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By LC/MARA Date 7/19/02

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March 2, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM: Al Haig

SUBJECT: Memorandum from Secretary Laird Enclosing Preliminary Draft of Potential Military Actions re Vietnam

-- At Tab A is a memorandum from Secretary Laird enclosing the initial, albeit unsanctioned, plans prepared by the JCS in response to your request of January 27 for such a scenario.

-- At Tab B is a proposed reply to Secretary Laird for your signature with some suggestions for modifications which might be considered.

The JCS plans, which have been forwarded, are I believe more extensive than the type you and the President visualized as acceptable signals of U.S. intent to escalate military operations in Vietnam in the face of continued enemy intransigence in Paris. Furthermore, any such plans should be forwarded with the views of the Chairman and the Secretary included. If implemented, they would require some level of coordination at State. The draft plan, in fact, recommends (Page 6 of the draft JCS memorandum) that an appropriate interagency Task Force be formed to refine each of the scenarios which have been developed.

In brief, the plans provide:

1. Actual or feigned airborne/amphibious operations against several objectives in NVN (Appendix A).
2. An actual or feigned airborne/airmobile expedition in force against enemy LOCs in Laos and Cambodia (Appendix B).
3. Actual or feigned renewed and expanded air and naval operations against NVN (Appendix C).

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4. Actual or feigned subversion of the population and preparation for active resistance by the people against the Hanoi regime. (Appendix D).

5. A plan for actual or feigned technical escalation of war against North (nuclear) (Appendix E).

Recommend

You sign the memorandum at Tab B to Secretary Laird which:

1. Expresses your gratitude for the excellent draft plan.
2. Requests additional refinement to include lower level actions.
3. Requests resubmission in final form by March 15, 1969.

Attachments

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2. R. F.

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

21 FEB 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

At the luncheon in my dining room on Monday, January 27, the President, General Wheeler, you, and I discussed the possibility of working out a program of potential military actions which might jar the North Vietnamese into being more forthcoming at the Paris talks. I was informed this morning that you would like to review the progress made in the staff work on such a program.

I am attaching the preliminary papers which have been prepared in the Joint Staff. I would like to emphasize that the papers have no status other than as working copy. While General Wheeler gave the papers to me, he has not had the opportunity -- nor have the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- to consider the proposals in any detail. Other members of my staff, with whom I shall want to consult before serious consideration is given to such dramatic steps, have not seen the papers at all.

While I wish to be responsive in providing material for some initial consideration, I wish to emphasize (a) the preliminary nature of this work; (b) the desirability of much more detailed discussions within the Department of Defense before any formal suggestions or recommendations can be made; and (c) the necessity, which I am sure you recognize, for coordination with the State Department and others before we proceed with any such steps as those outlined. I must confess to you being more impressed, at least initially, with the potential disadvantages of the proposals than with the possibility of achieving movement in Paris by such means.

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1. To preclude prolonged stalling tactics by the communists in Paris, a program of military, political, and psychological activities can be employed by the United States to create fear in the Hanoi leadership that the United States is preparing to undertake new highly damaging military actions against North Vietnamese (NVN) territory, installations, and interests. 1  
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2. Although implementation of such a program is technically feasible, there are also certain disadvantages associated with it: 8  
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  - a. US actions may result in a serious misjudgment by NVN or other Communist nations. 11  
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  - b. If NVN fails to react and the US then withdraws without any change in the basic situation, it may strengthen NVN intransigence. 13  
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  - c. If follow-on events make the US deception apparent, subsequent indications of serious US intent would lose their credibility. 16  
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  - d. Adverse criticism may force the US Government to disavow the intent after initiating the deception. The net result would be a strengthening of the NVN position. 19  
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3. These disadvantages notwithstanding, there may be occasions when some type of deception effort would be desirable. The following proposals, which could be implemented singly or in varying combinations, offer a broad spectrum of possible options: 23  
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- a. A combined airborne/amphibious operation against several objectives in NVN. (See Appendix A) 1  
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- b. Punitive airborne/airmobile expeditions against enemy lines of communications (LOC) and base areas in Laos and Cambodia. (See Appendix B) 3  
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- c. Renewed and expanded air and naval operations against NVN to include closure of Haiphong and the blockade of NVN. (See Appendix C) 6  
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8
- d. Subversion of the population and preparation for active resistance by the people against the Hanoi regime. (See Appendix D) 9  
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11
- e. A technical escalation. (See Appendix E) 12
4. Due to the lack of widespread disaffection within the population of NVN, convincing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) leaders that they are faced with mass uprisings is not presently considered feasible. 13  
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5. The appendices set forth scenarios for the proposed operations, to include the basic concept and general activities involved in each. 17  
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6. Guidelines for the execution of scenarios: 20
- a. To present a realistic and credible threat to Hanoi, an integrated political, diplomatic, and military effort must be controlled at the national level. 21  
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- Actions by the US negotiating team in Paris and public statements by high US government officials must be coordinated with the picture being painted through the manipulation of military resources. 24  
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b. The threat which is presented to Hanoi in each scenario must be on a significant scale if it is to achieve the desired psychological impact. 1  
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c. Each scenario must develop over an adequate period of time to permit the indicators to be picked up by the communists, transmitted through their intelligence network, evaluated, and considered by the top level leadership in Hanoi. 4  
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d. The message being transmitted by each scenario must be clear and credible to Hanoi. To the extent that the planned operation will thereby receive domestic or foreign news media recognition, the effect on the American public must be considered. 9  
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e. Provision must be made to permit arresting the development of each scenario at any desired stage without jeopardizing US interests. 14  
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f. Techniques for executing scenarios. 17

(1) There are two ways by which the military phases of each scenario can be executed. CINCPAC can be directed to prepare to execute an actual operation at a given future date employing certain designated resources, while the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintain control of preparation and phased execution of the operation. Alternatively a complete deception operation can be conducted under the Joint Chiefs of Staff control. The greatest realism can be obtained by the first alternative. The number of persons who are aware of the underlying psychological objective of the preparations can be held extremely small, lessening the chance of its leakage. 18  
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(2) Deception operations are considerably less expensive and easier to control but are much more difficult to present in a credible fashion. Planning must be 30  
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extremely detailed; and, to insure that execution is  
fully coordinated, a relatively large number of people  
must inevitably become aware that a deception is being  
presented.

(3) In the scenarios presented in the appendices, CINCPAC  
is directed to prepare for actual: (a) airborne/  
amphibious invasion of NVN, (b) punitive expedition  
into Laos and Cambodia, (c) resumption of bombing and  
institution of a naval blockade, and (d) resumption  
and expansion of subversion operations. However, each  
of those scenarios can be converted to a deception  
operation if desired. In the remaining scenario,  
technical escalation, a deception operation appears  
more feasible.

7. Evaluation of Scenarios.

a. Airborne/amphibious operation against NVN.

(1) This approach would be the most expensive to  
execute and presupposes a situation wherein sufficient  
forces to establish a credible threat are deployed from  
CONUS or withdrawn from combat during the embarkation  
and rehearsal phases. It would be the most likely to be  
observed and reported by the press.

(2) It would require extensive time to prepare, thus  
presenting an excellent picture to the enemy of a  
developing US effort. This would provide considerable  
opportunity for the enemy to evaluate, debate, and decide  
whether to change negotiating tactics.

(3) A landing targeted at Vinh would be more likely to  
cause the DRV to reconsider its negotiating tactics than  
either of the other two lodgements farther south.

(4) For credibility, this scenario must include actions  
pointing toward the resumption of bombing.

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- b. Punitive expedition in Laos and Cambodia. 1
  - (1) Punitive airborne/airmobile expeditions against enemy LOCs and base areas in Laos and Cambodia would be unlikely to obtain the desired reaction from Hanoi because of their limited scope and effect, NVN territory is not threatened, and feasible alternatives are available to the enemy. 2  
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  - (2) The threat of an expedition targeted on Tchepone, being closest to NVN, would be more likely to get the desired reaction than alternatives targeted farther south. 8  
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- c. Resumption of bombing and/or naval blockade. 11
  - (1) The resumption of bombing would be the most credible of all the scenarios, since bombing was employed extensively by the United States in the past and the assets for resumption are present in the theater. 12  
13  
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  - (2) With the assets already present, it would be difficult to present a picture of military preparations extending over sufficient time to affect a negotiating posture. This course would also imply the application of emphasis on public statements and other psychological activities to develop the picture of a hardening United States Government resolve. 16  
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  - (3) The naval buildup for a blockade will provide the opportunity to extend military preparations over a substantial period of time, thus providing more flexibility to this approach. 23  
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  - (4) This scenario would be the easiest to control and less expensive than that for an amphibious/airborne attack on NVN. 27  
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- d. Subversion of the NVN population. 30
  - (1) Since it is presently considered infeasible to convince the DRV leadership that it is faced with a 31  
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mass uprising, this scenario by itself would not be 1  
likely to produce the desired result of persuading 2  
Hanoi to change its negotiating tactics. For greatest 3  
effect, it should be coupled with other scenarios. 4

(2) The development of the actions proposed in 5  
this scenario would require considerable time. 6

e. Technical escalation. 7

(1) It is difficult to evaluate the degree of 8  
credibility which the DRV leadership will attach to 9  
this scenario. It would depend in great part on their 10  
assessment of the resoluteness of the United States 11  
leadership, considering the then existent attitude of 12  
the US population toward the entire SEA effort, as well 13  
as in their confidence in continued USSR support. 14

(2) Use of atomic, biological or lethal chemical 15  
weapons in Vietnam would excite very strong public 16  
and congressional reaction. 17

(3) The predictable reaction worldwide, particularly 18  
in Japan and Okinawa, upon the surfacing of this 19  
scenario, militate against its employment. 20

8. If the concept of applying psychological pressure to 21  
change DRV negotiating tactics is approved, it is recommended 22  
that an appropriate interagency task force be formed to refine 23  
each of the attached scenarios and to prepare detailed plans 24  
for their implementation. 25

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APPENDIX C

SCENARIO: Renewed and expanded air and naval operations against NVN

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CONCEPT

US officials indicate increased impatience with communist intransigence and hint that the bombing might be resumed. A high level military conference is followed by increased air and naval reconnaissance of NVN. Stockpiles of air munitions are built up, additional naval units move into the Tonkin Gulf and additional aircraft move onto airfields in Thailand. Leaks hint of a resumption of air and naval operations against NVN. Extensive psychological operations indicate increased US determination and irritation with Hanoi's delays.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

1. A high US government official in an exchange with the press hints that a breakdown in the Paris talks could lead to a resumption of the bombing of NVN, possibly expanded. He also indicates dissatisfaction with the slow pace of negotiations.
2. The US negotiator in Paris indicates to the NVN and NLF US impatience over communist intransigence.
3. Allied propaganda media increase emphasis on VC/NVA violations of the DMZ, Laos and Cambodia.
4. Leaflet drops are resumed over NVN, if not already done.
5. A military conference is conducted at CINCPAC involving SecDef, CJCS, CINCPAC, CINCSAC, COMUSMACV, CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT and COMUSMACTHAI.
6. US officials begin issuing statements designed to prepare the American public for the resumption of bombings.

COMMENTS

The tone and timing of statements by US official and negotiators will be keyed to actions and statements by the NVN in Paris and elsewhere.

See JCS 2472/420

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Appendix C

SCENARIO: Renewed and expanded air and naval operations against NVN

## CONCEPT

## IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

## COMMENTS

7. Allied forces in SVN intensify operations against VC/NVA forces.
8. CINCPAC is directed by message to prepare to renew bombing of NVN under reduced restrictions, to close Haiphong and blockade the coast of NVN.
9. CINCPAC, in implementation of the JCS message, takes action to --
  - a. Increase air reconnaissance over NVN and hydrographic surveys of the coast of NVN.
  - b. Build up stockpiles of air ordnance in SVN and Thailand.
  - c. Move additional carriers and other combat vessels into the Gulf of Tonkin.
  - d. Move or alert for movement additional Air Force Squadrons onto airfields in Thailand.
10. Air Force and Naval Squadrons in the US are alerted for possible movement to the Far East.

The blockade and closure of Haiphong may be directed as a separate action from the bombing resumption.

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SCENARIO: Renewed and expanded air and naval operations against NVN

CONCEPT

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

COMMENTS

11. The themes in grey and black radio broadcasts and in leaflets dropped on NVN are gradually changed to indicate an increased lack of patience with Hanoi's actions.
12. JGS is notified of a planned resumption of bombing and blockade of the north.
13. Rumors of a bombing resumption are spread by US airmen to local Vietnamese and Thais.

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Appendix C

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APPENDIX E

SCENARIO: Technical Escalation

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Appendix E

CONCEPT

US government officials indicate increased impatience with communist intransigence in Paris and hint at a possible technical escalation of the war. A visit by technical experts to the Far East is followed by a high level political/military conference. US troops in Vietnam commence CBR training while an apparent build-up of highly classified munitions occurs. Radio broadcasts and leaflet themes indicate increased US determination and irritation with Hanoi's delays.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

1. The US negotiator in Paris indicates to the NVN and NLF negotiators US impatience over communist intransigence. This theme of impatience is repeated in a press conference by a high US official in Washington.
2. A high US military official in a public statement comments that the Pentagon periodically examines means by which new and more modern weapons could be used in Vietnam if necessary.
3. Allied propaganda media increase emphasis on VC/NVA violations of the DMZ, Laos and Cambodia.
4. Leaflet drops are resumed over NVN, if not already being done.
5. A team of Pentagon technical experts in atomic and chemical warfare makes an extended visit of the Far East, stopping off at CINCPAC, Okinawa, Saigon and Bangkok.
6. A summit conference is held in Honolulu involving President Nixon, President Thieu and the heads of government of TCC's.

COMMENTS

The tone and timing of statements of US officials and negotiators will be keyed to the actions and statements by the NVN in Paris and elsewhere.

See JCS 2472/420

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SCENARIO: Technical Escalation  
CONCEPT

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

COMMENTS

- 7. Subsequently, a military conference is held at CINCPAC involving SecDef, CJCS, CINCPAC, COMUSMACV and CINCSAC.
- 8. High security storage areas are established at selected sites in SVN and Thailand. A limited number of actual chemical munitions are shipped into SVN and stored at those sites.
- 9. CBR training is conducted for all US troops in SVN, to include those in rear area jobs. Inspections are conducted of unit CBR equipment.
- 10. Allied forces in SVN intensify operations against VC/NVA forces.
- 11. The themes of grey and black radio broadcasts and in leaflets dropped on NVN are gradually changed to indicate an increased lack of patience with Hanoi's actions.

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March 3, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Honorable Melvin R. Laird  
Secretary of Defense

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HS*

SUBJECT: Memorandum Enclosing Preliminary  
Draft of Potential Military Actions  
re Vietnam

I am very grateful for your memorandum of February 21, 1969 which forwarded the preliminary papers prepared by the Joint Staff on possible actual or feigned military actions which might be undertaken to signal U. S. intent to escalate operations in Vietnam.

The plans are well conceived and the risks involved in their implementation are precisely enumerated. I am somewhat concerned, however, that the "realities" of the current domestic and international environment do not lend themselves to an acceptance of these risks at this time. There may be, however, some less elaborate actions which could be initiated which although more subtle in nature, might be undertaken with reduced risks of news media recognition or domestic turbulence. I have in mind such measures as the selective implementation of indicators which might signal force build-up, increased planning, etc., as manifested by increased military communications, increased aerial reconnaissance, planning conferences or even the staging of amphibious shipping.

Perhaps it would be possible to flesh-out the plans with a spectrum of lower profiled actions of this type which could be implemented with less risk of international and domestic turbulence. I would be most grateful if you would have this excellent effort refined accordingly so that we could jointly discuss the resulting proposals with the President sometime after March 15, 1969. We

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should also be prepared to discuss with the President proposals for accomplishing required interdepartmental coordination while preserving essential maximum security.

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