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SPECIAL ANNEX II

The Tonkin Gulf

① This analysis was made in an August 3 paper which reviewed the chronology of developments from all-sources, including NSA intercepts of relevant North Vietnamese naval messages. Throughout the crisis INR interpreted the raw intelligence provided by NSA and US navy traffic. In addition, INR kept a close watch on Communist reactions after the US retaliatory strike, and both military and political responses were analyzed in regular and all-source briefing items and Intelligence Notes as well as in special oral briefings for Department officials.

Three years later, in response to Congressional concern about the validity of the official version, particularly of the second incident, RLA prepared a review for the Director. The detailed review (November 14, 1967) found that unquestionably there had been engagements on both occasions, and, further, that the evidence suggested deliberate North Vietnamese attack in both incidents. There was no question that the North Vietnamese initiated the first incident, and COMINT provided North Vietnamese naval messages clearly ordering or referring to orders to attack.

② [However, COMINT evidence was not as conclusive about the second incident: One intercepted message called on the patrol boats involved to prepare for military operations that night, but that is available only as gisted in a report of several messages by as far as can be determined, NSA never provided a text of the actual message as intercepted. The after-action reports clearly demonstrate enemy combat activity at sea but do not absolutely prove that a deliberate attack was undertaken. There are North Vietnamese reports on damage done by US aircraft (and claims that planes were shot down--probably mistaking falling flares) and one reference to the possibility that the enemy "vessel" was "injured."

B1, B3

③ In addition [to COMINT], the 1967 INR analysis leaned heavily on circumstantial evidence to support its conclusion that the North Vietnamese had deliberately pursued and attempted to attack the DeSoto patrol on the night of August 4. The pattern of pursuit was similar to that employed in the first instance, and the North Vietnamese torpedo boats were even farther out to sea (some 75 miles) when they started

(b) (1)

(b) (3) -50 USC 403

(b) (3) -18 USC 798

(b) (3) -P.L. 86-36

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2.

rapidly closing on the Patrol. This is the strongest piece of evidence that an attack was planned, since no shadowing operation deliberately would be conducted with torpedo boats in this fashion. There was sonar (though not visual) detection of torpedos (though not until after the Maddox had fired on the closing vessels) and the after-action report cited above supports the conclusion that torpedos were fired.

In the course of the review, INR turned up information about a MAROP on the night of August 3-4 (far below the DeSoto's area of operation) which was not known by INR at the time nor, in fact, by many Washington officials when the decision was made to undertake the retaliatory air strike against North Vietnam. In its review of November 1967, INR concluded that it was "arguable" that Washington did not pay enough attention to these operations which North Vietnam possibly viewed as justifying its attempts against the DeSoto patrols. MAROP's were approved as a package by Washington which left their timing up to the field. No one in Washington or the field apparently thought to order a temporary halt after the first attack, despite INR's prediction of August 3 that such a coincidence of operations would carry considerable risk of another attack.

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