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October 2, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Contingency Military Operations Against North Vietnam

Attached are papers on contingency military operations against North Vietnam prepared under my direction by a special working group.

The papers do not address the relative merits of this option as against the present policy or other choices. My purpose at this time is to:

-- give you a general idea of such an option in terms of objectives and concept of operation.

-- provide in some detail contingency military and political plans thus far developed by the special working group on this question.

--- give you our appreciation of the issues posed by such an action.

If this course of action is pursued, certain basic principles must, I believe, be accepted:

-- To attempt this course and to fail would be a catastrophe. It must therefore be based on a firm resolve to do whatever is necessary to achieve success. Since we cannot confidently predict the exact point at which Hanoi would be likely to respond positively, we must be prepared to play out whatever string necessary.

-- Hanoi will heavily base its decisions on its view of the seriousness of our intention to see it through. We (including the whole bureaucracy) must therefore demonstrate that domestic and foreign criticism will not deter us.

-- To achieve its full effect on Hanoi's thinking, the action must be brutal. This would impress Hanoi both by its actual effect and as a signal of our intent.



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-- We should limit the number of decisions you will face, in order to limit the opportunities for domestic critics to put pressure on you. Each action must therefore be short and compact.

-- Once embarked on this course, we should not allow ourselves to be deterred by vague, conciliatory gestures by Hanoi. It must achieve its objectives, or we shall have demonstrated to the world our weakness rather than our strength. This requires, of course, a precise definition of our objectives.

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