out to be ineffective or too costly, it could develop infiltration trails further west, as far as the Mekong River if necessary, although probably not into Thailand. This would not be easy, for the present system has been long established, has experienced local guides, supply depots geared to both the trail and road system, and farms along the route which supply some of the food consumed by the infiltrators. To duplicate this system would be a major undertaking, and would require clearing the area of Lao army troops, thus widening the ground war in Laos.

18. We think it quite unlikely that the Communists would use the Se Bang Hieng tributaries, the only streams in the area, for the movement of personnel. Hanoi would probably not rely on its helicopters to move troops over the anti-infiltration system. The route by sea is not feasible for large-scale infiltration of personnel because of Operation Market Time. We think that for political reasons Cambodian ports and routes could not be used by the Communists for the infiltration of any significant number of personnel.

19. In sum, we think the major effort would be devoted to breaching the anti-personnel sector rather than going around it. This might require some increase in total Communist forces deployed in the infiltration zones, in order to work against the system and provide greater protection from air strikes.

D. The Antivehicular Sector

20. The overall Communist roadnet in Laos consists of some 650 miles of routes extending from Mu Gia Pass to the tri-border area of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam. During the dry season, some 400 to 600 trucks are employed on this roadnet. Therefore, the number of trucks passing a given point during a 24-hour period is very low, and most movements take place during hours of darkness.

21. The new elements for the Communists to cope with along the roadnet would be the mines and the intensive use of sensors to detect truck movements. The system would still rely on air strikes to destroy the trucks, and the Communist response would probably be to strengthen existing air defense measures and conduct extensive mine clearing operations. This would probably involve increased requirements in the daily tonnage of supplies, particularly ammunition and food, and in manpower.

22. The road system already includes bypasses, truck parks, turnouts, concealed hideaways and overhead trellises to hinder air detection. These would almost certainly be increased. The Communists would continue to rely on the movement of small convoys at night or during bad weather, with considerable space between vehicles. Since it is difficult to create new routes for truck traffic, and because the sensors would be more effective in detecting the truck movements than personnel movements, the Communists would probably devote a considerable effort to thwarting the sensors along the truck routes than along the trail system. Should these countermeasures be ineffective or too costly, the Communists would be forced to attempt to extend the roadnet further west in Laos or resort to other means.

E. Alternative Routes and Sources of Supply

23. *River Traffic in Laos.* Within Laos itself, one alternative for the Communists would be increased use of river traffic, but although this is more feasible for moving supplies than personnel, it has definite limitations. The only river that might be used through parts of the antivehicular sector is the Se Bang Hieng, which flows west and south from the western DMZ. At present, the only access to the river from North Vietnam, however, is via the trail network in Laos, but North Vietnamese Routes 102 and 103 could probably be extended to the river.

24. *Sea Routes.* We believe that infiltration by sea has been greatly reduced since the beginning of the Market Time Operation early in 1965. Nevertheless, if the Communists were willing to risk substantial losses, they would probably be able to infiltrate some weapons and ammunition by sea. The use of sea routes would be uncertain, and considering the present disposition of Communist forces in South Vietnam, it would present them with new problems in the distribution and delivery of materiel, particularly ammunition. We believe that, while the Communists would attempt to increase the use of sea routes as the

cost of using the Laotian corridor increased, they would not view it as a total solution to their problem, and would have to seek additional alternatives.

25. *Cambodia.* Cambodia has been primarily a source of food, providing the bulk of the Communists' external rice requirement, as well as some other items, such as medical supplies and radios. There is still no firm evidence that any substantial quantity of weapons or ammunition is being obtained by the Communists from or through Cambodia.

26. The capacity of Cambodian ports, roads, and waterways is far in excess of any likely Communist needs in South Vietnam. But the overt use of these facilities to ship arms and ammunition to the Communists in South Vietnam would clearly involve Cambodia in the war, something Sihanouk desperately wants to avoid. Nevertheless, given some time to make the necessary arrangements through additional use of commercial channels and clandestine means, the Communists could probably procure enough ammunition and weapons from or through Cambodia to make it an important alternate route.

27. *Sources in South Vietnam.* Communist forces operating in South Vietnam can obtain much of their logistical support locally, with the critical exception of arms and ammunition. For example, some 9 tons of their total daily requirement of 10 tons of ammunition is supplied from outside South Vietnam, most of it by truck through Laos. Although the VC might expand their modest production capability somewhat, it would be virtually impossible for them to develop the ability to produce the arms and ammunition needed by the Communist forces in South Vietnam.

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