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TS# 185905-b

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

13 December 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: PROBABLE REACTIONS OF CERTAIN ASIAN COUNTRIES TO A  
POSSIBLE US MILITARY ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable reactions to possible US use of Thai, Philippine, and GRC airfields as bases for B-52 operations against enemy targets in North or South Vietnam.

DISCUSSION

1. Thailand. For the past year or so, bases in Thailand have been used for US air strikes against Pathet Lao/DRV forces throughout Laos. For the most part, these operations have been carried out with the knowledge and consent of Thai leaders, who view the survival of a non-Communist Laos as essential to the security of Thailand. At the same time, however -- and despite a clearcut commitment to the anti-Communist cause -- Thai leaders

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want to avoid

provoking Communist China and irritating the USSR and the left-leaning Afro-Asian states. Domestically, they are concerned over possible public charges of toadying to the Americans and incurring unnecessarily the danger of retaliatory air attacks by the Chinese Communists.

2. The increased publicity given in recent months to Thailand-based, US air strikes in the Laos panhandle and to the prospect of their intensification and the introduction of US ground combat forces to the area has made the Thai leaders even more sensitive on the issue of US bases. Under these circumstances, US efforts to initiate B-52 operations, which would inevitably be highly visible, would probably be opposed by the Thai government at this time. Though Thai assent could ultimately be gained, the negotiating process would draw heavily on US political capital and would involve substantial costs in terms of increased military and economic assistance.

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3. If targets in North Vietnam were involved in addition to those in the South, the Thai leaders would fear intensification of the Peking-supported subversive campaign recently commenced at low levels in northeastern Thailand, and would estimate the chances of overt Chinese military action against Thailand to have increased. They would thus be more reluctant to agree to attacks on North Vietnam than to attacks on the South.

4. The Philippines. Under the terms of an informal agreement, the US would have an obligation to notify the Government of the Philippines of the use of Clark Field or other US bases there for direct air attacks on Vietnam. Whether or not this agreement is legally binding, the US would, for practical purposes, have to have Philippine consent. President-elect Marcos has indicated that he is willing to work closely with the US in Southeast Asian security matters and he would probably not be personally opposed. He would probably calculate that such operations, whether against North or South Vietnam, would not involve a serious threat of retaliation against the Philippines.

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5. Nevertheless, Marcos would probably be unwilling to give the green light to the US move before he judged that his political position vis-a-vis the Philippine Congress -- upon which the success of his administration will largely depend -- had been established; and this could take several months. Marcos would be especially concerned over the impact of the B-52 proposal on influential congressmen and journalists who now oppose plans to dispatch a Philippine combat force of 2,000 men to South Vietnam. Adverse public reaction, on the other hand, would probably not be an important factor in any delay, though Marcos would probably expect small-scale leftist protest demonstrations in Manila.

6. GRC. The Government of the Republic of China (GRC) would probably welcome the use of its air bases by US B-52s for operations against either North or South Vietnam. The government would construe the move as a further indication of US determination to stop the Communists in East Asia. It would also see it as an action which would certainly put the US in even more bitter opposition to Communist China and which could, before long, lead to war between the two. Taipei would consider that both of these eventualities would favor its own objectives. The GRC would also take this occasion to press the US for more military hardware.

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7. Outside the government, especially among the Taiwanese population, there would probably be some apprehension that US use of the airfields would expose Taiwan to retaliation by Peking. However, any popular opposition that did develop could easily be controlled by the government.

8. Chinese Communist Reactions. Attacks on Vietnam by B-52s from bases in Thailand or the Philippines would provoke a new outbreak of propaganda from Peking. The US would be denounced for this further extension of its aggressive warfare; the two countries would be denounced as Asian puppets of imperialism, permitting the use of their territory for attacks against other Asians. Propaganda of this sort would have some effect in the world, most especially if the bases were used for attacks on North Vietnam. It is possible that Chinese subversive efforts in north-eastern Thailand would be stepped up, though we believe that such acceleration could not be very rapid or effective.

9. Use of Taiwan bases might stir the Chinese Communists to some sort of low-risk military reprisal: shelling of the Offshore Islands, or harassment of GRC shipping and air activity in the western Taiwan Strait. We do not think that their reaction would

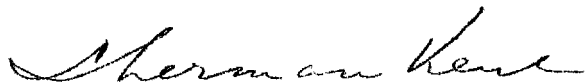
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go beyond this, or that their response within Vietnam would be influenced by the bases from which US air attacks were launched. However, the US use of Taiwan bases would confirm the Chinese Communists in their belief -- already strongly held -- that Taiwan is nothing but an outpost of US power, threatening the security of China itself. They would be fortified in their conviction that Taiwan presents for them a problem which can be solved only by bringing it under Peking's control. We do not believe that they would attempt to accomplish this in the near future, for they would recognize that their capabilities for such an enterprise are at present inadequate. They would nevertheless be reinforced in their feeling that in the long run war between themselves and the US is virtually inevitable.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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