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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-41-66

18 JAN 1966

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Air Operations Against North Vietnam (NVN) (U)

1. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in JCSM-16-66, dated 8 January 1966, forwarded to you their recommendation to resume offensive air operations against North Vietnam (NVN). They consider these operations a principal element of our strategy in Southeast Asia. This memorandum provides their recommendations for the conduct of offensive air operations when resumed.

2. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the air strike program against NVN, taking into account the recent views of CINCPAC. They have concluded that restrained air strikes against the north, as conducted thus far, will not achieve the primary military objective of causing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) to cease its support and direction of the aggression in South Vietnam (SVN). The piecemeal nature of the attacks against the DRV has permitted the enemy greater freedom to replenish and disperse his stocks, redirect the flow of materials, and improve his defenses. The geographic restrictions and limitation on the number of armed reconnaissance sorties authorized have limited effective interdiction of the extensive rail, highway, and inland waterway LOCs. Moreover, these restrictions and the requirement for single coordinated attacks on specified targets have exposed our forces to greater risks.

3. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that offensive air operations against NVN should be resumed now with a sharp blow and thereafter maintained with uninterrupted, increasing pressure. This course of action, as recommended in JCSM-982-64, dated 23 November 1964, offers

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the best probability of achieving our objectives at the least risk, casualties, and cost and with the least probability of enemy miscalculation. These operations should be conducted in such a manner and be of sufficient magnitude to: deny the DRV large-scale external assistance; destroy these resources already in NVN which contribute most to the support of aggression; destroy or deny use of military facilities; and harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and materials into SVN.

4. (TS) The denial of external assistance to NVN requires closing of the ports as well as sustained interdiction of land LOCs from China. Approximately 67 per cent of all imports in 1965 entered NVN through seaports (principally Haiphong). Military considerations would dictate that mining be conducted now; however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff appreciate the sensitivity of such a measure and recognize that precise timing must take into account political factors. Moreover, present sanctuaries should be reduced to permit more flexibility in interdicting major LOCs and striking key military targets.

5. (TS) The destruction of resources already in NVN would include the entire POL bulk and dispersed storage, distribution, and transportation system which contributes directly to the movement of supplies to the south. Large military facilities in the northern part of NVN would be destroyed. An intensified armed reconnaissance program, without sortie limitation, would be mounted to harass, disrupt, and attrite the dispersed supply and transport activities which have been identified through detailed intelligence analysis. Day and night air operations would concentrate on LOC centers, predicted traffic flow areas, transshipment points, vehicle/boat concentrations, and LOC exits from the DRV. Electric power would be disrupted in order to hamper command and control as well as bring home to the DRV leadership and populace the heavy price of continuing the war. As in the past, these attacks would be designed to minimize civilian casualties and damage to population centers.

6. (TS) The increasing DRV air capability is a continuing threat to the security of our military forces and should be destroyed. In the execution of the air campaign, continuous surveillance of DRV airfields would be maintained. The neutralization of these airfields must be authorized whenever interference with our planned air operations, or offensive air actions

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against our military forces in SVN, is initiated. Further, the operational commander must be furnished the authority to deal with the SAM threat, as required to prevent interference with planned air operations.

7. (TS) Operations against additional target systems would be the subject of separate authorizations as the air campaign develops.

8. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize the likelihood of adverse international reaction in response to sharply intensified air strikes and particularly to mining of the DRV ports. However, they believe that responsible Free World leadership will understand the necessity for these actions. Recognized also is the possibility of Communist China's direct entry into the war either through miscalculation or gradual escalation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that continued US restraint may serve to increase rather than decrease the likelihood of such intervention by encouraging gradual responses on the part of the Chinese Communists. This is in addition to the probable interpretation of such restraint as US vacillation by both the communist and Free World leadership.

9. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, recommend that:

a. The authorized area for offensive air operations be expanded to include all of NVN less the area encompassed by a ten-mile radius around Hanoi/Phuc Yen Airfield, a four-mile radius around Haiphong, and a twenty-mile China buffer zone. Exceptions to permit selected strikes within these restricted areas, in accordance with the air campaign described herein, will be conducted only as authorized by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

b. Numerical sortie limitations on armed reconnaissance in NVN be removed.

c. No tactical restrictions or limitations be imposed upon the execution of the specific air strikes.

d. The Joint Chiefs of Staff be authorized to direct CINCPAC to conduct an air campaign against the DRV as described herein. Upon your approval of the above concept, a JCS directive of execution to CINCPAC will be prepared and submitted to you separately for approval.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SIGNED

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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