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A CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY FOR MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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(Essay)

A Conventional Defense Strategy

for

Mainland Southeast Asia

by

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Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania
22 April 1966

SUMMARY

Chinese Communists and their allies have the capability to make a massive, overt invasion of mainland Southeast Asia. This would not be a direct threat to the national survival of the United States. Therefore, the United States, although willing to respond with a conventional air campaign against mainland China, would be unwilling to use nuclear weapons against strategic targets in China or in tactical support of defensive operations in Southeast Asia. It therefore behooves American professional military officers to develop concepts and strategies for a conventional defense of mainland Southeast Asia. A first step is to get our SEATO allies to recognize the need for a conventional defense option. Then it will be feasible to develop the force structure required to conduct an effective conventional defense of Southeast Asia. Although casualties would be great in such a campaign, it need not be the long blood bath commonly feared.

A CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

FOR

MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

On 19 January 1955, former Congressman Hamilton Fish appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to oppose adoption of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty.* Mr. Fish capsulized the fears of many Americans when he said:

. . . the SEATO treaties provide for sending American boys to fight in every swamp, jungle and ricefield of mainland Southeast Asia . . . it well may be the death certificate of a million or more of the selected youth of America For every thousand we send, Red China can send her tens of thousands

Secretary Dulles did not, however, propose to conduct a defense of Southeast Asia by engaging in massive ground warfare. He had a different military strategy in mind. During the Senate hearings on the treaty, he stated that to defend Southeast Asia we would rely on the deterrent of our mobile striking force. He visualized that our most effective strategy would be to strike at the source of aggression rather than to try to push American manpower into the area to fight a ground war. Although not directly stated in the hearings, the impression left was that the United States would use nuclear weapons on mainland China if the Chinese Communists invade mainland Southeast Asia.

*Commonly called the SEATO Treaty, it was negotiated by Secretary Dulles at Manila in September 1955. The signatories were Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States. A protocol extended the protection of the treaty to cover Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The development of SEATO standing forces and a command structure, as found in NATO, was to be eschewed. No U.S. combat forces were to be permanently stationed on mainland Southeast Asia. Instead, member nations were to develop the capability to deploy forces quickly into the area. Accordingly, beginning in 1956, from two to five SEATO military exercises have been held each year, stressing airborne, amphibious and air defense operations to reinforce and hold key areas.

But this is now 1966. Secretary Dulles is no longer with us. There is a great schism in the Sino-Soviet Bloc. The Chi Coms have attacked India and acquired "the bomb." Over two hundred thousand of the "selected youth of America" are engaged in a ground war to defeat Communist inspired insurgency in Vietnam. Two SEATO members, France and Pakistan, are cool towards U.S. efforts to combat aggression in South Vietnam. Suppose the Chi Coms invaded mainland Southeast Asia today. Would the United States respond immediately with nuclear strikes on China in order to defeat this aggression at its source? Or would the continuing constraints on the use of nuclear weapons cause our President to desire to attempt a conventional defense? If we did attempt a conventional defense, would it be the blood bath predicted by Mr. Fish? The American professional military officer is, by this new environment, challenged to develop and be ready to propose, should the need arise, an effective conventional defense strategy for mainland Southeast Asia. What follows

is an examination of salient facets of such a strategy, beginning with an analysis of Chi Com capability to launch such an invasion.

To conduct an invasion of Southeast Asia the Communist Chinese (Chi Coms) and their North Vietnamese (DRV), Viet Cong and Pathet Lao allies have at their disposal approximately 115 Chi Com divisions (half of which are fully equipped) and 7 DRV divisions, and on the order of 250,000 insurgents in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.* These ground elements are supported by air forces having approximately 2500 aircraft, mostly MIG 15 and 17 interceptors, and including approximately 350 transport aircraft. DRV and Chi Com naval forces include some amphibious lift, 28 submarines, 4 destroyers and several hundred patrol and mine warfare craft.

At first glance, it would appear that Mr. Fish's view is correct. The Chinese could pour hordes of soldiers into Southeast Asia. However, Communist China has a heavy requirement to protect its frontiers in Tibet, Sinkiang, Mongolia, Manchuria and opposite the Taiwan straits. Additionally, it must keep some Army divisions in reserve to insure internal security. Thus, about 40 Chi Com plus 7 DRV divisions could reasonably be expected to be available for an anabasis into mainland Southeast Asia. Although the Chi Coms can mobilize manpower for additional divisions, its capability to equip them is limited.

*All military strengths contained in this paper have been obtained from non-classified sources. Likewise the various military courses of action are the opinion of the author based on unclassified sources.

Providing logistics support for this forty to fifty division invasion force would be a prodigious, but not impossible task. That terrain in Southeast Asia which is not mountainous and jungle covered is generally swamps or ricefields. Roads and railroads are few and of limited capacity. The only railroads into the area from South China are the lines from Naning and Kunming into the Hanoi area. Even now these are under American air attack. The road net from Yunan into and within northern and eastern Laos has been under improvement by the Chi Com for a number of years. One press report in February 1966 indicated that Communist road builders were at work on this net only 18 miles east of Thakhek on the Thai-Laos border. Chi Com control of Laos and improvement of roads through it is an essential prerequisite for an invasion. In connection with this requirement, it is interesting to note that, since 1959, the Pathet Laos have seized all of eastern and most of northern Laos, including the critical mountain passes at Nape, Mugia and Tchepone.

A strong factor favoring Chi Com logistics operations in Southeast Asia is the direction of flow of the great rivers in the area; the Red through Hanoi and Haiphong, the Mekong, the Chao Phraya in Thailand, and the Salween and Irrawaddy in Burma. These rivers are the routes over which trade has traditionally moved in the area. They continue to carry much commercial traffic. These waterways are much less vulnerable to air interdiction than are

highway and railway nets except where locks are required on them as on the lower Chao Phraya.

Assuming that the invasion will last fifty to sixty days and that each division will consume up to 100 tons of supplies per day, Communist forces would have to stock about 300,000 to 400,000 tons of supplies in the DRV and northern and eastern Laos prior to their D-Day. At the rate of 250 truckloads per day, a very modest effort, this stock level could be built up in one year. To move these stockpiles of supplies forward into Thailand and South Vietnam during the invasion at a maximum rate of 500 tons per day the Communist would need approximately 4,000 trucks initially and 8,000 to 12,000 when their supply lines become fully extended. The Chi Coms have available those numbers of trucks. Thus, considering present disposition of Communist forces in Southeast Asia, their resources, and the logistics skill displayed by Asian Communist armies in World War II, Korea, and at Dien Bien Phu; Chi Com and DRV forces can be credited with being able to support up to 50 divisions attempting to invade Southeast Asia.

Opposed to the Communist forces; SEATO, including South Vietnam, has in the area over 19 divisions, special forces, numerous separate battalions, several hundred tactical fighters and light bombers, all supported by powerful elements of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The current U.S. buildup in Thailand and Vietnam has vastly enhanced SEATO capability to deploy reinforcements to the area because port and other transportation facilities have been greatly

improved and stockages of supplies in those countries increased. There are two significant logistics advantages which SEATO forces enjoy over Communist forces. They are command and use of the sea and a highly responsive intratheater airlift system. These advantages give SEATO forces a far greater strategic mobility than the Communist forces enjoy in the area.

With these general impressions of forces available and logistics capabilities, let us now look at the two broad courses of action open to the Chi Coms to seize control of mainland Southeast Asia by overt invasion. They are:

- a. Invade only Burma, possibly in conjunction with a coup d'etat there.
- b. Invade Laos, Thailand and South Vietnam simultaneously.

Communist China could gain more, at less cost, by invading Burma than by making an overt attack on any other country of mainland Southeast Asia. Seizure of Burma would give China oil, rice, metal ores and a good strategic position from which to launch later attacks on South and Southeast Asia. Failures elsewhere may some day tempt the Chi Coms to pick this Burmese plum. However, since the U.S. has no commitment to defend Burma, the defense of Burma will not be considered here.

As a prelude to examination of military aspects of a Chi Communist invasion of Thailand, Laos and South Vietnam; a survey of some political factors that may obtain on the Asian scene is in order.

Let us begin with a look at the probable response of some of our allies to this Communist attack.

South Korea can be expected to:

- a. Mobilize and thereby help pin down Chi Com forces in Manchuria.
- b. If asked, allow U.S. full use of Korean bases for air attacks on Chi Com mainland.
- c. Ask for additional modernization of Korean forces by the U.S.
- d. Leave its forces in Southeast Asia unless South Korea is actually attacked by North Korea.

Japan can be expected to:

- a. Have great difficulty deciding what to contribute to Southeast Asia defense effort, realizing that failure to participate in the defense of Southeast Asia will limit Japan's future role in Asia.
- b. Be plagued by mass internal disturbances inspired by left wing elements to force Japan into strict neutrality.
- c. Be very vulnerable to being blackmailed into neutrality by a Chi Com threat to launch a sneak nuclear attack against Japanese cities if Japan continues to support the U.S.
- d. Continue to supply materials for which payment is made in U.S. dollars.

Chi Nats can be expected to:

- a. Allow the U.S. full use of bases on Taiwan.

- b. Participate in conventional retaliatory air attack on China mainland.
- c. Encourage the U.S. to make nuclear strikes on China mainland.
- d. Participate in antisubmarine and other operations with the U.S. Navy.
- e. Offer ground troops for use in Southeast Asia.
- f. Request the U.S. to modernize its forces in return for Chi Nat support in Southeast Asia.
- g. Seek to develop the situation to allow Chi Nat return to the mainland.

The Filipinos, after much eloquent debate, can be expected to:

- a. Allow the U.S. to continue to use bases in the Philippines.
- b. Provide ground and other forces to SEATO as soon as the U.S. can equip them.

Australia, New Zealand and the U.K. will all contribute forces. Unfortunately, because our SEATO strategy has played down the requirement for ground forces, the initial contribution of these countries will be small.

In regard to other Asian nations, Indonesia will be neutral but will sell oil to SEATO forces. Malaysia will allow other Commonwealth countries to use its bases and take stringent measures to control its own left wing elements. Singapore will allow the U.K. continued use of its base there. Neither Pakistan nor France,

both SEATO members, will make any contribution of defense forces. Cambodia will attempt a neutral course, openly swinging to Chinese support if the tide of battle flows dramatically in favor of the Red Hordes.

The degree of support given by Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand to SEATO defense effort will have great political impact in the U.S. This will not be a popular war. If these other countries fail to mobilize and make their maximum capable contribution of forces, especially ground forces, to fight in Southeast Asia, any United States President will experience enormous difficulties in getting the domestic political support he will need to prosecute the war.

The great enigma on the power balance equation is Russia. If Russia stays out of the fight and Chi Coms lose, the Russian power position in the Communist world will be improved. If it provides arms and other supplies and China wins, it has been a party to strengthening the Chinese position. Russian aircraft and missiles will be needed by the Chi Coms to protect China from U.S. air attacks. The Russians can also help the Chi Coms by massing a sizeable naval force north of Japan to entertain the U.S. Pacific Fleet and keep it from applying its full power against China. The Russians, however, will make any move slowly, always chary of provoking escalation into general war. Conceivably, Russia could station fighter aircraft and missile units in China to assist in

air defense with minimal risk of provoking U.S. attack on the Soviet Union.

Going now to military considerations, the capital one for the Chi Coms is to decide when and for what purpose they should use their air force. They may use it primarily in air defense of China and North Vietnam, to attack SEATO air bases and naval forces, or in close support of ground forces. Since the invasion is certain to provoke a U.S. conventional, if not nuclear, retaliatory air bombardment against mainland China, the first and most pressing requirement is for air defense. The combined capability of our Pacific Fleet, SAC, and Pacific Air Forces to launch a conventional bombardment campaign against China is awesome. In economic terms, the U.S. could inflict, in a few weeks, millions of dollars of damage on the Chi Com industrial base painfully built up in the last two decades. A prime target for U.S. forces would naturally be Chi Com nuclear production facilities. Although this powerful conventional air campaign could not stop the flow of Chi Com men and supplies to the Southeast Asia front, the threat it poses to the Chi Com industrial base is today a major deterrent to Chi Com invasion. Air defense will therefore be the primary role of Chi Com air forces during an invasion of Southeast Asia. Chi Coms are not likely to provoke U.S. air attack on mainland China unless they are certain that they have a highly effective air defense system. The very poor showing of Communist jet fighters in air battles against U.S. aircraft in Korea, against the Chi Nats over the Taiwan Straits and of their

SAM units in North Vietnam; probably raise grave, healthy doubts in the minds of Chi Com strategists about the efficacy of their air defenses. The most probable employment of the Chi Com air forces is to attempt a Pearl Harbor type surprise attack on all U.S. air bases in Southeast Asia on aircraft carriers in range of their forces on D-Day. Following this attack, fighter forces will quickly be redeployed to air defense missions; and guerrilla attacks of far greater scale than any yet attempted will be used to neutralize SEATO air bases. This strategy will inflict significant damage on land based air power; but will leave the aircraft carriers unscathed, ready to launch retaliatory strikes on the China mainland.

The next critical decision for the Chi Coms to make is whether to attack during the dry or wet monsoon season. In the wet monsoon, weather will degrade effectiveness of SEATO air power and ground mobility. It will also degrade the capacity of the roads through Laos over which Chi Com forces must move 30 to 50 truckloads per day for every division that is to go as far south as Bangkok or Saigon. If the Chi Coms can provide logistics support of the invasion force by relying heavily on water transport, then it is to their advantage to attack in the wet season, generally April to October.

In the ground battle, Chi Com and DRV forces can place their main attack against South Vietnam with a secondary attack against Thailand. Or, they can opt to put the main attack on Thailand

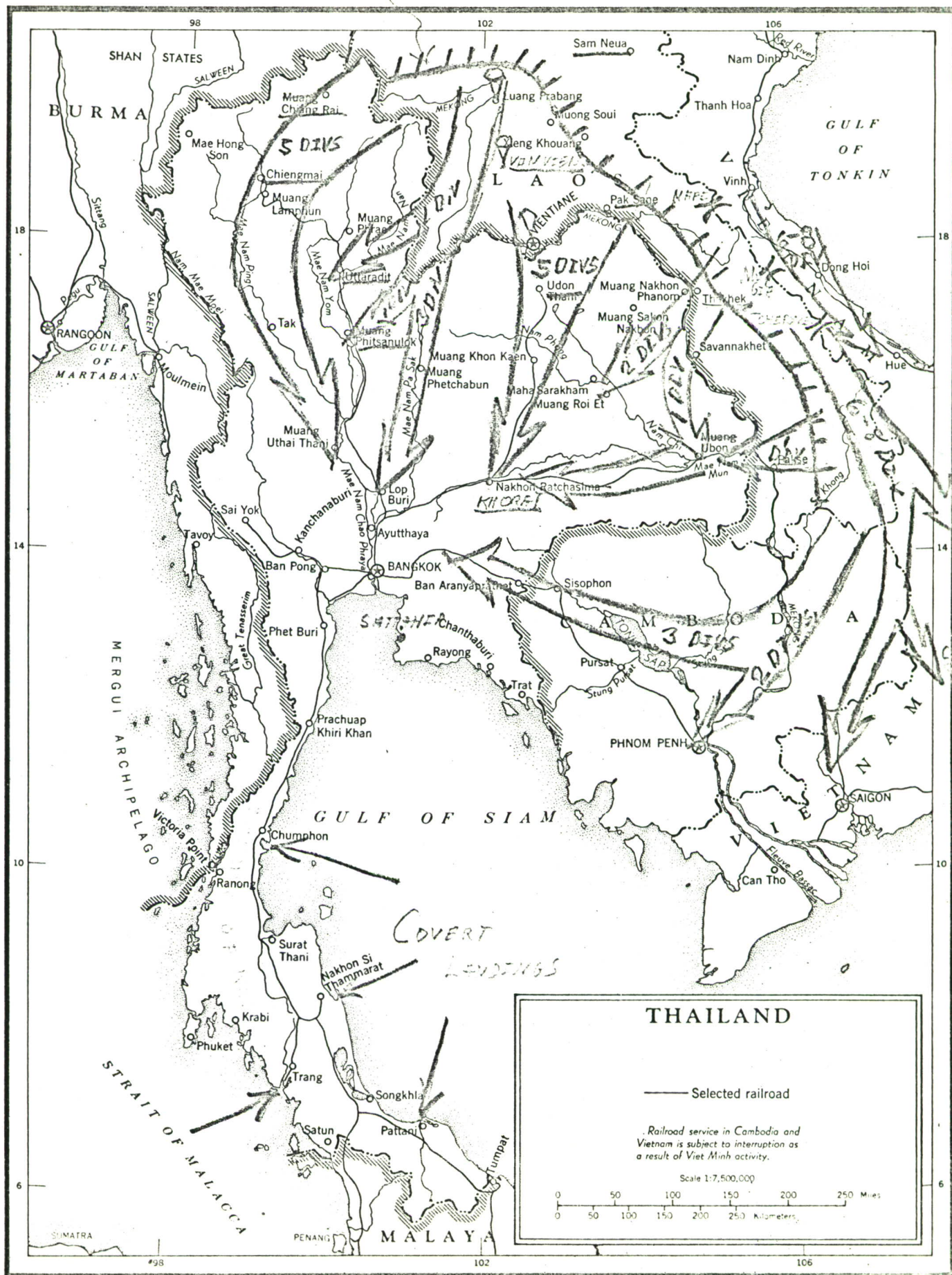
with the secondary attack on South Vietnam. The latter course appears more attractive because once Thailand is seized:

- a. All Chi Com and DRV forces can mass against SVN.
- b. Communist forces in SVN will have an excellent supply route by water down the Mekong.
- c. Chi Com air forces can deploy into old SEATO bases in Thailand and support the final attack on SVN.

The significant disadvantage of this course of action is that it allows the U.S. continued use of its beachheads in SVN to effect a buildup of its forces.

After a careful buildup of forces and supplies in eastern and northern Laos, which they now hold, and in North Vietnam, the Communists would seek to launch their attack with surprise and great violence across a broad front. (See Map.) In the very north of Thailand, about five divisions could move along the Chaing Rai-Chaing Mai axis, using every available road and jungle trail. Communist guerrillas in Thailand would render valuable service as guides here and elsewhere. Airborne elements could be dropped to seize Luangprabang, Van Vieng and Vientiane in Laos to clear quickly that axis of advance. Troop-carrying aircraft making these drops would have to contour-fly to their objectives to avoid detection by SEATO air defense radar. By a combination of foot, motor and boat movement, a five division force could move south from Luangprabang along the Mekong to seize Uttaradit and Phitsanulok and continue south toward Bangkok. These forces, like other Chi Com forces

Present trace of Communist held
area of LAOS.



would seek to isolate and destroy the Royal Thai Army in the first few days of battle.

Between Pak Sane and Vientiane in Laos, a five-division force could cross the Mekong to seize the SEATO air base at Udon and continue to Khorat. A total of three or four more divisions could move through Thakhek and Pakse to seize Ubon and its air base and assist in capture of Khorat and its air base. These forces would complete the seizure of Laos and crossing of the Mekong in one to five days. An important element of this main attack could be a force of up to three divisions going south on the Ho Chi Minh trail, then swinging west through Cambodia to Bangkok.

Speed would be the watchword of every Chi Com commander from sergeant to marshal. Whenever the lead Communist elements encounter resistance, following units would immediately move to the flanks to envelop or bypass the hostile force. Using their own trucks, captured vehicles, or trucks clandestinely procured by their agents in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, the Communist forces would make motorized dashes as often as possible. Local Communist sympathizers would have been alerted to provide rice, fuel and intelligence. Cadres moving closely behind the combat troops would quickly mobilize local labor and other resources.

A strong guerrilla capability developed in Thailand, but kept under wraps until this moment, could be used to launch widespread attacks on Thai military and civilian communications, paralyzing

them and causing dissipation of SEATO ground forces to rear area security missions.

Within the first ten days of the war, the Communists would expect to advance up to 200 miles into Thailand, destroy the bulk of the Thai ground forces, seize the major SEATO air bases at Chiang Mai, Udon, Ubon and possibly Khorat. With the Thai Army destroyed, they would expect to continue advancing with little opposition. Of the twenty divisions in the initial invasion of north Thailand and the Khorat plateau, as many as ten may be pinched out and go into reserve in place to ease the strain on the supply system and help build roads. That will leave ten to link up with the force in Cambodia and make the final assault to seize Bangkok. To support this final move on Bangkok, Communist supply points will have to have been displaced two to three times from their original locations in Laos. Again considering previous performance in Korea and currently in South Vietnam, the Communists can be expected to continue successful supply operations in spite of SEATO air interdiction of their supply routes.

The secondary attack into South Vietnam, with six to eight divisions driving on Hue, and two or three each marching on Qui Nhon, Camranh and Saigon, all supported by a maximum guerrilla warfare effort by the Viet Cong, would initially make considerable progress and prevent any sizeable movement of U.S. forces to help the hard-pressed Thais. Although it would capture much ground, it

is doubtful that this force would seize any major U.S. base by D+30.

After seizure of Bangkok, and with Thailand, Cambodia and Laos under their control, but not having reduced the SEATO beachheads in SVN, the Communists would then have two courses of action open to them. First, following their talk, fight, talk, fight philosophy, they could call for a truce. This move would be welcomed in many quarters of the world. The truce, if accepted by SEATO, could halt U.S. air attacks on the Chinese mainland and allow the Communists to consolidate their gains. Chi Com and DRV leaders would expect these truce talks to drag on for several years, a la Korea. The Communist alternative would be to mass forty to fifty divisions in South Vietnam, displace part of their air forces to Laos, Cambodia and Thailand and unleach all their combat power against SEATO beachheads, hoping to reduce them in ten to twenty days. The Communist air force would then be far more effective than it would have been at the start of the campaign when it would have been operating at the extreme limit of its fighters' range. However, their ability to use their air forces may be limited by the amount of fuel and ordnance they can ship to the forward air bases. Additionally, the Communists would have to have available substantial artillery, well supplied with ammunition for this final phase. The tonnage of supplies required per division per day in the final attack on the beachheads would at least triple what it had been in the early part of the campaign. Without

effective air and artillery support, just the reverse of the situation Mr. Hamilton Fish feared would occur. Communist infantry would be slaughtered by the massed air and artillery of SEATO forces defending their tight beachheads on the coast of South Vietnam. There is such an awareness amongst Chi Com officers of the possibility of such an Armageddon occurring, that official concern is expressed in the Chi Com press about officers who lack faith in Mao's doctrine of the invincibility of politically indoctrinated mass infantry against all comers.

Would the Communists be able to seize Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia as rapidly as the foregoing analysis seems to indicate they can? If so, would they then be able to mass 40 to 50 divisions to eliminate U.S. beachheads in South Vietnam? Other than their own logistics problems and SEATO air power, parameters limiting the Communist rate of advance are the strength and combat efficiency of the Royal Thai Army (RTA), SEATO ability to deploy ground force reinforcements into Thailand, SEATO guerrilla forces and tropical diseases. The Thai Army has only four divisions to defend their country against the invading force of 15 to 20 divisions. Even with the strongest air support, it would take highly trained, disciplined, skillfully led troops to conduct a retrograde operation lasting several weeks for distances up to 400 miles against those odds. The RTA is chronically understrength and seldom conducts field training exercises with units larger than battalions. Additionally, the RTA lacks adequate artillery. To

minimize effect of SEATO air power, the Communists will seek to attack at night. Thai infantry commanders will need strong artillery support to prevent piecemeal encirclement and destruction of their units in night operations. Generally speaking the RTA lacks the strength and combat efficiency required in the delay phase of the defense.

The SEATO reinforcement capability, however, markedly brightens the ground battle picture. Considering current dispositions of forces of SEATO members, and U.S. performance in deploying forces to South Vietnam, Santo Domingo and elsewhere, this tabulation is an estimate of SEATO reinforcement capability:

D+1 to D+5 days One U.S. Army brigade air lands
at Khorat and marries with equipment
stored there.

One U.S. Marine regimental landing
team of USPACOM reserve air and sea
lands in Bangkok area.

D+5 Lead elements of U.S. 82d and 101st
Abn Divisions and an Australian or
Commonwealth brigade commence arriving
by air.

D+10 U.S. Marine Division of PACOM reserve
closes in Bangkok.

D+10 (Cont)

Philippine brigade arrives by sealift.

Arrival of these SEATO reinforcements would increase Thai Army morale and effectiveness as well as make an immediate, direct contribution to the land battle. One interesting characteristic of Asian armies is that they fight much better when Americans fight beside them on the ground. By D+30 days, the total SEATO force in Thailand could include:

- 4 Divisions RTA

- 1 Thai Marine Regt

- 2 U.S. Army Airborne Divisions

- 1 U.S. Army Infantry Division

- 1 U.S. Marine Division

- 1 Philippine Division

- 1 Australian or Commonwealth Division

If political obstacles can be overcome, a minimum of one Chi Nat division could move in Chi Nat sealift and close in Thailand by D+30. With ground forces of this strength, SEATO forces could hold a sizeable lodgement in the Bangkok-Sattahip area.

Assuming at least partial mobilization occurs in the U.S., Philippines, Australia and New Zealand; during the period D plus 30 to D plus 120 days these additional substantial reinforcements of ground forces could be made:

- Four or five U.S. Infantry Divisions

- One Australian Division

One Philippine Division

Three Chi Nat Divisions

Thus, by D+120, SEATO and other friendly ground forces, including the South Vietnamese, would total approximately 35 divisions.

Port capabilities in Southeast Asia are capable of supporting a force of this size provided sufficient service troops are available to operate them. This buildup of ground power could be paralleled with a buildup in tactical air and sea power. However, loss of air bases in Vietnam and Thailand would force echelonment of tactical air forces to air bases in northern Malaysia, if Malaysia would permit SEATO use of its bases. Naval aviation could not be used to increase tactical air support in Thailand and Vietnam without weakening the strength of the air campaign against mainland China.

As Communist forces push SEATO elements into beachheads around Bangkok and the coast of Vietnam, other factors, beside the SEATO force buildup, will tend to show the momentum of the Communist offensive. The jungle which once had Pathet Lao and Viet Cong guerrillas will now conceal Laotian, Thai and South Vietnamese guerrillas. These guerrillas, plus stay behind troops, will force a major diversion of Red infantry strength to rear area security missions. Of even greater impact will be the diseases of the jungle. World War II experience indicates that tropical disease casualties (malaria, dysenteries, typhus, dengue, hepatitis, etc.) commonly run 90 to 100 percent in infantry units after several

months of jungle combat. Good hospitalization is needed to return these casualties to a duty status. The Communists will be hard pressed to provide this care or evacuate their casualties to China in a timely manner. Confronted with the certainty of contracting a debilitating tropical disease or being cut down by SEATO air and artillery fire power, Communist morale and combat efficiency will sag. The fate Mr. Fish predicted for American youths will fall upon the Red hordes. If Korean experience is a good indicator, once the hope of quick victory passes, numbers of Communist soldiers taken prisoner by SEATO forces will rise dramatically.

Sometime between two and six months after the start of the campaign; SEATO forces, holding beachheads in Vietnam and around Bangkok, will be in a posture which will allow them to launch a counter offensive. The SEATO mission in this phase should be to destroy Communist forces in Southeast Asia and reunite Vietnam. Failure to reunite Vietnam will leave a festering political situation in Southeast Asia which may pin down American forces and require the free countries in that area to maintain large defense forces for decades to come.

It will be appropriate for statesmen in the pause before the offensive, to exploit SEATO unity forged by the war and agree on the political organization of Southeast Asia when peace is restored. Political arrangements must be made which will enable the nations of that peninsula to live in harmony with one another and make the social and economic progress their peoples so ardently desire.

Whatever arrangements are made by the statesmen must be finalized early, for they will guide the conduct of civil affairs and military government operations as each village and province is liberated in the SEATO counteroffensive. Additionally, it will behoove the United States to have sizeable civil affairs units ready to go into the area to keep political activity moving in the proper direction.

The SEATO counteroffensive will not be a slow, footslogging operation. It will consist of simultaneous airborne and amphibious operations aimed at destroying Communist forces before they can withdraw into China, and at preventing continued reinforcement from China. An amphibious corps could land near Vinh or Haiphong in order to seize Hanoi and seal off the coastal routes from China into Southeast Asia. Independent division and larger airborne operations, such as rehearsed in maneuvers in the United States for a number of years, could be launched to seize key areas deep in the Communist rear. Chiang Mai and Khorat in Thailand, and Vientiane and Sam Neua in Laos are representative of communications centers which these airborne forces could seize to block reinforcement or withdrawal of major Communist units. Springing out from the airheads and beachheads, helicopter mobile brigades could conduct a series of shallower vertical envelopments to isolate and defeat in detail the Chi Com forces. Communist forces attempting to infiltrate back to Yunan or North Vietnam would, as the Japanese did in similar circumstances in WW II, die by the thousands of

starvation and disease in the jungle. The brilliant offensive of the British 14th Army into Burma in 1944 and 1945 is an example of the repeated tactical encirclements and reliance on air lines of communications which will characterize the SEATO counteroffensive.

This offensive phase of the campaign may last from three to six months. As it reaches its final phase a decision will have to be made as to when the air campaign against the China mainland will stop. The cessation of the air campaign may hinge upon the acknowledgement by the Chi Coms of the outcome of the campaign.

A defeat of this scale in Southeast Asia will have strong repercussions in China. The Communist control of China may be seriously shaken. Indeed, it will be prudent for SEATO, from the start of the war, to refrain from any guarantee of political sanctuary of Chinese Communists as we have done with North Korea and North Vietnam. This insecurity on the home front could force an early Chi Com withdrawal from Southeast Asia. If Chi Com control of the Chinese people is weakened, the Chi Nats will seek to exploit the weakness to return to the mainland. An alignment of other Asian countries; Japan, Vietnam, and South Korea, to help them may develop. Because of these unsettled political conditions, the United States must plan to maintain sizeable combat forces in Southeast Asia for two to five years after the expulsion of Communists from Southeast Asia as a minimum.

In conclusion, the professional soldier can say this about the prospects of a conventional defense of Southeast Asia:

It is feasible. It will not be the nightmare blood bath predicted by Mr. Fish. On the other hand, the professional soldier must advise that U.S. battle casualties will approximate those suffered in Korea. Disease casualties will be far greater, but fatalities from disease will be low.

The conventional defense of Southeast Asia could be made cheaper in blood and treasure in the long run if action were taken now to build up SEATO ground power. The first step in this direction is to get SEATO countries to recognize the need for a conventional, as well as nuclear, defense strategy option. Other SEATO members must clearly understand that the U.S. may not care to risk initiation of general nuclear war in an area where our national survival is not at stake. A force structure which would permit deployment of ground force divisions on this order of magnitude is desirable:

	<u>D to D+30 days</u>	<u>D+30 to D+90 days</u>
Thailand	7 Infantry 1 Airborne	2 Infantry
Philippines	1 Infantry 1 Airborne or Marine	4 Infantry
Australia	2 Infantry 1 Airborne	5 Infantry
New Zealand	1 Infantry	1 Infantry
Total	3 Airborne 11 Infantry	12 Infantry
Grand Total: 26 divisions		

Finally, an understanding ought to be reached among SEATO members on the conditions under which it may become desirable to ask the Chi Nats to assist in the defense of Southeast Asia.


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