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23 February 1966

JCS review completed

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : JCS Briefing of BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES on  
US Plans for Air Attacks in North Vietnam, Laos, and  
South Vietnam

DATE : 10:00 - 12:30 21 February 1966

BRIEFERS: Vice Admiral Lloyd M. Mustin, US Navy (J-3, JCS)  
Major General John B. McPherson, US Air Force, (JCS)  
Captain John R. McKee, US Navy, (JCS)  
Major General Robert P. Taylor, US Air Force, (DIA)

1. Background. This briefing was originally prepared by Brigadier General Grover Brown, J-2, CINCPAC, for Secretary McNamara in Honolulu, 8 February 1966. Admiral Mustin gave a slightly edited version. Supplementary material was left behind for interested Board members.

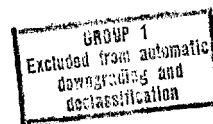
2. Purpose. The purpose of the original briefing was to tell Secretary McNamara what CINCPAC was going to do with projected US deployments, and what CINCPAC expected to achieve with them. The portion of the briefing given here considered the role of air power. It was, in essence, CINCPAC's overall concept of the Air War against the North Vietnamese, including the programs in South Vietnam and Laos.

3. Objectives. Probably the most important thing to come out of the briefing was evidence that JCS has accepted community estimates that the bombing campaign has not affected North Vietnamese willingness to continue the war and has not to date reduced significantly their ability to do so. In the light of clear evidence that North Vietnam intends to continue direction and support of the insurgency, the objectives of the bombing program have been slightly revised. As defined at the briefing they are:

a. Reduce to the maximum extent North Vietnamese capability to support the insurgency.

b. Progressively raise the price to North Vietnam of that support.

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4. Tasks. The briefing defined the tasks under these objectives as:

- a. Denial of external assistance to North Vietnam.
- b. Destruction in depth of its most important contributory resources.
- c. Disruption of troop movements.
- d. Destruction of other high value targets.

5. Targets include:

- a. Ports. About 67% of all North Vietnamese imports arrive by sea. Nearly all of this comes through the 3 key deepwater ports of Haiphong, Hon Gai, and Cam Pha.
- b. Northern LOCS. Objectives are to restrict -- as nearly as possible to deny -- assistance from China; to impede movement between Haiphong and Hanoi, and to harass other LOCS.
- c. High value targets: These include POL, power, and military support facilities.

6. Counter measures taken by the North Vietnamese to combat the effects of the bombing have been similar to those encountered in Korea: route by-passes, pontoon bridges, dispersal, etc. In the first part of 1965, the bombing program disrupted the North Vietnamese considerably, but by September the PAVN was completely dispersed, re-organized and functioning smoothly. In sum, for the period up through the end of the bombing pause, the "pressure" we were exerting on North Vietnam through the air war was declining rather than increasing, because of their successful adaptation measures. Nevertheless, an assessment of the damage in financial terms indicates Rolling Thunder cost North Vietnam on the order of \$28 million directly and an additional \$10 million indirectly.

7. Supply requirements and potential. There was some discussion of the support requirements of VC/PAVN troops in South Vietnam and of the tonnage per day potential of North Vietnamese supply routes through Laos. Admiral Mustin himself and other ranking officers with the JCS staff feel the going intelligence figure of 12 tons per day\* required to supply VC/PAVN troops.

\*This figure was a rough approximation of the average for 1965. It is generally recognized that the daily rate was considerably higher by the end of the year.

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in South Vietnam is too low, although it may be an accurate estimate of their needs at the beginning of 1965. JCS believes that nearer a 100 tons per day is needed to maintain their present level of activity and that by the end of the year it will be on the order of 150 tons per day.

8. Armed Reconnaissance. Since the resumption of the bombing, all missions to date have been Armed Reconnaissance. A maximum of 300 sorties per day has been authorized, but because of adverse weather, actual sorties have averaged less than half of this number. Armed Reconnaissance has also been restricted to an area considerably smaller than that permitted in the period immediately preceding the bombing pause. These restrictions essentially exempt the Northwestern part of North Vietnam. Interdiction strikes against targets in the Northeast are permitted only about once every two weeks. JCS is proposing less restrictive limits on Armed Reconnaissance to be fixed by a 10-mile radius around Hanoi and a 10-mile radius around Phuc Yen Airfield. Everything west of a line 10 miles west of Phuc Yen would be open to bombing as would everything south of a line 10 miles south of Hanoi. Although this would still exempt the Northeast from general Armed Reconnaissance, it would open up Northwestern North Vietnam, and would in fact expand the target area beyond its greatest previous limits by some 5,000 square miles.

9. Projected US sorties against North Vietnam for the remainder of 1966 are set at 7,407 per month. Approximately 3,000 additional sorties per month are to be flown in Laos; and from 16,000 to 24,000 sorties per month will be flown in South Vietnam. By mid-1966, the grand total of sorties per month in the air war will be 34,000. These figures are determined primarily by ordnance availability. The bomb shortage, more than any other factor, sets the limits on potential number of sorties which can be mounted. This shortage has begun to ease, however, and should not be a restricting factor by autumn, 1966.

10. Summary. JCS does not expect significant results from the bombing program during the first half of 1966. North Vietnamese counter measures should enable them to supply their forces in the South adequately despite hardships. During the latter half of 1966, however, JCS expects the bombing to hurt. They expect that the buildup of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam (from a total of about 110 battalions of VC/PAVN now to about 172 by December 1966) will require more supplies than North Vietnam will be able to deliver in the face of the bombing program. JCS believes that in 1967, because of US bombing, North Vietnam will not be able to meet the support requirements generated by the

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level of operations carried on in the South by augmented US forces. JCS believes that North Vietnam's managerial and reconstruction problems will have become increasingly serious, which in turn will have a serious effect on morale.

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