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PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

The two essential elements of the military concept are

- a mining operation sufficient to seal off the sea approaches to North Vietnam and thus NVN's supply of waterborne imports,
- collateral bombing designed to destroy or damage supplies, industrial capacity, and critical parts of the transportation system, thereby intensifying the economic strains brought about by the mining.

A detailed assessment of this concept involves analyzing

- their capabilities to counter the effects of the mining and bombing,
- required actions on our part -- e.g. reseeded the minefields, destroying lighters, cutting rail lines and highways -- to prevent their countermeasures from being successful.

A rough preliminary assessment is as follows:*

NVN Countermeasures and Our Responses

General. North Vietnam has stockpiles of food, industrial supplies, and petroleum sufficient to last several months. Upwards of 30-40% of their petroleum stocks, 50,000 tons or so of imported supplies, and perhaps 1000 trucks could be vulnerable to our initial attacks. Nevertheless, remaining stocks are largely dispersed and difficult to destroy by bombing. These stocks can sustain NVN for a few months.

Countering the Mining. North Vietnam would attempt to counter the effects of the mining in three ways:

- sweeping or otherwise breaching the minefields,
- rerouting imports through rail and highway approaches from China,
- airlift from or through China.

* The concept assumes that we surprise North Vietnam and that bad weather will not force major changes in the military plan. Later we will analyze what we do if these assumptions prove false.



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2

North Vietnam, even with Chinese or Russian help probably cannot sweep the minefields in a way which allows large ships to continue to dock. She can attempt to unload ships beyond the minefields into barges and other small craft and sweep the fields well enough to allow cargo to move ashore this way.

If they try this, we can easily lay more mines. We can also attack and attempt to destroy the barges and lighters with naval gunfire and tactical aircraft.

It is more likely that North Vietnam will seek to have imports rerouted through China.

-- Ships with goods bound for North Vietnam could unload in Chan-chiang, 560 miles from Hanoi by direct rail line, or Canton, which is much further by rail from Hanoi; (see attached map)

-- China herself could supply petroleum, food and some other supplies to North Vietnam by rail or highway.

The general strain on Chinese supplies and transportation capability would not be great because North Vietnam's requirements [for 16 million people] are relatively small. There will be local strains, however, and it will take time (we are analyzing how long) to assemble rail cars and divert supplies from their normal routes.

Our response to a major overland operation to supply North Vietnam could be to attack repeatedly the rail lines, marshalling yards, sidings, bridges and highways from China in an attempt to stop the supply flow. We could also bomb supply concentrations.

We should be more effective in this than we were when bombing North Vietnam before; we can concentrate our efforts instead of bombing targets all over North Vietnam. We still will not have complete success, however. Weather, darkness and the difficulty of policing the long border with China will provide opportunities for some supplies to get through.



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3

There may be an airlift. However, only a fraction of the import requirements -- high value spare parts, medical supplies, etc -- could be moved by air. The problems posed for us by an airlift would be more symbolic than real.

Countering the Bombing. The North Vietnamese may try to restore the airfields we destroy, but they probably will not try to rebuild the other facilities. They will attempt to do without.