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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
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INFORMATION

October 2, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Contingency Military Operations Against North
Vietnam

You asked me to consider alternatives to our present policy in Vietnam. One such alternative is a series of short, sharp military blows against North Vietnam designed to bring them to serious negotiations and an honorable settlement. This paper is an initial discussion of what this course would involve.

The paper discusses the objective of such a course, the military concept including targets, possible reactions and U.S. counteractions and an index of the other papers.

The Objective:

Our basic objective is to give Hanoi incentive to negotiate a compromise settlement through a series of military blows. We initially assumed that such blows might best be delivered at targets directly related to Hanoi's capacity to support the war in the south, the objective of previous bombings. We did not find this feasible, however, and decided that hitting targets of more general strategic importance would be more effective.

Our basic goal subsumes several specific military and political objectives:

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(i) To persuade the North Vietnamese, through effective military action, and an explicit willingness to repeat it, that the alternative to compromise is unacceptable damage to their society.

(ii) At the same time, to convey to Hanoi and others that our goal is not the total destruction of the country or the regime, which would invite major outside intervention.

(iii) Thus, to present the Soviets and Chinese with actions too limited to justify a military confrontation with us, yet effective and firm enough to forestall circumvention and promote their eventual influence on Hanoi to compromise.

Accordingly, supporting objectives would be:

(iv) To impose a substantial physical isolation of North Vietnam and destroy vital targets sufficient to confront Hanoi with military and economic disruption and deprivation, involving costly and time-consuming restoration or countermeasures. Our immediate military objective would be significant impact on North Vietnam as a society -- not simply a resumption of bombing aimed at reducing their support of the war in the south.

(v) To strike and maintain a political posture clearly immune to all likely pressures against continuing the action so long as Hanoi refuses to compromise.

What we would be saying by our actions is that:

- the NVN demands for our unconditional surrender are utterly unacceptable.
- we will go to almost any lengths to end the war quickly.
- we have decided to give NVN incentives to end the war by compromise sooner, rather than later.
- we will keep the negotiating avenue open, essentially on the basis of our May 14th (eight-point) proposal.



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Military Concept

The concept involves a number of air and naval actions, grouped into intense phases of short duration, e. g. , four strike days, possibly extended over a week by the variability of the weather. These actions would be markedly different from the previous air and naval operations against NVN, which constituted a spasmodic campaign against targets not in sanctuary and which were primarily related to support of the war in the south. The military actions contemplated in this paper, in addition to being intense over a short term, would (a) be directed against targets of a more strategic nature to achieve lasting military and economic effect, (b) confront Hanoi with a fait accompli -- that is, the destruction of a significant target which wouldn't require continuous follow-up bombing -- and (c) thereby generate strong psychological impact on the DRV leadership.

The basic military action would be the partial isolation of NVN by aerial mining of the six deep-water ports and initial interdiction of the Northeast Rail Line. The sea quarantine would be subsequently maintained by both periodic reseeded of the minefields and continuing air and naval operations offshore against NVN watercraft. Should subsequent phases be required, intensified interdiction of the rail lines or alternate routes would reinforce the isolation of NVN.

The initial mining operation would be accompanied by the near-simultaneous disruption of the enemy air order-of-battle and attacks upon several groups of critical economic and war-supporting facilities in NVN. These groups have been selected on the basis that their destruction or neutralization would:

- cause deep psychological impact on the Hanoi leadership.
- signal the return to the hardships and frustration of the earlier bombing period for NVN.
- cause significant physical damage, representing major capital investments and reconstruction efforts.
- halt most modern industrial production.
- prevent most foreign exchange earnings.



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- increase sharply the required imports of essential military and economic goods.

- disrupt extensively normal living conditions, public services and transport, and both urban and rural labor forces.

There would then be a pause in major offensive action to await a diplomatic response from Hanoi. During the pause, however, we would probably need offshore air and naval action to maintain the sea quarantine. The level of these actions would depend upon the NVN efforts to sweep or bypass the minefields.

Subsequent phases, if necessary, would deal with NVN reactions to counter or moderate the effects of the first phase, as well as include attacks upon additional critical groups of facilities for increasing impact. At Tab A is a conceptual plan along these lines.

The critical facilities include at least 29 installations in NVN that would be significant targets for attack under this concept. These are, by groups:

- five complexes in the Haiphong port area.
- six electric power stations.
- four airfields (with all but one of the 119 combat aircraft in NVN).
- three manufacturing facilities (cement, machinery, and coal processing).
- five storage facilities (POL, high-value imports and trucks).
- five transportation targets (three bridges, two railyards).
- the levee system in the Red River Delta.

The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff are currently preparing an integrated plan along these lines. Tab B is preliminary in nature pending receipt of these plans. For illustrative purposes, a sample package of actions which might be conducted over two periods of four strike days each is as follows:



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- Phase I - aerial mining of the six deep-water ports.
- destruction or neutralization of the NVN air order-of-battle (about 120 jet aircraft).
 - neutralization of five transportation targets, three of which are associated with the initial interdiction of the Northeast Rail Line.
 - destruction of six key electric power plants.
 - destruction of five major storage facilities.
- Phase II - destruction or neutralization of possibly reconstituted NVN air order-of-battle.
- destruction of key facilities in the Hanoi-Haiphong complex.
 - intensified interdiction of a probably expanded NE road-railroad route to China.
 - breaching of the levee system in the Red River Delta.

These actions run the risk of losses of U. S. aircraft (perhaps up to five per cent) and some of their crews, as well as inflicting considerable NVN civilian casualties.

The probability of success is heavily dependent on the weather, although some portions of the over-all operation could almost always be accomplished. For example, the sea mining could be executed in about an hour during 80 per cent of the days in November and December. Using all-weather aircraft, we could mine in about one day anytime. At the other extreme, however, the weather suited for bombing of the key bridges in the transportation target group occurs about one day out of four in November. Thus, for the sample Phase I, we could expect a high probability of partial success -- i. e., the establishment of the sea quarantine -- but less chance of accomplishing the desired effect on all the targets within a four-day period. For this reason, some flexibility is required, either in the duration of the phase or in the expected effect on the target groups.



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Actions and Counteractions.

We have made an initial estimate of possible actions by NVN, the Soviet Union, and the CPR, with possible U. S. counteractions. Below is an indication of what is touched upon in the respective tabs, which I recommend you read.

North Vietnam (see Tab C).

We can expect Hanoi to demonstrate extremely tough resistance. Its leadership will make judgments on the basis of our estimated intentions (whether U. S. attacks are an act of desperation or the beginning of a long and persistent campaign, regardless of consequences); estimates of its ability to receive sufficient external assistance to permit a viable economy and estimates of whether its political structure can withstand the strain of a sustained U. S. campaign. Hanoi, thus, is likely to respond with measures designed to exert maximum psychological pressure on the U. S. Administration, threatening to expand the war by calling for foreign "volunteers," initiating a large-scale anti-U. S. propaganda campaign, suggesting through a break-off in the Paris talks that a peaceful settlement is no longer possible, conceivably stepping up communist military activities in Laos and Cambodia, or even offering a cease-fire.

A movement toward increased NVN military actions will be limited by her ability to develop alternate supply lines through China and a reluctance to call for volunteers.

Soviet Union (see Tab D).

The Soviets have always been disturbed by the prospect of the action envisioned in this option, because they would be confronted with a direct challenge and with difficult choices. We can expect them to undertake various efforts to circumvent or mitigate the effect of our actions. They would almost certainly make a major effort to get supplies to NVN and to replace the losses inflicted on the NVN air order-of-battle. They might provide personnel for various NVN operations, including air defense. We must be prepared to spill Soviet blood and to inflict damage to Soviet ships, if this proves necessary for the



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effective implementation of our plan. We must also be prepared for Soviet responses outside the area of Vietnam, such as in Berlin. We should expect major political pressures, but the chances of major Soviet pressure to induce NVN toward moderation of her position are no better than even if Hanoi decides to remain intransigent. If Hanoi shows some disposition to move constructively, the Soviets would encourage it since Moscow almost certainly estimates that over time Hanoi can achieve its objectives in the south by political means.

Communist China (see Tab E).

Peking will attempt through offers of economic and military assistance and some political pressures to keep Hanoi in the war, but probably will follow its past policy of avoiding overt intervention and a consequent direct confrontation with the U. S. so long as Hanoi's estimated existence as a socialist state does not appear to be threatened. Peking will support Hanoi politically and diplomatically, principally by an intense anti-U. S. propaganda campaign, but will unlikely move toward an accommodation with the USSR if, as expected, the Soviet response is anything less than acceptance of a full-scale confrontation of its own with the U. S. Peking will return Chinese forces withdrawn from North Vietnam, possibly surfacing them as "volunteers," and will offer South China ports and LOCs to move supplies into the north. Some degree of cooperation with the USSR in supplying Hanoi can be expected. Peking will provide a sanctuary to DRV aircraft diverted from North Vietnam. The Chinese might attempt to stimulate attacks by pro-Peking guerrillas in other Southeast Asian countries in order to divert U. S. military resources. In response, we should inform the Chinese that our operation is not directed against them, but we should maintain pressures on Hanoi regardless of the Chinese role. We do not anticipate that the Chinese will try to prevent Hanoi from seeking an accommodation with us if and when Hanoi decides to do so.

We have identified to date a number of questions which should be answered, or at least considered, in further study. At Tab H we have attempted to list some of the more important questions. Such a paper could be considered a priority work list for additional effort on this alternative course of action.



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Attachments:

- A - Conceptual Plan of Military Operations
- B - Assessment of Military Actions
- C - NVN Actions and U.S. Courses of Action
- D - Soviet Actions and U.S. Courses of Action
- E - Chinese Communist Actions and U.S. Courses of Action
- F - Integrated Diplomatic and Military Scenario
- G - Draft Presidential Speech
- H - Major Questions