

SNIE 10-9-65

Communist and Free World Reactions  
to a Possible US Course of Action

23 July 1965

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SNIE 10-9-65  
TS 185875  
23 July 1965

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*SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE*

(b) (3)

COMMUNIST AND FREE WORLD REACTIONS  
TO A POSSIBLE US COURSE OF ACTION

This is the estimate. No further versions will be published.

Submitted by the  
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the  
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD  
as indicated overleaf  
23 July 1965

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TS 185875

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

23 July 1965

SNIE 10-9-65: COMMUNIST AND FREE WORLD REACTIONS TO A  
POSSIBLE US COURSE OF ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To estimate foreign reactions, particularly those of the Communist powers, to a specified US course of action with respect to Vietnam.

ASSUMPTIONS

For purposes of this estimate, we assume that the US decides to increase its forces in South Vietnam to about 175,000 by 1 November. We further assume related decisions to call up about 225,000 reserves, to extend tours of duty at the rate of 20,000 a month, to increase the regular strength of the armed services by 400,000 over the next year, and to double draft calls.

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We further assume (a) that the increase in forces would be accompanied by statements reiterating our objectives and our readiness for unconditional discussions, (b) that US forces would be deployed so that no major grouping threatened or appeared to threaten the 17th Parallel, and (c) that we might either continue present policy with regard to air strikes or extend these strikes in North Vietnam to include attacks on land (but not sea) lines of communication from South China\* and military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

## THE ESTIMATE

1. Communists and non-Communists alike would see in the increased US military involvement in Vietnam a strong indication that the US saw little hope of early negotiations. This would be particularly true if, at the same time, the US extended its air operations in North Vietnam.

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\* See Annex for a discussion and map of both land and current sea routes from China to North Vietnam.

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I. VIET CONG AND DRV REACTIONS

2. At present the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese (DRV) leaders appear confident that their course in South Vietnam promises ultimate and possibly early success without important concessions on their part. They seem to believe that they can achieve a series of local military successes which, sooner or later, will bring victory through a combination of a deteriorating South Vietnamese army (ARVN) morale and effectiveness, a collapse of anti-Communist government in Saigon, and an exhaustion of the US will to persist.

3. We do not believe that inauguration of the US actions here assumed would basically alter these expectations. The VC and the DRV probably have come to expect increased US commitments, and they probably believe that the VC, with increased North Vietnamese assistance, can find ways to offset the effect of larger US forces. Nor do we think that the extension of air attacks to military targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong area would significantly injure the VC ability to persevere in the South

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or persuade the Hanoi Government that the price of persisting was unacceptably high.\*

4. If the extension of air attacks were to include sustained interdiction of land lines of communication leading from South China, these actions would obviously make the delivery of Soviet and Chinese aid more difficult and costly, and would have a

\* The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, disagrees with the judgment made in this paragraph and would substitute the following: "3. We believe that inauguration of the US actions here assumed, which emphasize US willingness and determination to become more deeply involved in combat operations in the South and eliminate the concept of an area 'sanctuary' in North Vietnam, has a reasonable chance of basically altering the Communists' short-term expectations. While the VC and the DRV probably have come to expect some additional US commitments, and they probably believe that the VC, with increased North Vietnamese assistance, can find ways to offset the effect of larger US forces, such confidence could be quite quickly undermined by effectively expanded US combat operations. Extension of air attacks to military targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas would pose the added threat that urban/industrial targets might be next. The selective and limited nature of US bombing target selections to date may have led Hanoi seriously to underestimate the extent of US determination to exert the power necessary to force discontinuance of DRV support for the VC. US military actions resulting from the assumed program could well persuade the Hanoi Government that the price of persisting was becoming unacceptably high."

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serious impact on the limited industrial sector of the DRV general economy. It would still not have a critical impact on the Communist determination to persevere and would not, at least for the short term, seriously impair VC capabilities in South Vietnam.

5. If, in addition, POL targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were destroyed by air attacks, the DRV's ability to provide transportation for the general economy would be severely reduced. It would also complicate their military logistics. If additional PAVN forces were employed in South Vietnam on a scale sufficient to counter increased US troop strength, this would substantially increase the amount of supplies needed in the South. The VC also depend on supplies from the North to maintain their present level of large-scale operations. The accumulated strains of a prolonged curtailment of supplies received from North Vietnam would obviously have an impact on the Communist effort in the South. They would certainly inhibit and might even prevent an increase in large-scale VC military activity, though they would probably not force any significant reduction in VC terrorist tactics of harassment and sabotage. These strains, particularly if they produced a serious check in the development of VC capabilities for large-scale (multi-battalion) operations might lead the DRV to consider

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negotiations.\* But the final decision on whether to seek negotiations would depend to a great extent on political developments in the Indochina area and elsewhere, and on the actual course of combat in South Vietnam.

6. In response to the US program, the Communists would almost certainly undertake measures to increase their own strength in South Vietnam for a higher level of struggle. They are already augmenting VC units and dispatching additional PAVN forces to South Vietnam; the assumed US actions would probably result in a speeding up of this process. By the end of 1965, the total of PAVN regulars in organized units in South Vietnam could reach 20,000 to 30,000 men. Although the Communists are aware of the dangers of concentrating their troops in large numbers, they might, during the next few months, attempt major assaults against GVN forces and positions, seeking to shatter ARVN before the increased weight of US strength could be brought to bear.

\* The Director of Intelligence and Research, for the Department of State, and the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, believe that in spite of greater damage and harassment caused by sustained air attack on lines of communication (LOC) and other targets, the capacities of DRV and Laos LOC are sufficient to permit support of the war in South Vietnam at the scale envisaged in this estimate. Other significant factors supporting this position are the impossibility of doing irreparable damage to LOC capacity; demonstrated Communist logistic resourcefulness and ability to move large amounts of war material long distances over difficult terrain by primitive means; and the difficulty of detecting, let alone stopping, sea infiltration.

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7. In coping with larger US forces employed in a more aggressive fashion, we believe that the Viet Cong would seek to avoid the kind of engagements which risked a serious Communist defeat. Instead, they would probably concentrate on harassments intended to bleed and humiliate US forces, trapping and destroying isolated units where possible. At a minimum, the Communists would almost certainly continue present efforts to cut land communication lines and would step up the dispatch of small, expendable teams on sabotage and assassination missions designed to make the US look impotent or foolish. The Communists might also seek to increase their activities in Laos.

8. Over the longer run, the Communists' strategy will depend upon the actual course of combat and their estimates of South Vietnamese stability and US will to persist. They are predisposed to attach great weight to signs of disintegration in Saigon and to manifestations of domestic US opposition to Administration policies. These boost popular morale on the Communist side and reinforce the leadership's conviction that Communist staying power is inherently superior.

9. Should future military and political developments bring this conviction into serious doubt, the DRV might express

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increased interest in negotiations. However, they would endeavor to preserve their own freedom of action while laying inhibitions on US/GVN military operations, hoping to promote disarray in Saigon and encourage US opinion in favor of withdrawal.

10. Faced with the buildup outlined in our assumptions, the DRV would probably request more air defense equipment from the USSR, including SAMs, fighters, technicians, and perhaps pilots, particularly if US air attacks were expanded. From the Chinese, Hanoi would probably request more radar equipment, anti-aircraft artillery, and technicians in addition to a further increase in shipments of infantry arms and ammunition. Hanoi might also request China (and, perhaps, North Korea) to furnish aircraft and pilots. In general, however, we believe that Hanoi would wish to maintain some limits on, and a rough balance between, Soviet and Chinese personnel.

11. Deployments on the scale here assumed would cause the DRV some concern about US invasion. This would be true even if US forces took up positions which were not suggestive of an invasion. We believe, however, that the DRV would not react to this concern by requesting the introduction of Chinese combat forces. It probably would make such a request only if actual invasion seemed clearly imminent.

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## II. CHINESE COMMUNIST REACTIONS

12. The Chinese are probably even more convinced than the Vietnamese Communists that if the DRV/VC remain firm, in the end the US will be wholly defeated in Vietnam. Renewed US determination, evidenced by the buildup assumed in this estimate, would give the Chinese some pause but, in our view, not much. They would believe that the US measures were sufficient only to postpone defeat while magnifying its eventual effect.

13. We do not believe that the Chinese would react to the assumed US moves including the present level of air attacks, by overtly intervening in the military struggle with combat forces. They are already stepping up their military assistance, including the introduction of some rear service elements into North Vietnam, and would give more aid if requested by the DRV. Moreover, they would try to increase alarm among non-Communists, especially the US public, by intensifying their propaganda and reiterating their willingness to accept hostilities if attacked by the US. They would probably continue to strengthen their forces in South China and might take some further overt steps toward mobilization.

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14. If air strikes were extended to the Hanoi-Haiphong area and particularly to lines of communication from South China, the chances of Chinese Communist air intervention from Chinese bases would increase. This would particularly be true if the air strikes were effective in cutting the main roads and rail lines over which the principal supplies are moving. While we believe the Chinese would be reluctant to engage the US in an air war or to risk US retaliation against Chinese military installations, we consider the chances are about even that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US over North Vietnam from bases within China. We do not believe, however, that this would lead to greatly increased Chinese Communist participation in the conflict. In any case, if large numbers of US aircraft were operating close to the frontiers of China the likelihood of hostile encounters would be high.\*

15. If, in the circumstances described in paragraph 9, the Viet Cong and the DRV at some point wished to move toward negotiations, an important divergence might open up between Hanoi and Peiping. The Chinese are themselves not suffering direct military damage and they fear that negotiations would give the USSR a chance to increase its role in Vietnam. Thus they would exert strong pressures to dissuade the DRV from entering into negotiations.

\* Footnotes of dissent from this paragraph appear on the next page.

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- \* The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence); Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; and the Director of NSA, do not agree with the judgment expressed in this paragraph. They believe that it should read as follows: "If air strikes were extended to the Hanoi-Haiphong area and particularly to lines of communication from South China, the chances of Chinese Communist air intervention from Chinese bases would increase. Nevertheless, we believe the Chinese would be reluctant to engage the US in an air war or to risk US retaliation against Chinese military installations. We therefore consider it unlikely that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US over North Vietnam from bases within China."

The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that the chances are better than even that Chinese aircraft would deliberately engage the US under these circumstances. Even if air engagements were accidental they would have extremely dangerous repercussions and if they were deliberate they could not fail to lead to a wider war.

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## III. SOVIET REACTIONS

16. The USSR hopes for an eventual Communist victory in South Vietnam, but it is more conscious than Peiping and Hanoi of the larger military risks. Moreover, the USSR wants to maintain or improve its influence over the DRV and in the world Communist movement generally; it does not wish the kind of Communist victory which would magnify the prestige and power of China. Unlike Peiping and Hanoi, Moscow is concerned with minimizing damage to East-West relations. In this situation, the USSR prefers a course of negotiations, but it cannot afford to appear laggard in supporting the DRV, and it is deepening its commitment to Hanoi's cause.

17. In the circumstances outlined in our assumptions, we believe that the USSR would see no alternative to continued support of the DRV and further expansion of its military aid. It would thus be likely to grant a DRV request for additional air defense equipment and personnel. It would probably feel compelled to comply promptly with DRV requests to replace air defense equipment destroyed by US attacks in the Hanoi area. The Soviet aid program might be hampered by Chinese restrictions on transit rights.

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18. The USSR would probably indicate that, if the US remains unyielding in Vietnam, it faces trouble elsewhere in the world, as, for example, in Berlin. We do not think, however, that Moscow would confront us with a major challenge. Nor do we believe that the Soviets would wish to foreclose the possibility of negotiations at some future stage; indeed, they would probably work to keep this possibility alive on both sides.

19. We believe that the US decisions considered here would produce important reactions in general Soviet policy. Moscow would almost certainly harden its general stance toward the US. For example, although the Soviets have agreed to renewed disarmament talks, partly in order to check the deterioration in East-West relations, the assumed US course in Vietnam would probably lead them to devote the talks entirely to attacks on the US or even to break them off.

20. The assumed moves would carry total US military manpower above the 2.8-2.9 million total which we estimate for the USSR; they would also imply a reversal of the downward trend in US military spending which Kosygin cited in justifying the 1965 reduction in the overt Soviet military budget. We believe that

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the USSR's declared policy of restraining or even reducing military expenditures has been under attack by military spokesmen in recent months and is the subject of debate within the collective leadership. It is likely that the US moves, plus the worsening of general Soviet-US relations, would strengthen the position of those arguing for additional military appropriations. In these circumstances, the USSR probably would respond with an overt increase in its own military spending.

#### IV. NON-COMMUNIST REACTIONS

21. Most non-Communist nations have already realized that the US, already heavily engaged in South Vietnam, is likely to increase its commitment if necessary. The measures here considered would nevertheless cause rising alarm because, in combination with Communist statements in response, they would revive and fortify fears of increased cold-war tensions and even of a much larger war. This might make some governments more reluctant to give public support to US policy, particularly governments in political difficulty, e.g., the UK, Canada, and Norway. Significant extension of bombing in North Vietnam would increase apprehension in these countries. Over the longer run, however, the more important reactions will depend on the subsequent course of the conflict.

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22. In non-Communist Asia, Japan offers the most serious problem. We believe the Sato government would maintain its policy of supporting US policy in spite of howls from the press and opposition forces. Sato's position would be made much more difficult, however, if Okinawa or especially Japan were to become a greatly expanded conduit for support of US forces in Vietnam, or if it appeared that China was about to become involved in the fighting. India would deplore increased bombing of the DRV but would otherwise continue its position of public questioning and private acquiescence in US actions in South Vietnam. Pakistan, hoping to continue to receive American aid while remaining on good terms with China, would reaffirm its neutrality and its noninvolvement in Vietnam.

#### V. REACTIONS TO THE MODE OF ANNOUNCEMENT

23. If the announcements were made in piecemeal fashion and with no more high level emphasis than necessary, the development of a crisis atmosphere might be mitigated. It is also possible that private assurances to the USSR that the US increase in overall military strength was directed solely toward the situation in Vietnam, and not meant to improve the US position vis-a-vis

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the Soviets, might soften the tone of the Soviet response. This avoidance of strident recriminations might in turn decrease somewhat the negative reaction of non-Communist countries. We believe, however, that the reactions of the Communist powers, particularly in the military field, would not be basically changed by the method of announcement. We also believe that there would still be increased apprehension among non-Communist countries.

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## ANNEX

## LAND TRANSPORTATION: RAIL

1. The North Vietnamese rail system is meter gauge. The two rail lines which connect the railroads of North Vietnam with those of Communist China are the most important logistic links for the movement of military supplies from Communist China to North Vietnam. The main route -- Hanoi to Dong Dang -- connects with the Chinese standard-gauge network at Ping-hsiang in Kwangsi Province, where cargo is then transloaded. The Hanoi-Lao Cai route continues as a meter-gauge line into China's Yunnan Province terminating near Kunming. This is Kunming's only rail connection with the main rail system of China. The railroad from Haiphong to Hanoi is important because Haiphong is the main port of North Vietnam.

2. North Vietnam is short of rolling stock, with about 120 locomotives and 1,800 freight cars, and a small number of petroleum tank cars. Additional meter-gauge rolling stock and locomotives could be obtained quickly only from Yunnan Province where the supply is not large.

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ANNEX

3. The maximum capacity of each of the rail routes to China is about 3,000 metric tons per day each way, but the Hanoi-Dong Dang line is the more important for the movement of military supplies because it provides a link with the rail system of all of China. Some of the vulnerable points on this line are the bridge over the Song Cau about 20 miles northeast of Hanoi, the bridge over the Red River in Hanoi itself, and the bridge over the Canal des Rapides about 6 miles northeast of Hanoi. Some of the vulnerable points on the Hanoi-Lao Cai rail route are the bridge over the Song Lo (Claire) River about 50 miles northwest of Hanoi, the bridge about 7 miles southeast of Vinh Yen, and a bridge over the Nam Si River at the border with Communist China.

## LAND TRANSPORTATION: ROAD

4. The capacity of all roads leading to Hanoi from Kwangsi Province is about 2,300 metric tons a day during the dry season and 650 metric tons a day during the wet season. The most important is highway Route 1A, which runs generally parallel to the Hanoi-Dong Dang railroad line. The limiting section of this road has a capacity of about 1,000 metric tons per day during the dry season and about 300 metric tons during the wet season. There are alternate, but longer, road systems through Mong Cai and

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## ANNEX

Cao Bang. There is only one through road between Hanoi and Lao Cai. This road has a limiting section with a capacity of only 500 metric tons per day during the dry season and is not capable of supporting truck traffic during the wet season. Another road west of the Hanoi-Lao Cai rail line also connects Yunnan Province with Hanoi. The capacity of the limiting section of this road is about 550 metric tons per day during the dry season and 100 metric tons during the wet season. The most important single target for disrupting road traffic is the Daumer bridge across the Red River in Hanoi.

## INLAND WATER ROUTES

5. The Red River could be used to supplement other means of transport from Yunnan Province, particularly during the wet season when road capacities are reduced.

## SEA ROUTES

6. North Vietnam's only major port, at Haiphong, is rail served and has relatively modern cargo-handling facilities. Two secondary ports at Cam Pha and Hon Gai are well equipped to handle the export of coal from nearby mines, but have very limited facilities for handling other types of cargo and are not connected to North Vietnam's rail system.

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ANNEX

7. The bulk of ocean-going traffic from China to North Vietnam originates at Canton, Swatow, Fort Bayard, and ports on Hainan Island. In addition, there are approximately 900 motor-powered and 4,800 sailing junks operating in the coastal waters of southern China and the adjacent northern coasts of North Vietnam. If one-third of the available junks were devoted to supplying goods to North Vietnam, they would be capable of transporting an estimated 570,000 tons annually. These shallow-draft craft would not require port facilities for off-loading, but could discharge cargoes over the beach. This type of traffic, which could move close to shore, would be difficult to detect and intercept. Such cargoes would, of course, be limited to items which could be easily handled by these methods.

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