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BOMBING AS A POLICY TOOL IN VIETNAM:
EFFECTIVENESS

A STAFF STUDY
BASED ON THE PENTAGON PAPERS
PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

STUDY No. 5



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**PREFACE BY SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT, CHAIRMAN,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

In 1968 the Department of Defense completed an eighteen month study of "United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967," popularly known as the "Pentagon Papers." The existence of this classified 47 volume study became known to the public through newspaper reports in June 1971. In September the Defense Department declassified large portions of the first 43 volumes. The other four volumes remained classified on the grounds that disclosure of the materials they cover—the history of negotiations—would be detrimental to the national interest.

In September 1971 the Committee on Foreign Relations began a detailed study of the Pentagon history and related materials. The study was initiated under the authority of S. Res. 140, agreed to July 24, 1971, for the purpose of inquiring into the origins and evolution of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, with particular reference to lessons for U.S. foreign policy making that might be drawn from the Pentagon history. Three staff researchers, Robert E. Biles, Robert M. Blum, and Ann L. Hollick, have been engaged in a careful review of the 7,000 pages of documents and analysis included in "United States-Vietnam Relations." They have had at their disposal both the classified and unclassified versions of the Pentagon Papers. In addition, they have drawn upon corroborative printed materials and interviews with individuals involved in the events under study.

Study Number 4 of this series, "Negotiations, 1964-1968," by Robert E. Biles was based on the still classified diplomatic volumes of the Pentagon Papers and, hence, was itself classified "Top Secret." But because of the importance of the events covered in this study, I requested the cooperation of the Department of State in declassifying the staff study in whole or in part. After a frustrating exchange of letters and telephone calls covering more than five months, the State Department refused to cooperate in even partial declassification of the study. The Department's position remains adamant today, even after the publication of the substance of the diplomatic volumes in national newspapers. The unclassified preface and table of contents to "Negotiations, 1964-1968" are provided in the appendix of this study.

"Bombing as a Policy Tool in Vietnam" by Robert E. Biles examines the effectiveness of the bombing of North Vietnam in achieving the goals set for it by those involved in making the air war policy. Focusing on the period of intense bombing from 1965 to 1968, the study examines the intelligence and defense community's own "in-house" studies of the air war. It finds that of the five major goals set for the bombing only one has been achieved. The bombing has succeeded in making North Vietnam pay a high price for her support of the war in the South. But the air war has not stopped the flow of supplies to the South, broken Hanoi's will, or forced the North Vietnamese to negotiate an end to the war. The gains in U.S. and South Vietnamese morale from

escalation of the bombing have always proved fleeting. There are several reasons for the failure of the bombing to achieve its goals. North Vietnam, an agricultural country with little industry, provides few major targets for air attack; the North Vietnamese have proved highly determined and extremely resourceful in adapting to the damage done by the bombing; and North Vietnam's allies have provided sufficient aid to more than offset the losses from the bombing.

Throughout the war, the claims made for strategic and interdiction bombing have consistently exceeded their accomplishments, and the extravagance of the rhetoric supporting the current air offensive against the North has a familiar ring. The bombing of North Vietnam has been a costly one in terms of pilots lost, civilian casualties, damage to our international standing, and riches expended. The failure of the bombing to achieve the goals set for it makes that high cost a very sad waste.

The material which appears in this study does not necessarily reflect the views of the Committee or any member thereof.

BOMBING AS A POLICY TOOL IN VIETNAM: EFFECTIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

Bombing has served several functions during the course of the Vietnam war: close support of troops engaged in combat, interdiction of enemy supplies and reinforcements, and strategic bombing to reduce enemy capabilities. By far the most controversial aspect of United States bombing policy has been the interdiction and strategic bombing. In their name, the United States has bombed South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and supply lines in neighboring Cambodia and Laos. Critics have contended that interdiction and strategic bombing have been unsuccessful and immoral acts, that they cost too much, and that they do violence to America's reputation abroad. Supporters of the bombing reply that it has at the very least made it very costly for North Vietnam to support the war in the South and has saved American lives. If it has not been as successful as expected, it is because of restrictions on targets and the graduated increase in the bombing, which gave North Vietnam time to adapt. The purpose of this study is to evaluate these arguments and thereby to improve our understanding of strategic and interdiction bombing as a policy tool in the Vietnam war. The study covers the period from 1965 when the regular bombing of North Vietnam began, to 1968 when it was halted in an attempt to promote a negotiated settlement.

The objectives to be gained by bombing North Vietnam have varied during the course of the war, but they can be summarized as follows: (1) to reduce the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam, (2) to make North Vietnam pay a high cost for supporting the war in the South, (3) to break the will of North Vietnam, (4) to affect negotiations for an end to the war, and (5) to raise U.S. and South Vietnamese morale. Individual objectives have been combined, downgraded, and re-emphasized. At times the official, public objective has differed from the Government's private objective. But each of these goals has played an important role in the debate over bombing policy.

INTERDICTION

SHIFTING RATIONALES

When the bombing of North Vietnam began in early 1965, the public rationale was the reduction of the flow of supplies and men to the South. In the words of the Pentagon history of the war:

The public was told that NVN [North Vietnam] was being bombed because it was infiltrating men and supplies into SVN [South Vietnam]; the targets of the bombing were

directly or indirectly related to that infiltration; and the purpose of attacking them was to reduce the flow and/or to increase the costs of that infiltration. Such a rationale was consistent with the overall position which morally justified U.S. intervention in the war in terms of NVN's own intervention; and it specifically put the bombing in a politically acceptable military idiom of interdiction.¹

In private, however, the rationale for the bombing was a mixture of complex and often conflicting objectives. The situation in South Vietnam seemed to be falling apart. The bombing of the North, it was hoped, would boost morale in the South, show the determination of the United States, and break the will of the North to continue its aggression. Again in the words of the Pentagon history:

Target selection had been completely dominated by political and psychological considerations. . . . Relatively little weight was given to the purely physical or more directly military and economic implications of whatever target destruction might be achieved.

With the gradual acceptance, beginning in March [1965], of the need for a militarily more significant, sustained bombing program, serious attention began to be paid to the development of a target system or systems that would have a more tangible and coherent military rationale. The first and most obvious candidate for such a target concept was that of interdicting the flow of men and supplies into South Vietnam by striking the lines of communication.²

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The objective of an interdiction program, of course, would be to reduce the capability of the Communist forces to operate in South Vietnam. Guesses as to the effect of the interdiction of aid from North Vietnam varied widely. Admiral Sharp, commander of Pacific forces, predicted in a January 12, 1966, message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that a properly executed bombing program "will bring the enemy to the conference table or cause the insurgency to wither from lack of support."³ A more moderate but still optimistic view was taken in a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) of July 23, 1965. The SNIE estimated that a bombing program which included destruction of the petroleum facilities and military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area together with sustained interdiction of the lines of communication from China could reduce communist capabilities in the South. It reasoned that:

If additional PAVN [North Vietnamese Army] forces were employed in South Vietnam on a scale sufficient to counter increased U.S. troop strength [which the SNIE said was "almost certain" to happen] this would substantially in-

¹ U.S., Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense Task Force, Vietnam, *United States Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), IV.C.7.(a), "Volume I The Air War in North Vietnam," p. 3 (hereafter cited as *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*).

² *Ibid.*, IV.C.3., "Evolution of the War: The Rolling Thunder Program Begins," p. 74.

³ CINCPAC 120206Z Jan. 1966, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 32. Sources are frequently not shown in the GPO edition of *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*. But because the footnotes were recently declassified by the Department of Defense, they are cited in this study.

crease the amount of supplies needed in the South. The Viet Cong also depend on supplies from the North to maintain their present level of large-scale operations. The accumulated strains of a prolonged curtailment of supplies received from North Vietnam would obviously have an impact on the Communist effort in the South. They would certainly inhibit and might even prevent an increase in large-scale Viet Cong military activity, though they would probably not force any significant reduction in Viet Cong terrorist tactics of harassment and sabotage.⁴

The physical reduction of North Vietnam's support for the war in the South could be accomplished by four methods: (1) the destruction of war-related industry and war-supporting facilities such as weapons production and petroleum storage facilities; (2) general debilitation of the North Vietnamese economy and thereby its ability to support the war effort; (3) attacking the lines of communication so that supplies are slowed, stopped, or destroyed; and (4) destruction of the North Vietnamese military. During the course of the war, all four methods were tried, but as will be seen none proved successful in accomplishing the goal of reduced support for the war in the South.

THE POL DEBATE

In the early stages of the bombing of the North, some critics claimed that the program had failed to achieve its objectives because of restrictions on the targets that could be struck and the piecemeal nature of the escalation. It was argued that because the increase in the bombing was gradual, North Vietnam had time to adapt itself to the bombing, replenish and disperse its stock, diversify its transportation system and improve its defenses.⁵ One CIA report, for example, noted in early 1966 that—

almost 80 percent of North Vietnam's limited modern industrial economy, 75 percent of the nation's population, and the most lucrative military supply and LOC targets have been effectively insulated from air attack.⁶

Most of this line of criticism of the bombing program stemmed, in the words of the Pentagon history—

from basic disagreement with an air campaign centered upon a tactical interdiction rationale rather than a punitive rationale more in keeping with strategic uses of air power, a campaign in which the apparent target was the infiltration system rather than the economy as a whole. . . . This kind of criticism of the bombing concentrated on the most conspicuous aspect of the program, the strikes against fixed targets, and it faulted the program for failing to focus on the kinds of targets which strategic bombing had made familiar in World War II—power plants, oil depots, harbor facilities, and factories.⁷

⁴ SNIE 10-9-65, 23 July 1965, "Communist and Free World Reactions to a Possible U.S. Course of Action," *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁵ JCSM 41-66, 18 Jan. 1966, *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶ CIA SC No. 0828/66, "The Role of Air Strikes in Attaining Objectives in North Vietnam," *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ Analyst's comments, *ibid.*

In response to this criticism, Secretary of Defense McNamara at first questioned the effect strategic bombing would have on the infiltration effort and stressed the risks of widening the war if such targets were hit.⁸ Eventually, however, he agreed to the bombing of North Vietnam's petroleum facilities. According to the Pentagon history, the failure of these attacks to reduce either infiltration or logistical support from the North apparently tipped the balance in McNamara's mind against any further escalation of air attacks against North Vietnam. "The attack on North Vietnam's POL [petroleum] system was the last major escalation of the air war recommended by Secretary McNamara."⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were strong proponents of bombing North Vietnam's POL system. In November 1965, they proposed a major program of air attacks against it. "Attack of this system," they argued, "would be more damaging to the DRV [Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam] capability to move war-supporting resources . . . than an attack against any other single target system."¹⁰ As the Pentagon history explains:

It is not surprising that the JCS singled out the POL target system for special attention. NVN had no oil fields or refineries, and had to import all of its petroleum products, in refined form. . . . Nearly all of it came from . . . the USSR and arrived by sea at Haiphong, the only port capable of conveniently receiving and handling bulk POL brought in by large tankers. From large tank farms at Haiphong with a capacity of about one-fourth of the annual imports, the POL was transported by road, rail, and water to other large storage sites at Hanoi and elsewhere in the country. Ninety-seven percent of the NVN POL storage capacity was concentrated in 13 sites, 4 of which had already been hit. The other 9 were still off limits. They were, of course, highly vulnerable to air attacks.¹¹

In making their recommendation that North Vietnam's POL system be attacked, the Joint Chiefs emphasized the interdiction effects. "POL-fueled carriers," they said, were the "principal vehicles" for transporting supplies to South Vietnam and Laos. Moreover, POL was becoming increasingly important to the effort in the South. With five confirmed and two suspected North Vietnamese regiments in South Vietnam, there was an increasing load on the supply system. Roads were being improved and increasing numbers of trucks were being imported. Finally, "recuperability of the DRV POL system from the effects of an attack is very poor."¹²

The record in the Pentagon history of what the intelligence community was telling policy makers during the POL debate is incomplete. Thus, we do not know the full range of debate nor the impact that intelligence may have had on the decision to increase the scale of bombing. Nevertheless, examination of the information available in

⁸ Testimony before Senate Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations, Aug. 4, 1965, and House Committee on Armed Services, Aug. 6, 1965, and Background briefing for the press, Oct. 21, 1965, *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁹ Pentagon historian's comments, *ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁰ JCSM 810-65, "Air Operations Against the North Vietnam POL System," 10 Nov. 1965, *ibid.*, p. 65.

¹¹ Pentagon historian, *ibid.*, pp. 65-66, citing J-3 in collaboration with DIA, "Attack on the North Vietnam Petroleum Storage System--A Study," 23 April 1965 revised 22 Dec. 1965.

¹² JCSM 810-65, 10 Nov. 1965, *ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

the Pentagon history does provide some insights. The intelligence community was initially skeptical of the Joint Chiefs' claim that attacking North Vietnam's POL facilities as part of an intensified program would substantially reduce the North's capacity to support the war.¹³ There was some dispute within the intelligence community as to just how effective the proposed bombing would be in interdicting the flow of men and supplies. But it appears that there was a tendency on the part of the intelligence agencies to accommodate their estimates to the growing pressure to increase the level of bombing.¹⁴

There is no indication in the Pentagon history that any of the major intelligence agencies believed that the bombing of the North could or would reduce the level of support for the war in the South below its then current level. Rather, the agencies placed their hopes in punishing North Vietnam and in possibly breaking her will. The most optimistic view of interdiction bombing was that the damage to North Vietnam's economy and transportation capacity might set an upper limit on the amount of support she could provide for the war in the South. Such a hope was predicated upon intensified air attacks, destruction of POL facilities, bombing both military and industrial targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, and mining North Vietnam's harbors. But even such a heavy program of attacks, the intelligence agencies concluded, would not prevent North Vietnam from providing levels of support for the war substantially higher than those of 1965.¹⁵

What, specifically, did the intelligence agencies feel could be accomplished by a more intensive bombing campaign? First, Hanoi would have to pay a high penalty for her support of the war. She would suffer considerable economic disruption and destruction. The Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the three service intelligence agencies even held out the hope at one point that the intensified air strikes combined with the increased U.S. troop commitment might eventually break Hanoi's will.¹⁶

While all the intelligence agencies seemed to agree that the air attacks would increase the burden and costs of supporting the war, there was no agreement that they would break Hanoi's will. In December 1965, the Board of National Estimates characterized Hanoi's will to persevere in the South as virtually unshakeable in the short run and extremely tough even in the long run. In the words of the Board, "They continue to believe that time is their ally and that their own staying power is superior."¹⁷ The Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department argued that "Hanoi would be less and less likely to soften its opposition to negotiations and at some point it would come to feel that it had little left to lose by continuing the fighting."¹⁸

The POL strikes finally began on June 29, 1966, and continued into the fall. They were initially hailed as highly successful. During the first month, for example, they reportedly destroyed 70 percent of

¹³ Memorandum for the Director, CIA, from Sherman Kent, for the Board of National Estimates, "Probable Reactions of the DRV, Communist China, and the USSR to U.S. Air Attacks on Petroleum Storage Facilities in North Vietnam," Nov. 27, 1965, *ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁴ Pentagon historian's commentary and citations, *ibid.*, pp. 68-123.

¹⁵ SNIE 10-2-65, Dec. 10, 1965, "Probable Communist Reactions to a U.S. Course of Action," *ibid.*, p. 72; SNIE 10-1-66, "Possible Effects of a Proposed U.S. Course of Action on DRV Capability to Support the Insurgency in South Vietnam," Feb. 4, 1966, *ibid.*, p. 76; and CIA SC No. 08440/66, "The Effect of Destruction of NVN Petroleum Storage Facilities on the War in SVN," June 8, 1966, *ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁶ SNIE 10-2-65, Dec. 10, 1965, *ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁷ Memorandum for the Director, CIA, from Sherman Kent, Dec. 2, 1965, *ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁸ SNIE 10-2-65, Dec. 10, 1965, *ibid.*, p. 73.

North Vietnam's bulk petroleum storage capacity.¹⁹ However, as the Pentagon history relates, by September both the CIA and DIA were in general agreement as to the failure of the POL strikes."²⁰

What became clearer and clearer as the summer wore on was that while we had destroyed a major portion of North Vietnam's storage capacity, she retained enough dispersed capacity, supplemented by continuing imports (increasingly in easily dispersable drums, not bulk), to meet her ongoing requirements. The greater invulnerability of dispersed POL meant an ever mounting U.S. cost in munitions, fuel, aircraft losses, and men. By August we were reaching the point at which these costs were prohibitive.

* * * * *

It was clear in retrospect that the POL strikes had been a failure. Apart from the possibility of inconveniences, interruptions, and local shortages of a temporary nature, there was no evidence that NVN had at any time been pinched for POL.

* * * * *

The real and immediate failure of the POL strikes was reflected . . . in the undiminished flow of men and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh trail to the war in the South.²¹

There were several reasons for the failure. First, "NVN's dependence on the unloading facilities at Haiphong and large storage sites in the rest of the country had been greatly overestimated."²² Bulk imports continued; tankers simply stood off shore and unloaded onto barges. More oil was also brought in already drummed; thus, it was convenient for dispersed handling and storage. Second, "the difficulties of switching to a much less vulnerable but perfectly workable storage and distribution system, not an unbearable strain when the volume to be handled was not really very great, had also been overestimated."²³ The key point was that "NVN's adaptability and resourcefulness had been greatly underestimated."²⁴ The effectiveness of the strikes was further offset by an unanticipated result of the bombing: the North Vietnamese were highly successful in using the strikes to extract larger commitments of economic, military, and financial assistance from the Russians and Chinese.²⁵

Secretary McNamara, according to the Pentagon history, "made no effort to conceal his dissatisfaction and disappointment at the failure of the POL attacks."²⁶ In January 1967 he testified before a joint session of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees that—

I don't believe that the bombing up to the present has significantly reduced, nor any bombing that I could contem-

¹⁹ DIA Special Intelligence Summary, "NVN POL Status Report," 1 Aug. 1966, *ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²¹ Pentagon historian's analysis, *ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

²² Pentagon historian's analysis citing CIA SC No. 04442/67, "The Rolling Thunder Program, Present and Potential Target Systems," Appendix A, January 1967, *ibid.*, p. 142.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* Also citing SNIE 13-66, "Current Chinese Communist Intentions in the Vietnam Situation," Aug. 4, 1966.

²⁶ USAF Historical Division Liaison Office, "USAF Plans and Operations: The Air Campaign Against North Vietnam, 1966," *ibid.*, p. 144.

plate in the future would significantly reduce, actual flow of men and materiel to the South.²⁷

EVALUATION OF INTERDICTION

During the course of the bombing of North Vietnam, a number of studies of its effectiveness were made. Two of the most important were carried out in 1966 and 1967 by a group of leading government-oriented scientists under the auspices of the JASON Division of the Institute for Defense Analyses.²⁸ According to the Pentagon history, the first study had a "powerful and perhaps decisive influence on McNamara's mind."²⁹ Both studies strongly criticized the effectiveness of bombing as a policy tool in the war effort. The 1967 JASON study, for example, concluded that "the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam has had no measurable effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South."³⁰

The studies found that the bombing had not reduced the flow of supplies to the Communists in South Vietnam. In fact—

Since the beginning of the Rolling Thunder air strikes on NVN, the flow of men and materiel from NVN to SVN has greatly increased, and present evidence provides no basis for concluding that the damage inflicted on North Vietnam by the bombing program has had any significant effect on this flow. In short, the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam to the South appears to reflect Hanoi's intentions rather than capabilities even in the face of the bombing.³¹

Moreover, Hanoi's ability to support the war had not been decreased by the bombing. Rather, "its ability to sustain the war in the South has increased."³²

The failure of bombing to interdict the flow of men and supplies to the South is attributable to at least three factors. First, North Vietnam is an underdeveloped country, which makes her far less susceptible to the strategic effects of bombing. Second, the vast majority of material support for the war originates not in North Vietnam but in Russia and China. North Vietnam serves essentially as a conduit for the supplies. Third, the Communists have shown great resourcefulness and determination, while we have tended to overestimate the capability of our bombing.

BOMBING AN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRY

As an agricultural country, North Vietnam provides an extremely poor target for air attack. In the words of the Pentagon history analyst—

The theory of either strategic or interdiction bombing assumed highly developed industrial nations producing large quantities of military goods to sustain mass armies en-

²⁷ Quoted in *The Washington Post*, Feb. 15, 1967, *ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁸ Institute for Defense Analyses Report, IDA TS/HQ66-49, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing on North Vietnam's Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect," Aug. 29, 1966, and IDA, JASON Division, "The Bombing of North Vietnam," Vol. I, "Summary," IDA Log No. TS/HQ 67-217, Dec. 16, 1967, *ibid.*, pp. 149-55 and *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV, C.7.(b), "Volume II: The Air War in North Vietnam," pp. 122-27.

²⁹ *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV, C.7.(a), p. 149.

³⁰ IDA, "The Bombing of North Vietnam," Dec. 16, 1967, *ibid.*, IV, C.7.(b), p. 123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³² *Ibid.*

gaged in intensive warfare. NVN, as U.S. intelligence agencies knew, was an agricultural country with a rudimentary transportation system and little industry of any kind. Nearly all of the people were rice farmers who worked the land with water buffaloes and hand tools, and whose well-being at a subsistence level was almost entirely dependent on what they grew or made themselves. What intelligence agencies liked to call the "modern industrial sector" of the economy was tiny even by Asian standards, producing only about 12 percent of a GNP of \$1.6 billion in 1965. There were only a handful of "major industrial facilities." When NVN was first targeted the JCS found only 8 industrial installations worth listing on a par with airfields, military supply dumps, barracks complexes, port facilities, bridges, and oil tanks. Even by the end of 1965, after the JCS had lowered the standards and more than doubled the number of important targets, the list included only 24 industrial installations, 18 of them power plants which were as important for such humble uses as lighting streets and pumping water as for operating any real factories.

Apart from one explosives plant (which had already been demolished), NVN's limited industry made little contribution to its military capabilities. NVN forces, in intelligence terminology, placed "little direct reliance on the domestic economy for material." NVN in fact produced only limited quantities of simple military items, such as mortars, grenades, mines, small arms, and bullets.³³

Moreover, such arms and munitions as were produced in North Vietnam were made in small workshops, which provided poor targets, rather than in larger, more vulnerable arsenals. "The great bulk of its military equipment, and all of the heavier and more sophisticated items, had to be imported."³⁴

In short, North Vietnam's industry did not provide a rewarding target for air attack. Meaningful targets were few, and those that existed were critical to neither the viability of the economy nor the prosecution of the war in the South.

Much of the damage was to installations that the North Vietnamese did not need to sustain the military effort. The regime made no attempt to restore storage facilities and little to repair damage to power stations, evidently because of the existence of adequate excess capacity and because the facilities were not of vital importance.³⁵

"The idea that destroying, or threatening to destroy, NVN's industry would pressure Hanoi into calling it quits seems, in retrospect a colossal misjudgment."³⁶ The idea, however, was based on an apparently plausible assumption about the rationality of North Vietnam's leaders, which according to the Pentagon history analyst, the U.S. intelligence community appeared to share.

This was that the value of what little industrial plant NVN possessed was disproportionately great. That plant was pur-

³³ *Ibid.*, IV.C.7.(a), pp. 54-55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³⁵ IDA TS/HQ66-49, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing," Aug. 29, 1966, *ibid.*, pp. 152-53.

³⁶ Pentagon historian's commentary *ibid.*, p. 56.

chased by an extremely poor nation at the price of considerable sacrifice over many years. Even though it did not amount to much, it no doubt symbolized the regime's hopes and desires for national status, power, and wealth, and was probably a source of considerable pride. It did not seem unreasonable to believe that NVN leaders would not wish to risk the destruction of such assets, especially when that risk seemed (to us) easily avoidable by cutting down the insurgency and deferring the takeover of SVN until another day and perhaps in another manner—which Ho Chi Minh had apparently decided to do once before, in 1954.³⁷

Experience, however, did not bear out this assumption. The North improved its air defenses, laid aside its economic development plans, and made necessary adjustments. Imports were increased to offset production losses; bombed facilities were in most cases simply abandoned; and large vulnerable targets such as barracks and storage depots were dispersed and concealed. The North Vietnamese appeared willing to accept the loss of the small industrial base rather than reduce their support for the war in the South.

The bombing and the strain of supporting the war in the South have caused considerable dislocation in the labor force of North Vietnam. By 1968, as many as 475,000 to 600,000 civilians including women and children were working to repair the damage done by the air strikes, while another 110,000 military personnel were assigned to air defense duties.³⁸ Military induction standards were apparently also lowered, and there were reports of 15 year old villagers being conscripted to fight in the South.

It appears, however, that the North has been able to meet its manpower needs. A study by the Systems Analysis Office of the Department of Defense reported that 90% of the North's manpower needs were met by normal population growth.³⁹ The same study found that the bombing also increased the supply of labor. Thirty-three thousand workers were released from their work by the destruction of North Vietnamese industry, and another 48,000 women were made available for work on roads and bridges in the countryside by their evacuation from the cities. Similarly, North Vietnam as an underdeveloped country had many underemployed who could be used to repair war damage without reducing production. Finally, an estimated 40,000 Communist Chinese were thought to be employed in maintaining North Vietnam's road and rail net. The Systems Analysis Office study concluded "it appears that the North Vietnamese government is not likely to be hampered by aggregate manpower shortages."⁴⁰ The Pentagon contribution to the NSSM 1 also held that "In spite of these extra demands, it appears that NVN has enough manpower to continue the war at the high casualty rates sustained in 1968."⁴¹ The

³⁷ *Ibid.*, citing CIA/DIA, "An Appraisal of the Effects of the First Year of Bombing in North Vietnam," SC No. 08437/66, June 1, 1966.

³⁸ Draft of National Security Council, "National Security Study Memorandum 1," 1960, in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 77 (May 11, 1972), p. E5610 (hereafter cited as NSSM1). Another study put the total manpower diversion over a three year period at 750,000. OASD (SA) Economics & Mobility Forces paper, "The Bombing—Its Economic Costs and Benefits to North Vietnam," Jan. 2, 1968, attached to Alain Enthoven Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "The Economic Effects of Bombing North Vietnam," Jan. 2, 1968, in *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV, C.7.(b), p. 130.

³⁹ OASD (SA) Economics & Mobility Forces paper, "The Bombing," Jan. 2, 1968, in *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV, C.7.(b), p. 130.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31.

⁴¹ NSSM 1 in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 77 (May 11, 1972) p. E5663.

State Department contribution was more optimistic but concluded that "there is no evidence that manpower shortages in themselves were becoming acute enough to *prevent* Hanoi from continuing its policies."⁴²

BOMBING VS. FOREIGN AID

The second factor contributing to North Vietnam's ability to continue aiding the war in the south is the large amount of military and economic aid received from Communist China and the Soviet Union. The second JASON study, submitted in December 1967, concluded:

NVN has transmitted many of the material costs imposed by the bombing back to its allies. Since the bombing began, NVN's allies have provided almost \$600 million in economic aid and another \$1 billion in military aid—more than four times what NVN has lost in bombing damage. If economic criteria were the only consideration, NVN would show a substantial net gain from the bombing, primarily in military equipment.

Because of this aid, and the effectiveness of its counter-measures, NVN's economy continues to function. NVN's adjustments to the physical damage, disruption, and other difficulties brought on by the bombing have been sufficiently effective to maintain living standards, meet transportation requirements, and improve its military capabilities. NVN is now a stronger military power than before the bombing.⁴³

A study by the Systems Analysis Office of the Department of Defense reached a similar conclusion. "Over the entire period of the bombing, the value of economic resources gained through foreign aid has been greater than that lost because of the bombing."⁴⁴ The study concluded that North Vietnamese standards of living may have declined but that food supplies had been maintained with only a slight decline. Overall, "the North Vietnamese are not badly off by past North Vietnamese standards or the standards of other Asian countries."⁴⁵ With respect to the capital stock destroyed by the bombing—

It is not certain that Russia and China will replace North Vietnam's destroyed capital assets through aid programs, thus absorbing part of the bombing cost themselves. However, they could do so in a short period of time at relatively small cost; if economic aid remained at its wartime yearly rate of \$340 million and half were used to replace capital stock, North Vietnam's losses could be replaced in a year.⁴⁶

Similar conclusions were also reached in the 1969 National Security Study Memorandum 1. "It is generally agreed that the bombing did not significantly raise the cost of the war to NVN. This was because

⁴² *Ibid.*, No. 76 (May 10, 1972), p. E5000. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ IDA, "The Bombing of North Vietnam," Dec. 18, 1967, in *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV, C.7.(b), p. 125.

⁴⁴ OASD (SA) Economics & Mobility Forces paper, "The Bombing," Jan. 2, 1968. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁶ "If the capital stock, is replaced, the economic cost to North Vietnam of the bombing will be the cumulative loss of output from the time the bombing began until the capital stock is fully replaced. Even this probably overstates the cost, however. Even if the pre-bombing capital stock, were only replaced, it would be more modern and productive than it otherwise would have been." *Ibid.*

production facilities outside of NVN were not targetable."⁴⁷ Estimates as of January 1969 placed North Vietnam's losses of capital stock, military facilities, and current production at \$770 million. But economic and military aid from Communist allies totalled \$3 billion.⁴⁸

The key consideration so far as bombing policy is concerned, then, is the fact that North Vietnam serves as a funnel for the transit of military aid from other Communist countries to the Communist forces in the South. Attention should thus be focused on North Vietnam's capability to transport men and supplies to the South rather than on its ability to support the war economically.

The North Vietnamese transportation system is primitive and superficially appears highly vulnerable to air attack. But it has proved to be highly flexible and its capacity has greatly exceeded the demands placed upon it.⁴⁹ Because the North Vietnamese transportation system is based to a large degree on crude roads, trails, and waterways rather than on highways and railroads, it provides relatively few lucrative targets for air bombardment. This is particularly true of the southern half of North Vietnam and the trails through Laos. A March 1966 report by the CIA argued:

The rudimentary nature of the logistic targets in the southern part of North Vietnam, the small volume of traffic moving over them in relation to route capacities, the relative ease and speed with which they are repaired, the extremely high frequency with which they would have to be restructured—once every three days—all combined to make the logistic network in this region a relatively unattractive target system, except as a supplement to a larger program. A significant lesson from the Rolling Thunder program to date is that the goals of sustained interdictions of the rudimentary road and trail networks in southern North Vietnam and Laos will be extremely difficult and probably impossible to obtain in 1966, given the conventional ordnance and strike capabilities likely to exist.⁵⁰

The debate as to the effectiveness of bombing in interdicting the flow of supplies from the North was reflected in the 1969 National Security Study Memorandum 1. The U.S. military command in Saigon (MACV) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) felt that the bombing had succeeded, while the Department of State, CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) felt that it had failed. The debate over the attempt by MACV to block two key roads near the passes from North Vietnam into Laos in late 1968 illustrates the differences between the two views. According to the summary of NSSM 1—

MACV finds it has effectively blocked these roads 80% of the time and therefore caused less traffic to get through. OSD/ CIA/State agree that enemy traffic on the roads attacked has been disrupted. However, they point out that the enemy uses less than 15% of the available road capacity, is constantly

⁴⁷ NSSM 1, in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 77 (May 11, 1972), p. E5063.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Pentagon historian's commentary, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 55.

⁵⁰ CIA SC No. 0828/66, "The Role of Air Strikes in Attaining Objectives in North Vietnam," March 1966, *ibid.*, p. 82.

expanding that capacity through new roads and bypasses, and our air strikes do not block but only delay traffic.

Besides blocking the roads, our bombing destroys material in transit on them. JCS/MACV and OSD/CIA agree that we destroy 12% to 14% of the trucks observed moving through Laos and 20% to 35% of the total flow of supplies in Laos. To MACV/JCS, the material destroyed cannot be replaced so that our air effort denies it to the VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam. In complete disagreement, OSD and CIA find that the enemy needs in SVN (10 to 15 trucks of supplies per day) are so small and his supply of war material so large that the enemy can replace his losses easily, increase his traffic flows slightly, and get through as much supplies to SVN as he wants to in spite of the bombing.⁶¹

It seems that on balance the interdiction bombing in southern North Vietnam and Laos has made the North Vietnamese logistical effort more difficult, costly, and time consuming but that it has not prevented Hanoi from meeting the supply needs of the Communist forces in the South.

The northern half of North Vietnam, however, would seem to offer more lucrative transportation targets, particularly railroads and harbors. In 1966, approximately two-thirds of North Vietnam's imports arrived by sea and the bulk of the remaining third by rail from China.⁶² Again, there was a sharp split between MACV and the Joint Chiefs on the one hand and the CIA and the Office of the Secretary of Defense on the other. MACV/JCS believed that if all imports by sea were denied and land routes through Laos and Cambodia were attacked vigorously, the North Vietnamese would be unable to obtain enough war supplies to continue. OSD and CIA, however, felt that the overland routes alone could provide North Vietnam enough material to carry on even in the face of an unlimited bombing campaign.⁶³

The mining of North Vietnamese harbors and the current intensive bombing of the North should provide a test of these arguments. Because no reliable data is yet publicly available, it is impossible to judge the interdiction effects of this bombing. However, considering the previous adaptability of the North Vietnamese, it seems probable that they will adjust to the bombing and continue to support the war in the South, albeit at higher cost and with greater delay in the movement of supplies. The capability to wage large scale conventional warfare with armor and heavy artillery, as in the spring 1972 offensive, may be considerably reduced.

ADAPTING TO BOMBING

The third factor reducing the effectiveness of the bombing of the North has been the resourcefulness and determination of the North Vietnamese. During the massive bombing of their petroleum facilities, for example, they proved quite resourceful. Distribution was switched from bulk to barrels and decentralized without a major reduction in capabilities. The North has also adapted well to the continuing attacks on the transportation system. According to the Pentagon history—

⁶¹ National Security Council, NSSM 1, "Summary of Responses to NSSM 1—The Situation in Vietnam," in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 76 (May 10, 1972), p. E4981.

⁶² CIA SC No. 0828/66, "The Role of Air Strikes," March 1966, in *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 82.

⁶³ NSSM 1, in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 76 (May 10, 1972), p. E4981.

Several hundred thousand workers were mobilized to keep the transportation system operating. Miles of by-pass roads were built around choke-points to make the system redundant. Knocked-out bridges were replaced by fords, ferries, or alternate structures, and methods were adopted to protect them from attack. Traffic shifted to night time, poor weather, and camouflage. Shuttling and transshipment practices were instituted. Construction material, equipment, and workers were prepositioned along key routes in order to effect quick repairs. Imports of railroad cars and trucks were increased to offset equipment losses.⁵⁴

The second JASON study concluded that because of such countermeasures, North Vietnam "has become increasingly less vulnerable to aerial interdiction aimed at reducing the flow of men and material from the North to the South."⁵⁵

Coupled with the adaptability of the North Vietnamese has been a tendency to over-estimate the capability of U.S. bombing. The first JASON study concluded in 1966:

Initial plans and assessments for the Rolling Thunder program clearly tended to overestimate the persuasive and disruptive effects of the U.S. air strikes and, correspondingly, to underestimate the tenacity and recuperative capabilities of the North Vietnamese. This tendency, in turn, appears to reflect a general failure to appreciate the fact, well-documented in the historical and social scientific literature, that a direct, frontal attack on a society tends to strengthen the social fabric of the nation, to increase popular support of the existing government, to improve the determination of both the leadership and the populace to fight back, to induce a variety of protective measures that reduce the society's vulnerability to future attack, and to develop an increased capacity for quick repair and restoration of essential functions. The great variety of physical and social countermeasures that North Vietnam has taken in response to the bombing is now well documented in current intelligence reports, but the potential effectiveness of these countermeasures was not stressed in the early planning or intelligence studies.⁵⁶

The second JASON study concluded in 1967 that because of foreign—aid, and the effectiveness of its countermeasures, NVN's economy continues to function. NVN's adjustments to the physical damage, disruption, and other difficulties brought on by the bombing have been sufficiently effective to maintain living standards, meet transportation requirements, and improve its military capabilities. NVN is now a stronger military power than before the bombing and its remaining economy is more able to withstand bombing.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a), pp. 56-57.

⁵⁵ IDA, "The Bombing of North Vietnam," Dec. 16, 1967, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(b), p. 124.

⁵⁶ IDA TS/HQ66-49, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing," Aug. 29, 1966, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 154.

⁵⁷ IDA, "The Bombing of North Vietnam," Dec. 16, 1967, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(b), p. 125.

PUNISHING THE NORTH

Although seldom stated explicitly in either memoranda or official statements, an implicit goal of the bombing has been the punishment of the North for its support of the war in the South. A relatively explicit statement of the goal was given by Secretary of Defense McNamara in 1967 in a list of what he considered to be the three objectives of the bombing campaign against North Vietnam: "To make clear to the North Vietnamese political leadership that so long as they continued their aggression against the South, they would have to pay a price in the North."⁵⁸

The goal is often stated in terms of increasing the cost of the war for the North. A March 1966 CIA report argued for increased bombing of northern North Vietnam because it would inflict more pain on the regime and increase the cost of the war. The key argument was:

The flow of military logistics supplies from the USSR and China cannot be cut off, but the movement could be made considerably more expensive and unreliable if authorization is granted to attack intensively the rail connections to Communist China and if the three major ports are effectively mined.⁵⁹

As has been shown above, the bombing has caused severe damage and disruption to the domestic economy of North Vietnam. Many thousands of civilians have been evacuated from the cities or diverted to repairing damage done by the airstrikes. The civilian population has suffered considerably. National Security Study Memorandum 1 reports that—

Individual citizens suffered many hardships. While the total supply of goods in NVN increased, individual standards of living declined. Food was rationed and consumer goods were scarce; and air raid warnings disrupted the lives of the populace and forced many to leave their homes. Moreover, it has been estimated that approximately 52,000 civilians were killed in NVN by U.S. air strikes.⁶⁰

While there is a natural desire to impose hardship on an enemy, such a goal seems unsupportable on either moral or policy grounds. The moral implications of mere retribution should require no explanation. By the same token, the high cost of the bombing to the United States in terms of lives and materiel makes such a policy undesirable. Simply raising the cost of the war to the North serves no policy end unless it has a pay-off in terms of impeding the ability of the North to support the war or increases the likelihood of the North's deciding to end the war. Hence, retribution is usually linked to interdiction or putting pressure on Hanoi's will. The preceding discussion has indicated, however, that the bombing has not stopped the flow of supplies to the South. The question then becomes what effect the bombing has had on Hanoi's will to continue the war.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁹ CIA SC No. 0828/66, "The Role of Air Strikes," March 1966, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 82.

⁶⁰ NSSM 1 in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 77 (May 11, 1972), p. E5063.

BREAKING HANOI'S WILL

One of the most pervasive justifications for the bombing of the North is the belief that in some degree the bombing will put pressure on the Hanoi leadership to terminate the war. According to the Pentagon history of the conflict, this was the original purpose of the sustained bombing of the North, although the public rationale was generally put in terms of North Vietnam's capability to continue the war.⁶¹ An interagency task force known as the NSC Working Group concluded in late 1964 that—

The nature of the war in Vietnam is such that U.S. ability to compel the DRV to end or reduce the VC insurrection rests essentially upon the effect of the U.S. sanctions on the will of DRV leadership to sustain and enlarge that insurrection, and to a lesser extent upon the effect of sanctions on the capabilities of the DRV to do so.⁶²

The contention that bombing would put increased pressure on Hanoi's will played a major role in the arguments of the JCS for the highly unsuccessful attacks on North Vietnam's petroleum facilities in 1966.⁶³ With the relative failure of bombing to achieve the goal of interdicting the flow of supplies south, the goal of breaking Hanoi's will became more prominent. In arguing for continued bombing, presidential assistant for national security, Walt Rostow wrote in a 1967 memorandum—

We have never held the view that bombing could stop infiltration. . . . We have held the view that the degree of military and civilian cost felt in the North and the diversion of resources to deal with our bombing could contribute marginally—and perhaps significantly—to the timing of a decision to end the war.⁶⁴

Although the reasoning is seldom explicit, the argument that the bombing would affect the will of Hanoi's leadership is generally based on three suppositions. First, the bombing would so reduce North Vietnam's capability to successfully prosecute the war that Hanoi would either sue for peace or substantially reduce the level of warfare. Second, the leadership would decide that the level of destruction visited upon the North Vietnamese economy was greater than the gain from supporting the revolution in the South. Or third, that the morale of the North Vietnamese population would so deteriorate that the leadership would be forced to seek relief from the bombing through negotiations or reduced support for the forces in the South.

Examination of the results of the bombing indicates that none of these suppositions have been borne out in practice. The bombing has made support of the war in the South more difficult and costly but has not reduced North Vietnam's ability to prosecute it. The damage to the North Vietnamese economy has been substantial and development plans have been postponed. But aid from Russia and China has more than offset the damage inflicted by bombing. In such

⁶¹ *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 3.

⁶² NSC Working Group on Vietnam (Southeast Asia), "Section I: Intelligence Assessment: The Situation in Vietnam," Nov. 24, 1964, pp. 6-8 (in State Department Materials, Vol. IV), *ibid.*, IV.C.2.(c), p. 10.

⁶³ Pentagon historian, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 66.

⁶⁴ Memorandum to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Others from Walt W. Rostow, "U.S. Strategy, in Vietnam," May 6, 1967, in New York Times, *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 574.

a situation, it seems probable that Hanoi's relationship with her allies is more important than the bombing in the leadership's determination to continue the war. And according to the 1966 JASON study by government-oriented scientists—

Hanoi's political relations with its allies were in some respects strengthened by the bombing. The attacks had the effect of encouraging greater material and political support from the Soviet Union than might otherwise have been the case. While the Soviet aid complicated Hanoi's relationship with Peking, it reduced North Vietnam's dependence on China and thereby gave Hanoi more room for maneuver on its own behalf.⁶⁵

Available evidence indicates that the great hardships placed upon North Vietnam's population by the bombing and the cost of the war in the South have lowered popular morale but not to the degree that support for the war is threatened. Evidence of the deterioration of popular morale as of early 1968 came from reports of Spanish repatriates who lived in North Vietnam from 13 to 19 years, a decree on the "punishment of counterrevolutionary crimes," and the appearance of a widespread black market.⁶⁶ According to the CIA contribution to the 1969 National Security Study Memorandum 1—

There were some indications in late 1967 and in 1968 that morale was wavering, but not to a degree that influenced the regime's policies on the war. The regime was quite successful, however, in using the bombing threat as an instrument to mobilize people behind the Communist war effort. There is substantial evidence, for instance, that the general populace found the hardships of the war more tolerable when it faced daily dangers from the bombing than when this threat was removed and many of the same hardships persisted. Concern about maintaining popular morale, and, in particular, discipline and unwavering support for the needs of the war appears to have grown markedly in the past year when most of the country was no longer subjected to bombing. Since the 1 November bombing halt over the entire country, Hanoi has put great stress on countering the widespread tendency of the people to relax their efforts. Concern of this kind is reflected almost daily in North Vietnamese publications and broadcasts as the regime has used exhortation, criticism, and the threat of coercion to sustain support for the needs of the war in South Vietnam.⁶⁷

Similarly, in commenting on civilian hardships in North Vietnam, the military contribution to NSSM 1 stated:

There is no evidence to suggest that these hardships reduced to a critical level NVN's willingness or resolve to continue the conflict. On the contrary, the bombing actually may have hardened the attitude of the people and rallied them behind the government's programs. Firm population controls and a steady flow of propaganda from Hanoi have

⁶⁵ IDA TS/HQ66-49, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing," Aug. 29, 1966, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a) p. 163.

⁶⁶ NSSM 1 in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 76 (May 10, 1972), p. E4999.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 77 (May 11, 1972), p. E5010.

been credited with helping to maintain support for the regime. There is some evidence, however, indicating that morale and support for the war in NVN has declined significantly since the bombing halt.⁶⁸

The experience in bombing North Vietnam, then, appears to once again demonstrate that an attack by a clearly foreign power tends to increase support for the indigenous government and to increase social cohesion in spite of the hardships created by the war.

The persistence of the view that Hanoi's will can be broken by bombing seems inconsistent with what is known of the North Vietnamese leadership. Most of Hanoi's top leadership is composed of long-time revolutionaries who were intimately involved with Vietnam's struggle for independence from the French. Their struggle lasting over 30 years indicates a tenacity and will not easily broken. Moreover, as both communists and nationalists, they apparently believe that they have a mission to liberate what they consider to be the southern half of their country. Their statements during the long period of negotiations leave little doubt that they think that time, international opinion, the weight of history, and their own commitment will bring them victory.

A convincing perspective on the effect of the bombing on Hanoi's will was provided by the 1966 JASON study:

The indirect effects of the bombing on the will of the North Vietnamese to continue fighting and on their leaders' appraisal of the prospective gains and costs of maintaining the present policy have not shown themselves in any tangible way. Furthermore, we have not discovered any basis for concluding that the indirect punitive effects of bombing will prove decisive in these respects.

It may be argued on a speculative basis that continued or increased bombing must eventually affect Hanoi's will to continue, particularly as a component of the total U.S. military pressures being exerted throughout Southeast Asia. However, it is not a conclusion that necessarily follows from the available evidence, given the character of North Vietnam's economy and society, the present and prospective low levels of casualties and the amount of aid available to Hanoi. It would appear to be equally logical to assume that the major influences on Hanoi's will to continue are most likely to be the course of the war in the South and the degree to which the USSR and China support the policy of continuing the war and that the punitive impact of U.S. bombing may have but a marginal effect in this broader context.⁶⁹

BOMBING AS AN AID TO NEGOTIATIONS

Related to the belief that bombing would break the will of Hanoi's leadership is the belief that bombing would aid in negotiations with the North. Bombing was expected to play essentially two roles with respect to negotiations. These were expressed by Assistant Secretary

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. E5063.

⁶⁹ IDA TS/HQ66-49, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing," Aug. 29, 1966, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a) p. 162.

of Defense John McNaughton in a 1966 memorandum: "The purposes of the bombing are mainly: . . . b. To bring about negotiations (by indirect third-party pressure flowing from fear of escalation and by direct pressure on Hanoi). c. To provide a bargaining counter in negotiations (or in a tacit 'minuet')." ⁷⁰

The preceding discussion makes clear that the bombing of North Vietnam has not brought about a willingness of the North Vietnamese leadership to make fundamental negotiating concessions. Moreover, bombing appears to take second place to the military situation in the South in Hanoi's calculations. However, it appears probable that the desire to end the bombing played some role in the decision of Hanoi to accept the U.S. offer of negotiations in 1968. Such was the consensus of the national security agencies in the 1969 NSSM 1.⁷¹ The bombing may, however, have contributed to the failure of other negotiating tracks, such as the 1966 contacts through the Polish representative to the International Control Commission, the direct contacts in Moscow in 1967, and the direct contacts in Rangoon December 1965-February 1966.⁷² It thus remains a moot point whether the bombing contributed to the possibility of formal talks between the two sides.

No doubt, the bombing of the North represents a bargaining chip in negotiations, but its value is uncertain. In spite of its prominence in public statements by both sides, the uncertain role of bombing in the course of negotiations from 1965 onward, the relative ineffectiveness of bombing in either stemming infiltration or breaking the will of the North, and the predominance of concern with the course of the war in the South indicate that in terms of extracting major concessions, bombing is a bargaining chip of relatively low value.

BOOSTING MORALE

A final purpose of the bombing of North Vietnam, according to Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton, was to sustain U.S. and South Vietnamese morale.⁷³ A similar view was echoed by Secretary McNamara in 1967.⁷⁴ To a degree this objective was achieved. The retaliatory strikes in 1964 and the sustained bombing begun in early 1965 probably contributed to some degree to boosting the morale of the hard pressed South Vietnamese government. As the second JASON study found in 1967—

There had been an appreciable improvement in South Vietnamese morale immediately after the bombing began and subsequent buoyancy always accompanied major new escalations of the air war. *But the effect was always transient, fading as a particular pattern of attack became a part of the routine of the war. There was no indication that bombing could ever constitute a permanent support for South Vietnamese morale if the situation in the South itself was adverse.*⁷⁵ (Emphasis added.)

⁷⁰ McNaughton 2nd Draft, "Some Observations about Bombing North Vietnam," Jan. 18, 1966, in McNaughton Book II, Tab DD, *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷¹ NSSM 1 in *Congressional Record*, Vol. 118, No. 76 (May 10, 1972), pp. E4977 and E4986, and No. 77 (May 11, 1972), p. E5012.

⁷² "Negotiations, 1964-1968," a staff study based on the Pentagon Papers prepared for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations, Study No. 4 (Washington, Aug. 9, 1972).

⁷³ McNaughton 2nd Draft, "Some Observations about Bombing North Vietnam," Jan. 18, 1966, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations*, IV.C.7.(a), p. 84.

⁷⁴ IDA, "The Bombing of North Vietnam," Dec. 16, 1967, *ibid.*, IV.C.7.(b), p. 123.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

CONCLUSION

This study of the effectiveness of the air war against North Vietnam in achieving the goals set for it by those involved in making the bombing policy necessarily neglects many relevant considerations. These include civilian casualties, the international impact of the bombing, the risks of escalation and provoking Chinese or Soviet intervention, the costs of the bombing, captured airmen, and the consequences within the United States. But in so doing, the study places in a starker light the high hopes held out for the bombing and the small results actually achieved.

Throughout the war, the results of the bombing of North Vietnam have consistently fallen far short of the claims made for it. The bombing began with the expectation that it would break the will of the enemy—although many questioned its capability to do so. When Hanoi showed no signs of weakening, the rationale shifted toward interdiction, but this goal, too, proved unobtainable. Many suggested that this failure was because there were too many restrictions. If such targets as the North's petroleum facilities were attacked, it was argued, Hanoi's capabilities would be sharply reduced. But again North Vietnam proved capable of adapting; the will of the Hanoi leadership held strong. Again bombing failed to fulfill the promises made for it.

This study should conclude with two warning notes. First, the focus of this study has been on interdiction and strategic bombing of North Vietnam during the period 1965-68. It does not consider tactical air support, which has been relatively successful in achieving its goals. Neither does it consider the current air war against North Vietnam, which is far heavier than previous offensives. No reliable information is yet available on its success or failure.

Second, the experience in Vietnam cannot be readily transferred to other situations. In overcoming the effects of the bombing, the North Vietnamese have had certain advantages which may not apply to other cases. The leadership has shown great tenacity and high motivation, as well as exceptional ingenuity and adaptability in coping with the effects of the bombing. The evident control and organization of the society, together with apparently high popular support have made possible this tenacity and adaptability. Equally important has been the willingness and ability of other Communist countries to provide sufficient military and economic aid. The location of North Vietnam has also been of considerable importance. Bordering on an ally, China, North Vietnam could not be blockaded; land transportation routes were available. Moreover, the proximity to China long tended to moderate U.S. escalation of the air war because of the fear of Chinese intervention. The common border with South Vietnam and the relatively unpopulated and heavily foliated border area with Laos facilitate infiltration and make interdiction bombing more difficult. The original guerrilla nature of the war long reduced the amount of supplies which had to be infiltrated, thus reducing the burden on the North. And finally, the underdeveloped nature of the Vietnamese economy has provided relatively few valuable targets for bombing.

These caveats notwithstanding, this study calls into serious question the efficacy of strategic and interdiction bombing against a highly motivated guerrilla enemy in an underdeveloped country. Bombing

appears capable of raising the costs of war to an enemy in such a situation, but it cannot be depended on to weaken his will or to substantially reduce his activity by interdicting his supplies. Compared to the damage to U.S. prestige and the internal division created by the bombing policy, its meager gains must be seriously questioned.

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CONFIDENTIAL

S.T.R.
J

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[redacted] Met with Carl Marcy, Chief of Staff, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, regarding Senator Fulbright's 3 October letter to the Director asking for whatever documents we might have regarding the effects of bombing on North Vietnamese capabilities. (This was a followup to an 18 September Fulbright request for an alleged Agency estimate on the subject mentioned by Tad Szulc in the 13 September New York Times.) I reminded Marcy that, as stated in the Director's letter to Fulbright on 22 September, there was no Agency estimate corresponding to the description contained in the Szulc story. I said we obviously couldn't undertake to give Fulbright everything we had relating to the effects of bombing and the ability of North Vietnam to carry on. Marcy admitted that the latest Fulbright letter represented a "fishing expedition" but asked whether we couldn't respond by letter which said simply that "the current Agency assessment is that the bombing has had such and such an effect." He said we could, of course, classify such a letter as highly as we wished. I said we'd see what we could do.

25X1

CONFIDENTIAL

[redacted]

001-10

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

October 3, 1972

CARL MARCY, CHIEF OF STAFF
ARTHUR M. KUHL, CHIEF CLERK

The Honorable
Richard Helms
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Mr. Helms:

On September 18 I wrote you that I would appreciate it if you could arrange to have a Central Intelligence Agency report, which Mr. Tad Szulc of the New York Times reported had been made available to him, also made available to me. You replied on September 22 that after a thorough review of your files you were unable to identify any Agency report which fit the description given by Mr. Szulc.

I would assume that there are reports, studies, analyses, notes, memoranda or documents characterized in some other way prepared in August by your Agency which assessed the effects of the bombing on North Vietnamese military capabilities. I gather from your letter that you do not know which intelligence officials made available which particular document to Mr. Szulc. Since you are not able to identify any particular Agency document, I would appreciate it if you could arrange to make available to me whatever documents were prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency on this subject in August.

Sincerely yours,

J. W. Fulbright
J. W. Fulbright
Chairman

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72-58244A

22 SEP 1972

The Honorable J. W. Fulbright, Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

My dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your letter of 18 September requesting that we make available to you a CIA report mentioned by Mr. Tad Szulc in his New York Times article of 13 September. A thorough review of our files fails to identify any Agency report which fits the description given by Mr. Szulc. Since we do not know the identity of the "intelligence officials" cited in the article, we are not able to specify the material to which your request refers.

Sincerely,

Richard Helms
Richard Helms
Director

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20 September 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Senator Fulbright's 18 September 1972 Letter

1. I have just received (from Mr. Maury) a copy of Senator Fulbright's 18 September 1972 letter to you asking for "the Central Intelligence Agency report, on which Mr. Szulc's (13 September) article was based."

2. As you may be aware, a similar (probably identical) letter has been sent to the Secretary of Defense. Shortly after lunch today (20 September), and before I was aware that Senator Fulbright had written you, [redacted] of DIA called me to solicit help in preparing a DIA memorandum for Secretary Laird to assist the Secretary in answering a letter from Senator Fulbright. According to Fowler, Fulbright had asked Laird to identify and furnish copies of the DIA and CIA reports mentioned in Szulc's 13 September New York Times article. [redacted] has probably not seen the actual letter, hence his account of it may not be completely accurate.)

3. [redacted] said a thorough search of DIA's records and files had failed to turn up any DIA report or study similar to that described by Szulc. He then asked if there was any such CIA report. If so, could he please have the title, date and (if at all possible) a copy. In levying this request, [redacted] grumbled a bit saying that the Agency never seemed to send DIA our Indochina studies any more, hence DIA did not know what we were saying or producing. I ignored that crack and not wishing to sprinkle any gasoline on that ember, simply told [redacted] (fudging slightly) that we too had searched our files and had no candidate for the Szulc leak. I also told him (truthfully) that the Szulc article had no verbal echoes of any prose we had ever produced and, further, we had never thought or written in terms of a two-year time frame, hence any paper pitched to that period could not possibly have come from us.

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4. [] thanked me, adding that DIA was equally mystified by the two-year reference, since that was a time frame they had never used either. [] then said he would recommend that the Secretary tell Senator Fulbright he (Laird) had checked both DIA's and CIA's records, could locate no such document and, hence, was unable to comply with the Senator's request. Here I blew a sharp whistle, saying that for form's sake and to keep wires from getting inadvertently crossed it would be much better if Defense handled any senatorial (or other) queries only with reference to its own material, without commenting on the Agency. Should we receive a similar letter from this, or any other, Senator, we -- in turn -- would not comment on Defense. [] said he agreed, would amend his recommendation accordingly and again thanked me for my help.

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[]
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

cc: Mr. Colby
Mr. Maury ✓

Executive Registry
102-5824

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

CARL MARCY, CHIEF OF STAFF
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September 18, 1972

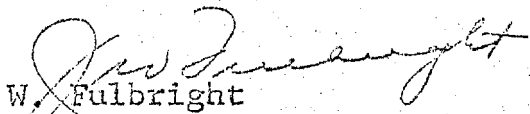
Mr. Richard Helms
Director, Central
Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear Mr. Helms:

I am writing in regard to a report in the September 13th issue of the New York Times by Tad Szulc, a copy of which is enclosed. The report refers to "separate but concurring" studies prepared late last month by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency reporting that the North Vietnamese can sustain the fighting in South Vietnam "at the present rate" for the next two years despite American bombing.

The New York Times story stated that: "The substance of the reports was made available to the New York Times today by highly placed intelligence officials." I would appreciate it if you could arrange to have the Central Intelligence Agency report, on which Mr. Szulc's article was based, also made available to me.

Sincerely yours,


J. W. Fulbright
Chairman

Enclosure

Vietnam

NEW YORK TIMES

DATE

13 Sep 72

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Hanoi Held Able to Fight 2 Years at 'Present Rate'

By TAD SZULC

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12—

This country's two principal intelligence agencies have concluded in recent reports submitted to the White House that Hanoi can sustain the fighting in South Vietnam "at the present rate" for the next two years despite the heavy American bombing of North Vietnam.

In separate but concurring reports prepared late last month, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency declared that although the heavy bombing in the North since last April had been successful in hitting designated targets, it had failed to meaningfully slow the flow of men and equipment to South Vietnam.

A high-ranking intelligence

official, along with others interviewed this week, said, however, that if the North had not been heavily bombed, the North Vietnamese could have doubled their operations and would have been spared heavy losses.

"They have not been hit fatally," he said, "but they are slowly bleeding to death—even if it takes two more years."

The two intelligence agencies said in their reports, which were prepared for the National Security Council, that the overall results of the bombing to date have been disappointing because of North Vietnamese "ant tactics" in keeping troops and supplies moving despite the air attacks. The substance of

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the reports was made available to The New York Times today by highly placed intelligence officials.

These officials, citing daily intelligence estimates as well as the bombing reports, said that all the indications were that the Communists were preparing new "high-point" offensives throughout South Vietnam within 30 days.

Following are the highlights of the current intelligence estimates and findings made available by the intelligence officials:

Some 20,000 fresh North Vietnamese troops have infiltrated into South Vietnam in the last six weeks, making an approximate total of 100,000 regular soldiers there. Only one training brigade is said to remain in North Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese now have the highest number of regular troops in the Mekong River delta, southwest of Saigon, since the start of the war. The total was estimated at 20,000 to 30,000 men compared with 3,000 a year ago. Most of the infiltration has occurred since the start of the Communist offensive March 30—and intelligence officials said that the delta now was "our biggest problem," as pacification programs had become seriously threatened.

A third petroleum pipeline has been completed between the Chinese frontier railroad terminal of Pingxiang and Hanoi. The work began in May,

after the United States mined Haiphong harbor, but the completion of the third pipeline became known only in recent days.

The North Vietnamese have built additional pipelines southward from Hanoi to supply their forces in South Vietnam. One of them reaches down to the A Chau Valley.

Intelligence officials, discussing the reports of the two agencies, said that it was virtually impossible for air strikes to cut the pipelines, which are four inches in diameter. Two officials said that whenever a pipeline was hit, North Vietnamese technicians turned it off at pumping stations while rapid repairs were made.

As for railways from China, they said, the North Vietnamese have to a large extent neutralized the effects of the bombing by marshaling all available rolling stock and manpower.

The officials said that the

North Vietnamese "ant tactics" involved moving supplies by rail up to a bombed-out bridge or a severed highway. The supplies are then reportedly moved by river barges, truck, bicycle or back pack to railroad cars waiting beyond a damaged section of the track or a destroyed bridge, and reloaded. At the same time, it was noted, labor units repair the tracks and bridges.

'Officials' Conclusions

The conclusion reached by the intelligence agencies officials said, was that the "ant tactics" used in the movement of supplies and the three underground pipelines had enabled the North Vietnamese to keep their forces fighting.

They said that frequent pilots' reports of "secondary explosions" along the infiltration trails and the capture of arms and munitions caches—a 143-ton cache was reported found by South Vietnamese troops last week—suggested that materiel continued moving southward.

The "secondary explosions" are said to indicate that munitions depots or loaded trucks have been hit while other targets have been under attack.

The officials said the predictions of new enemy offensives during September and October were based on the deployment of troops southward, the "preparation of battlefields" by demolition and other new technical units, captured documents and information from defectors and prisoners of war.

These officials emphasized

what they termed "a major effort" by the Communists to bring troops and supplies into the Mekong Delta through Cambodia's Chup plantation area, the so-called Parrot's beak area of Cambodia, which juts into South Vietnam west of Saigon, and Route 1, the main highway from Saigon to Phnompenh, Cambodia.

United States intelligence estimates are that since the start of the Communist offensive at the end of March in the northern part of South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong have lost 100,000 dead on the battlefield and in bombing attacks. The South Vietnamese toll is put at 25,000 to 30,000.

But intelligence officials emphasized that both sides had suffered equal "qualitative" losses in officers and noncommissioned officers.