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Chief, Estimates Staff

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Auth: GS, USAF

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PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA THROUGH MID-1952

I. FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE COMMUNIST POLICY TOWARD INDOCHINA.

A. What is the current military situation in Indochina?

1. What is the relative military strength, combat effectiveness, and tactical position of the French-Vietnamese and Viet Minh forces?

a. Strength and Disposition of French Air Force

(1) As of 15 November 1951 the FAEEC had a strength of 365 aircraft of which 316 were assigned to tactical squadrons under three tactical commands:

Type	No. of Squadrons	Aircraft
Fighter	4	83
Light Bomber	1	25
Photo Reconnaissance	1	12
Observation and Liaison	6	120
Transport	3	<u>76</u>
		316

The personnel strength of FAEEC is as follows:

Officers 524

Enlisted 6,296

6,820**

**Includes 359 Pilots (Officers and NCO's).

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(2) The composition and disposition of the tactical squadrons are as follows:

TACTICAL COMMAND NORTH - Hanoi

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Type Aircraft</u>	<u>No. of Aircraft</u>	<u>Location</u>
Fighter Sq 1/8	F8F	20	Bac Mai-Hanoi
Transport Sq 2/62	JU-52	24	"
Liaison Sq 53	Martinet	6	"
	Penguin	8	"
	Cricket	12	"
	Hiller	1	"
Photo Recon Sq 80	F8F	12	Gia Lam-Hanoi
Art Obs Sq 23	Cricket	24	"
Transport Sq 2/64	C-47	6	"
Fighter Sq 3/6	F8F	20	Cat Bai-Haiphong
Fighter Sq 1/9	F8F	20	"
Bomber Sq 1/19	B-26	10	"

TACTICAL COMMAND CENTER - Hue

Bomber Sq 1/19	B-26	15	Tourane
Fighter Sq 2/9 (Det)	F6F	7	"
Art Obs Sq 21	Cricket	10	"
Liaison Sq 54	Martinet	6	"
	Cricket	4	"
	Penguin	4	"
Transport Sq 1/64 (Det)	JU-52	3	"
Transport Sq 1/64	JU-52	16	Nha Trang

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<u>Unit</u>	<u>Type Aircraft</u>	<u>No. of Aircraft</u>	<u>Location</u>
Art Obs Sq 22 (Det)	Cricket	2	Nha Trang
Transport Sq 1/64	JU-52	2	Vientiane
Transport Sq 2/64 (Det)	C-47	1	"
<u>TACTICAL COMMAND SOUTH - Saigon</u>			
Fighter Sq 2/9	F6F	16	Tan Son Nhut
Transport Sq 2/64	C-47	19	"
Transport Sq 1/64 (Det)	JU-52	5	"
Art Obs Sq 22	Cricket	16	"
Liaison Sq 52	Martinet	8	"
	Cricket	12	"
	Penguin	6	"
	Hiller-Heli-copter	1	"

The movement of aircraft from one tactical command to another is common and is determined primarily by the military situation in the various commands.

b. French Naval Air Arm

(1) The shore based French Naval Air Arm in Indochina comprises a total of 25 aircraft assigned to two patrol squadrons and one reconnaissance squadron. The composition and disposition of these units is as follows:

<u>Units</u>	<u>Type A/C</u>	<u>No. Aircraft</u>	<u>Location</u>
Patrol Bomber Sq 8F	PB4Y	10	Saigon
Patrol Recon Sq 8S	PBY-5A	2	1-Haiphong 1-Saigon

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<u>Units</u>	<u>Type A/C</u>	<u>No. Aircraft</u>	<u>Location</u>
Recon Sq 9S	Sea Otter	8	Cat Lai
Liaison	C-47	1	Saigon
	Moranés	4	Haiphong

Note It is expected that the Catalinas will be returned to France in the near future. One PB4Y-2 is being cannibalized for spare parts.

The personnel strength of the French Naval Air Arm is as follows:

Officers	57
Enlisted	<u>758</u>
	815**

**Includes 35 Pilots (Officers and NCO's).

(2) The carrier based French Naval Air Arm in Indochina comprises a total of 44 aircraft aboard the CVL Arromanches, of which 16 F6F's are operational and 16 are in reserve and 6 SD2C's are operational with 6 reserve. The airgroup personnel complement is 30 pilots officers and 310 aircrewmen. The primary mission of the ARROMANCHES is maritime surveillance, especially coastal, and air support to ground operations.

c. Air Facilities

French air facilities in Indochina are very limited. Only ten airfields have permanent-surfaced runways. Of these, only the airfields at Haiphong, Tourane and Saigon are capable of sustained operation of medium bomber and jet aircraft. In the critical Tonkin delta area, the French are using three airfields, Bac Mai and Gia Lam at Hanoi and Cat Bai at Haiphong. This latter airfield, Cat Bai, has full facilities as a fighter and light bomber base as well as the

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largest underground fuel capacity in northern Indochina. It is also here at Haiphong that a new airfield, Kien An, is near completion. When completed as planned it will have twin 7,500 foot runways. All of these highly important French airfields are surrounded by rice paddies which makes field dispersal and camouflage of aircraft impossible. They are within range of possible air attacks from nearby Chinese Communist airfields in Yunnan, Kwangai and Hainan Island areas. If they should fall into Viet Minh hands, Hue Airfield, 300 miles to the south would be the next good operational field available to the FAEEO. In central Indochina, the most important airfield is Tourane with 6,400 foot permanent runways and full facilities. Tan Sot Nhut Airfield near Saigon is the most important airfield in southern Indochina, and the home base of the FAEEO.

Of the eight auxiliary seaplane stations available to the French Naval Air Arm in Indochina, Cat Lai Seaplane Station, six miles east of Saigon, is the only suitable seaplane landing area.

d. Combat Effectiveness.

The FAEEO capabilities are excellent in operations of a tactical ground support type, with no air opposition or effective enemy AAA fire. It is also very efficient in conducting paratroop operations and supply by airdrop, transport activities, reconnaissance, observation and liaison, within the limitations of its equipment. The French pilots are well qualified to perform tactical support missions of low-level and dive bombing, rocketry and gunnery. FAEEO would be

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relatively ineffective in air defense operations, due to lack of modern interceptor aircraft, radar defenses and early warning, or fighter direction equipment.

The combat effectiveness of the combined shore and sea based French Naval Air Arm in performing its mission of patrol, reconnaissance, destruction of enemy shipping, and support to ground operations is good within the limits of its aircraft and facilities.

e. Strength and Disposition of Viet Minh Air Force

(1) The Viet Minh have no known Force in being, and no immediate prospect of developing such a Force. There have been some reports of training of Viet Minh pilots being conducted by the Chinese Communists at various south China airfields, but this is unconfirmed. If the Viet Minh ground forces are to have air support during coming operations against the French/Vietnamese, it would be provided only by the Chinese Communist Air Force, using either regular units or "volunteers".

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B. What are the capabilities of the Chinese Communists to commit an increasing volume of air assistance to the Viet Minh in the form of advisers, instructors, manpower and materiel?

1. Assuming present situation or an intensification of the fighting in Korea?

The Chinese Communists have committed no known air assistance to the Viet Minh in the form of manpower or materials up to the present time. It is possible that there may be a few airfield advisers among the some 8000 Chinese Communist advisers already with Viet Minh units in Indochina. There have also been unconfirmed reports of training of Viet Minh pilots being conducted by the Chinese Communists in the Sino-Tonkin border area. Unless the Chinese Communists decide to create a Viet Minh Air Force, as the Soviets did with the Chinese Communist Air Force itself, there is no need of their committing air assistance to the Viet Minh in the form of advisers, instructors, manpower and materiel at this time.

2. Assuming an armistice in Korea?

The Chinese Communists, assuming an armistice in Korea, would have the capability of beginning the creation of a Viet Minh Air Force, and providing it with materiel assistance. Logistical difficulties and the time element necessary to create a modern day air force from scratch would be seriously limiting factors in this course of action, however.

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C. What are the capabilities of the Chinese Communists to commit major elements of their regular air forces in Indochina?

1. Assuming present situation or an intensification of the fighting in Korea?

a. What air strength could the Chinese Communists commit to such an invasion? What airfields are available or could be made available and supported logistically for operational use?

The Chinese Communist Air Force is estimated to have approximately 1700 aircraft available at the present time, including 900 jet fighters, 250 piston fighters, 160 ground attack, 240 light bombers, and 150 transport aircraft. The bulk of these aircraft, especially the jet fighters, are currently located in North China and Manchuria.

There are a few airfields in Viet Minh held territory within Indochina which the Chinese Communist Air Force might use, but recent air reconnaissance, verified by aerial photographs, show that no effort has been made by the Viet Minh to prepare these fields for operations. This would indicate that utilization of airfields in south China is the most probable if air operations against Indochina begin. Twenty-two airfields exist or could be made available on short notice within 400 nautical miles of Hanoi, in the Yunnan, Kwangai and Hainan areas, of sufficient size to be considered by the CCAF for use in conducting air operations against the Tonkin Delta area of Indochina. Five of these airfields are class II fields, and are capable of supporting limited operations of heavy/medium bombers

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and sustained operations of jet tactical support fighters, with runways of 6,000 feet or better. Six class III fields are potential heavy/medium bomber bases and are presently capable of supporting sustained operations of jet interceptor fighters, with runways of 5,000 feet or more. The remaining 11 airfields are Class IV fields, and will support sustained operations of light transports and piston fighters, with runways of 4,000 feet or better.

It is believed that at present Hanning, Liuchou, and Fai-se are the only three bases from which jet fighters could be used in support of air operations in the Tonkin area of Indochina. Because of the range of the MIG-15, operations from these bases would probably be confined to combat air patrol and escort.

At present the CCAF is principally located on fields in the Manchurian-Korean area, the majority of these within combat range of North Korea. Some of their jet aircraft are being used consistently against UN aircraft. It is not believed that the CCAF would logically pull out many of their jet-type aircraft for any appreciable period of time from the Korean War to use in the south against Indochina. The possible exception to this might be the moving of some jets down to help in air operations against the major French-Vietnamese airfields in the Tonkin area. The use of their piston-type aircraft is a different matter. These aircraft are not being used to any extent at present, and could be moved south without weakening the present CCAF capability in the Korean area. They could be used for either a sudden attack or for prolonged operations in the Indochina theatre,

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and would be able to accomplish the mission desired without fear of FAEEEO jet interception. Due to the lack of air defenses by the French-Vietnamese, both ground and air, a split of this type would allow the CCAF to accomplish dual missions effectively, without weakening their present scale of operations in Korea.

2. Assuming an armistice in Korea, what air strength could the Chinese Communists commit to such an invasion?

The Chinese Communists are capable of using, for air operations in Indochina, all or any part of their present air force in being when released from their Korean mission, subject only to logistical and air facilities limits in the Indochina-China border area.

- D. How would the air capabilities of the Viet Minh forces be affected in the next six months if:

1. Chinese Communist air technical and materiel assistance were maintained at approximately present nature and levels?

There is no Chinese Communist air technical and materiel assistance being given to the Viet Minh at present.

3. Chinese Communists commit major elements of their regular air forces in Indochina?

The employment of major units of the CCAF in air operations in the Tonkin Delta area of Indochina anytime during the next six months could practically eliminate the present operational French Air Force in this area. A successful surprise attack on the Tonkin Airfields could knock out, it is estimated, approximately 60% of the French Air Force's operational aircraft in Indochina, including 75% of their fighter strength. This would remove a major obstruction to Viet Minh/Chinese Communist ground forces, and allow the issue to

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be settled by ground action where the enemy has a vast numerical superiority.

E. What are the present French-Vietnamese capabilities for air defense against:

1. The Viet Minh alone, assuming a continuance of the present scale of Chinese Communist assistance?

Since the Viet Minh have no air force, the French-Vietnamese are not lacking in air defenses against the Viet Minh alone.

2. The Viet Minh alone, assuming the present nature and level of Chinese Communist aid is increased?

So long as the Chinese Communists do not "create" a Viet Minh Air Force, or provide a "volunteer" air force for their use, the French-Vietnamese air defense capability against the Viet Minh alone will not change.

3. The Viet Minh, with major elements of the CCAF?

It is believed that both the French-Vietnamese ground forces and the FAEEC would be relatively ineffective in air defense operations. The Tonkin area airfields are especially vulnerable to attack. They are overcrowded with aircraft, there is no adequate radar or early warning system, AAA defenses are limited, there is insufficient space for dispersal of aircraft, and installations and aircraft are not camouflaged. The FAEEC aircraft (F8F and F6F) which would be utilized as interceptors or combat air patrol missions are not in condition to perform such a role, and probably could not stand up against modern Soviet type fighter aircraft. Through lack of maintenance water injection systems are useless and there is no operable oxygen in the

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aircraft. The FAECO is trained and used primarily in a tactical ground support role. For these reasons it is believed that the present FAECO would be out fought in a short period of time, if engaged in combat by the Chinese Communist Air Force presently in being.

F. What trends in French Vietnamese capabilities to resist Viet Minh-Chinese Communist pressure are probable through mid-1952?

1. In air material supply (scheduled MDAP aid)?

Most of the present capability of the FAECO is due to the MDAP assistance received during the past year, and that remaining to be delivered during FY 1952. Present MDAP policy provides for the replacement of aircraft as needed to maintain the level now reached by the FAECO in Indochina and to supply all the ammunition and POL needed for combat operations as required. The question of supplying the FAECO with jet fighters is under consideration; there are none scheduled for Indochina at present.

G. What is the importance of Indochina to the USSR and to Communist China?

1. From the point of view of dynamic international Communism?
2. From the point of view of China's defense?

From the point of view of dynamic international Communism, Indochina is the key to control of mainland Southeast Asia, not only because of its geographic location, but also because it is the principal center of Western-led armed resistance to the spread of Communism throughout the area.

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Inasmuch as no nation aspiring to a position of power can long tolerate the presence of a hostile foreign power on its borders, the presence of French armed forces near the China-Indochina border could be said to constitute a potential threat to Communist China. In reality, however, the only aggressive threat in the area is that posed by Communist China itself, and the explosive border situation either would not exist or could at least be settled amicably were it not for the patently aggressive policies of the Chinese Communist regime.

H. What would be the influence on Chinese Communist courses of action with respect to Indochina of:

1. Developments in Korea?

A continuation of the present air war in the Korean theater would probably prevent the Chinese Communists from launching major air operations against Indochina. It would not, however, prevent the redistribution of sufficient aircraft for a damaging surprise air attack in Indochina.

4. A possible Chinese Communist belief that a more aggressive course in Indochina might bring UN or US retaliation, including an air campaign, against the China mainland?

If the Chinese Communists believed that a more aggressive course in Indochina might bring UN or US retaliation, including an

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air campaign, against the China mainland, they would probably not attempt a small scale aggressive move (such as the surprise air attack envisioned in I. H. 1., above) either with or without a Korean armistice. In these circumstances, the Chinese Communists probably would not launch any action likely to be construed as aggression against Indochina until they had available for immediate employment in China Proper sufficient ground and air strength to conduct large-scale sustained action in Indochina and to repel anticipated UN-US retaliatory action against mainland China. However, the Chinese Communists would probably continue to furnish the Viet Minh forces with such material and advisory assistance as seemed to be beyond the UN-US capabilities to detect.

5. A significant improvement in the French-Vietnamese military and political position in Indochina?

A significant improvement in the French-Vietnamese military and political position in Indochina would probably have the effect of increasing Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh forces with the minimum objective of preventing the complete defeat of the latter.

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6. Indications of French Weakening of will to resist because of the economic and military strains on metropolitan France involved in a long-term and indecisive war in Indochina?

There are some indications of a weakening of the French will to resist in Indochina, not only because of the continuing economic and military strains, but also because of a feeling of the futility of continuing the struggle without the dynamic leadership of DeLattre in the face of the apparently growing prospect of massive Chinese Communist intervention. Assuming that this French attitude becomes a permanent trend, the resultant Chinese Communist course of action could be either active or passive, depending largely upon the timing dictated by international Communist strategy. The Chinese Communists could take advantage of the weakening French will to resist and strike a quick knock-out blow to achieve Communist control of Indochina. On the other hand, they might see less reason than ever for major intervention, in view of the apparently increased Viet Minh capability to achieve eventual Communist control.

7. Developments elsewhere in Southeast Asia (for example, Burma) favorable to the Communists.

If the current unstable developments in Burma continue unchecked, that country may well come under actual or effective Communist control within a year or two with relatively little effort on the part of the Chinese Communists. Communist control of Burma would virtually isolate Indochina from the remainder of mainland Southeast Asia and thus greatly facilitate the ultimate conquest of Indochina. Such a situation would also place the Communists in an extremely favorable position to launch

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a two-pronged attack on Indochina, from Burma and Communist China. The actual course of action followed by Communist China in these circumstances would be largely dictated by the requirements of international Communist strategy.

8. Developments outside of Southeast Asia.

The only type of development outside of Korea, Southeast Asia, or the Soviet Bloc which could be assumed to have a deterrent effect on any Chinese Communist aggressive plans respecting Indochina is Western (predominantly US) political and/or military action which would convince the Soviet Bloc that further Chinese Communist aggression in the Far East would be met by disastrous counteraction. Conversely, developments which implied to the Soviet Bloc a lack of Western determination to block further Communist aggression would serve as a green light to the Chinese Communists with respect to Indochina.

II. INDICATIONS OF CURRENT CHINESE COMMUNIST INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA

A. What indications may be derived from Communist military activity in Communist China and within Indochina?

Although there is no reliable intelligence that CCAF units have moved nearer to Indochina than Canton and Hankow, there are a number of unconfirmed reports of CCAF activity in Yunnan, Kwangsi, and Kwangtung Provinces bordering on Indochina. According to these reports, there have been preparations at Nanning Airfield, beginning at least as far back as August 1951, which include runway improvement, provision

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of fuel storage facilities, security precautions, hanger construction, and storage of aircraft parts. These reports also allege the planned establishment of a maintenance "factory" at Nanning, the development of auxiliary airfields at former airfield locations within MIG-15 combat radius of Tonkin, the establishment of an airfield in the Paracel Islands, and the arrival of jet aircraft and conventional bomber aircraft at Nanning. Other reports state that there has been an increase in technical and supervisory personnel at airfields in the Canton area and that engineers have arrived at the border town of Langson, Indochina, to establish an airfield for the Viet Minh forces.

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