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23 July 65

*read*

The Honorable Robert S. McNamara  
The Secretary of Defense  
The Pentagon

Dear Bob:

I transmit herewith our most recent Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-9-65 which estimates foreign reactions, particularly those of the DRV, China, and the USSR, to certain US military courses of action in Vietnam. These courses are set forth in appropriate detail on the first and second pages of the document under the heading "Assumptions."

I invite your special attention to item (c) on page two: "...we might either continue present policy with regard to air strikes or extend these strikes in North Vietnam to include attacks on land (but not sea) communi- cations from South China....

This effort to interrupt the flow of military supplies from China to North Vietnam and the southern areas of combat recalls similar efforts and their concomitant difficulties in other theatres of operations and in other time frames. It is my feeling that a close study of our efforts to isolate battlefields in World War II (especially the campaign in Italy) and in the Korean War through the interdiction of land communications by air attacks contain many valuable lessons. Matters such as the rationale of initial target selection; the handling capacity of relevant routes and the proportion of this capacity needed for purely military traffic; the recuperability of targets once damaged; the enemy's use of lash-up repairs, detours, and alternate routes; the relationship between the interdiction of a given route or routes and the level of the enemy's combat effectiveness, and so on, may be greatly illuminated by my suggested reference to history.

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We should bear two things in mind: first, whereas these lessons of the past will be useful, I am sure that they will not be strictly applicable to the much more difficult problem of interdicting overland supply in the Indochina area (ordinary levels of combat expenditure are comparatively small, manpower for repair and portage service is almost certainly not in short supply, and route capacities are probably much larger than those necessary for strictly military requirements); second, these lessons will obviously not be applicable to sea-borne traffic which -- if not right now of major importance to the DRV/VC -- would become so as soon as the squeeze on overland movement began to be felt.

Sincerely,

W. F. Raboru

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