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Source material used in this study is restricted insofar as possible to

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official U.S. government documents, a number of which were declassified at the author's request. The reader, provided with the same information available to American decisionmakers, should be in a good position to evaluate the judgment of key government leaders.

In support of the war, North Vietnamese developed a well-run military logistics system which achieved a high level of effectiveness in spite of formidable challenge s. Between 1964 and 1969 the system delivered over a half million troops and comparable quantities of munitions to South Vietnam. There is no evidence that logistics considerations seriously constrained the Hanoi high command in the implementation of particular military strategies.

The policymakers in Washington recognized the importance of the North Vietnamese Army's logistics system to the prosecution of the war in the South. However, U.S. policy consistently emphasized the demand that North Vietnam desist rather than pressing for the adoption of decisive measures to prevent Hanoi from supporting the war. This attempt at dissuasion was translated into military strategy. On the ground it became a war of attrition designed to make the cost in human life so dear that the adversary would cease his aggression. In the air, bombing was part of a "carrot and stick" approach intended to force Hanoi to negotiate on terms favorable to the United States. Even after authoritative studies reported that air interdiction had no effect on North Vietnam's ability to conduct the war in the South the bombing continued. The original ground and air strategies, although bankrupt, were retained. Increased in intensity and made more deadly by technological developments, U.S. military operations still failed either to prevent or dissuade Hanoi from supporting the war.

NORTH VIETNAM'S MILITARY LOGISTICS SYSTEM: ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WAR, 1961-1969

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

LANCE J. BURTON, LTC, USA
B.S.F.S., Georgetown University, 1960
M.A., University of London, 1973

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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Name of candidate LANCE J. BURTON

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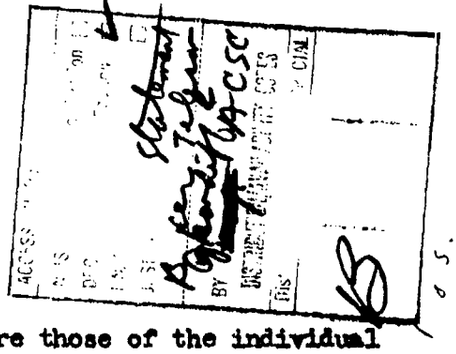

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ABSTRACT

Military logistics were extremely important to North Vietnam in the conduct of the Second Indochina War, especially during the period of major United States involvement from 1961 to 1969. This paper sought to determine the extent to which the Communist logistics system contributed to the war effort and answer in part the still puzzling question of why the U.S. armed forces, in spite of their ability to conduct a series of highly successful military campaigns, were unable to defeat a foe greatly inferior in numbers and technology.

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demand that North Vietnam desist rather than pressing for the adoption of decisive measures to prevent Hanoi from supporting the war. This attempt at dissuasion was translated into military strategy. On the ground it became a war of attrition designed to make the cost in human life so dear that the adversary would cease his aggression. In the air, bombing was part of a "carrot and stick" approach intended to force Hanoi to negotiate on terms favorable to the United States. Even after authoritative studies reported that air interdiction had no effect on North Vietnam's ability to conduct the war in the South the bombing continued. The original ground and air strategies, although bankrupt, were retained. Increased in intensity and made more deadly by technological developments, U.S. military operations still failed either to prevent or dissuade Hanoi from supporting the war.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Military logistics possessed tremendous importance for the North Vietnamese leaders during the Second Indochina War, from 1956 to 1975. Far greater emphasis was placed on this particular aspect of war-making than is generally acknowledged. How much did the North Vietnamese military logistics system contribute to Hanoi's prosecution of the war ? The primary purpose of this paper, insofar as available sources permit, is to answer this question, especially during the period of the major military involvement of the United States, from 1961 to 1969.

The prominent role the North Vietnamese accorded military logistics was evident in their defense organization. But the accent on logistics went beyond the immediate realm of the military. The Vietnamese Communist Party, the highest political authority within the state, had its own bureau which reviewed and made recommendations concerning military logistics. Further, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the nation's foremost military commander and strategist, consistently advocated an efficient logistics system as an essential ingredient of military success.

The senior military body within North Vietnam's Ministry of Defense was the High Command of the Armed Forces.[1] The High Command

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[1]The past tense is used since the period discussed preceded the 1975 reunification of Vietnam and the establishment of a single government in Hanoi for the entire country. It is likely, however, that the defense organization remains as it was.

consisted of three directorates, each of which reported separately to the Minister.[2] The General Political Directorate disseminated party doctrine, controlled the commissars assigned to military units, and had overall responsibility for the political reliability of the armed forces. The General Staff Directorate collected intelligence, supervised training, developed plans, and directed military operations. The third element, the General Logistics Directorate, had the task of logistical support for the armed forces operating throughout Indochina. Its responsibility embraced procurement, supply, and transportation. That this directorate was one of only three within the defense establishment illustrated the superior status to which logistics had been elevated. The tripartite High Command apparently assured the logistics director a coequal share with the political and general staff directors in developing and executing military decisions. In comparison with the United States and British senior defense staffs, Hanoi's organization not only was more streamlined, but also granted the director of logistics more weight in influencing strategic affairs.[3]

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[2]Harvey H. Smith and others, Area Handbook for North Vietnam (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 403-406. Also, U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "North Vietnam Personnel Infiltration into the Republic of Vietnam," Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam Study 70-05 (formerly Confidential), 1970, p. 2.

[3]The Joint Staff of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Organization has five directorates: Personnel, Operations, Logistics, Plans and Policy, and Communications-Electronics. In addition, the Defense Intelligence Agency functions as the Joint Staff's intelligence "directorate." See Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, Report to the President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970), pp. 36 and 45. The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence Military Central Staff is comprised of the equivalent of six directorates: Policy, Intelligence, Operations, Operational Requirements, Personnel and Logistics, and Signals. See "Higher Organisation for Defence" (unpublished text, National Defence College, Latimer, Buckinghamshire, England, 1973), p. 6.

Within the Vietnamese Communist Party structure, subordinate to the policy-making Central Committee, a General Logistics Department was established to oversee military logistics. Party influence was further buttressed by the apparent care taken in selecting individuals to lead the High Command's Logistics Directorate. In a politico-military system of this kind, the director had to have vigorous party affiliations, thereby assuring a close link between party and defense efforts aimed at logistical support of the fighting forces. This was of course true of Lieutenant General Dinh Duc Thien, whose tenure in the post of director began in the late 1960's. He was an alternate member of the Central Committee and a full member of the party's Central Military Committee.[4]

Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam's Minister of Defense since 1946, has continually stressed the importance of logistics on military operations in his strategic treatises. In describing his impressive victory over French forces at Dien Bien Phu, he pointed out that "a strong rear is always the decisive factor for victory in revolutionary war." The zeal with which Giap pushed home the point was visible in the "indeed" with which he introduced the assertion and the italicisation with which he made it stand out in the text.[5] His earlier campaigns had impressed him with the magnitude of the supply effort required for even comparatively small engagements. At the battle of Vinh Yen in 1951, for example, 180,000 porters carried supplies demanded by a relatively unsophisticated

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[4]"Gen. Giap addresses Military Transport Corps," Summary of World Broadcasts (Reading, Berkshire, England: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1975), 24 June 1975, p. FE/4937/B/7.

[5]General Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War People's Army (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), p. 184.

force of 20,000 troops. At Hoa Binh in the same year 150,000 porters were committed to supply 35,000 soldiers.[6] Giap's reputation for military operations has obscured the meticulous attention to logistics to which his successes in no small measure may be attributed.[7]

As noted earlier, this paper will endeavor to measure the contribution of the North Vietnamese logistics system to the military effort Hanoi directed at defeating American armed forces. Therefore, in terms of total war, this inquiry has a limited scope. It will ignore many aspects of the war. Political considerations, pacification programs, military operations, and similar activities will be addressed only to the extent that they bear on the military logistics of the Communist forces. Although the scope of the study is narrow, the expectation is that it will answer in part the still puzzling question of why the largest armed force in the world, in spite of its ability to conduct a series of highly successful military campaigns, was unable to defeat a foe greatly inferior in numbers and technology.[8]

Essentially, a historical research method is employed. The events associated with the subject are described as a preface to an analysis of the reasons for and implications of pertinent decisions. Statistical data are incorporated to support observations, and cause-

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[6]Major D. M. O. Miller, "Logistic Support in Revolutionary Warfare," British Army Review, April 1975, p. 9.

[7]Lieutenant Colonel John C. Levanger, "General Vo Nguyen Giap: The Vietnamese Napoleon ?" (unpublished research report, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 1973), pp. 32-33.

[8]The authoritative Institute for Strategic Studies reported that United States' forces in 1969 numbered 3,453,000 compared with 3,300,000 for the Soviet Union and 2,821,000 for the People's Republic of China. See The Military Balance (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1969), pp. 1, 5 and 39.

effect relationships between various incidents are discussed. Specific conclusions are then drawn from the evidence and the analysis.

Source material used in this study is restricted insofar as possible to official government documents. Many of these originally bore a security caveat but have been declassified at the author's request. The author is grateful for the cooperation by which pertinent material became available for this paper.[9] There are a number of reasons for a range of documentation which may seem restrictive. Little reliable factual data have as yet become available from North Vietnam, although there are a few biographies and strategic studies and, of course, Hanoi radio broadcasts which were primarily propagandistic in purpose. Hence, in gathering the necessary evidence, the author has relied largely on official U.S. government studies. These were prepared for the most part under the auspices of the Department of Defense. Although such studies may contain debatable conclusions, the information appears accurate. Captured secret North Vietnamese and Viet Cong documents, as well as interrogation reports of prisoners of war, were the source of much of the information. It therefore possesses a sufficient degree of authenticity. Thus the paper will expose readers to information, which, for national security reasons, was not heretofore available to the general public. As it was the same information available to civilian and military decision-makers, the readers should be in a position to evaluate, with a greater measure of fairness, the judgment of key government leaders.

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[9]The original U.S. government security classification assigned to each declassified document cited in this paper is noted parenthetically in appropriate footnotes.

This documentation is supplemented with extracts from the Government's official and unclassified version of the "Pentagon Papers," a name the media has popularized for a study with the colorless title of United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967. This Department of Defense study has limitations in that it is not a documentary history but rather "a history based solely on documents."[10] The compilers were denied the opportunity to interview the personalities involved and consequently were handicapped not only in ascertaining who had seen which documents but also in appraising their importance and relevance. Even the compilers' access to documentation was incomplete. White House files were beyond the range of their examination, and only some State Department memoranda and cables were put in their hands. As a result, "distortions," the authors say, "sure abound in these studies."[11] The "Pentagon Papers," nevertheless, are a valuable source because they record information that otherwise would have remained inaccessible.

"Hanoi's Approach," the first chapter dealing with the paper's substance, describes how the North Vietnamese regime formulated its policies and the military strategies it adopted. Expanding requirements for men and material to complement ambitious military plans is the premise for the transition to a detailed explanation of the military logistics systems. The remainder of the chapter dwells on techniques used to infiltrate personnel and to transport munitions, and concludes with a summary of the logistical accomplishments over the years from

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[10] U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. (ix).

[11] Ibid.

1964 to 1969.

"Washington's Approach," the succeeding chapter, commences similarly with an explanation of how policy was made and translated into military strategy. This leads to an examination of the extent to which various strategies were intended to cope with the American perception of the North Vietnamese logistics system. Ground, naval and air interdiction programs are thereafter described.

The last chapter, "Washington's Approach Analyzed," records the results of interdiction. These are then measured against the impact or North Vietnam's logistics capacity on the conduct of the war. The study concludes with an assessment of the U.S. effort projected from an analysis of the evidence.

CHAPTER II

HANOI'S APPROACH

Military logistics had an essential role in whatever strategic plan the North Vietnamese fashioned to reunify Vietnam -- the primary national political goal. Hence, in their eyes, logistics possessed major importance in forwarding their military strategy in all the stages through which it progressed over the ten years from 1959 to 1969. Formulation of governing strategic concepts, often in response to United States military success, was the work of the North Vietnamese leaders in their roles as chiefs of the Communist party organization, heads of government departments, and commanders of military forces. Undoubtedly the party leadership which they exercised was the source of their power, both political and military. In any event their strategies were devised to fulfill political decisions as they confronted the altering circumstances of the Second Indochina War.

Policy Formulation

Under the 1960 Constitution, the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, although answerable to the National Assembly, had extensive powers.[1] He appointed all the members of the Council of Ministers, which served as his cabinet, and directed their work. The

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[1]Though commonly referred to as North Vietnam, the official title is the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the establishment of the "Democratic Republic" on 2 September 1945. Harvey Smith and others, Area Handbook for North Vietnam (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 166.

The Premier was merely the senior member of the Council which included five Deputy Premiers and some two dozen other persons heading various ministries, agencies, and commissions. A smaller, select executive body, the National Defense Council, was directly responsible for national security matters. The permanent members of the Defense Council were the President, Premier, Defense Minister, head of the national intelligence organization, ministers of public safety and heavy industry, and principal directors of the High Command of the Armed Forces. The National Assembly was a phantom body which met twice a year in brief sessions. Its only function was to approve decisions already adopted elsewhere. Day-to-day Assembly duties were conducted by the Standing Committee, a permanent body exercising "legislative" functions.[2]

In common with other Communist states, the governmental structure did not reveal where political power resided. Rather it diagramed in effect the administrative machinery by which party decisions were implemented. The Vietnam Workers' Party directed and controlled the government through a parallel structure of organizations operating from the highest to lowest level of administration.[3] At the apex of the party organization was the Political Bureau composed of ten full, and two alternate members.

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[2]Smith, Area Handbook for North Vietnam, pp. 165-172.

[3]The Vietnam Workers' Party, VWP (Viet Nam Dang Lao Dong), is a direct descendent of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) founded in 1930 by Ho Chi Minh. Although the dissolution of the ICP was announced in 1946 it continued to exist until 1951 when a Party Congress created its successor, the VWP. See Michael C. Conley, The Communist Insurgent Infrastructure in South Vietnam: A Study of Organization and Strategy (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 3-7.

The Party Central Committee, which in 1960 numbered 71 members, was immediately subordinate to the Political Bureau. The Central Military Committee was an arm of the Central Committee concerned with defense affairs. The multiple occupations of a few members of the Political Bureau illustrated how the parallel party-government structure operated.[4] Ho Chi Minh demonstrated the thesis beyond doubt. He founded the party in 1930 and served as its Chairman for the rest of his life. He was President of the Democratic Republic from its birth in 1945 till his death in 1969. By holding these two positions he dominated the party's Political Bureau, was Chairman of the Central Committee and its Military Committee, and Chairman of the Government's Council of Ministers and the Defense Council. All in all, he held seven ranking offices. Another member of the Political Bureau, Truong Chinh, was Secretary-General of the Party from 1941 until 1956 and Chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee from its conception. Other Political Bureau members held dual positions in the party, government, and military forces. Pham Van Dong, Premier since 1956, was Vice Chairman of the Defense Council. General Vo Nguyen Giap was Minister of Defense from 1946 and a Vice Chairman of the Defense Council. Nguyen Duy Trinh, the Foreign Minister, and Tran Quoc Hoan, Minister of Public Security, were members of the Defense Council as were Generals Nguyen Chi Thanh and Van Tien Dung, respectively heads of the High Command's Political and General Staff Directorates.[5]

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[4] P.J. Honey, Communism in North Vietnam (London: Ampersand, 1965), p. 32 and Smith, Area Handbook for North Vietnam, pp. 183-188.

[5] Ibid., Honey, pp. 35-36 and Smith, pp. 186-188.

In the absence of documentation on how policies were programed, strategies shaped, and decisions carried into action, the most reasonable supposition is that the party's Political Bureau was the fount of direction and guidance. One of the Central Committee's standing committees (the Military Committee is the prime example) would then take under consideration whatever had been proposed or questioned. Perhaps parameters were specified and options outlined. The standing committee's staff would examine, forecast the ramifications of different courses of action as well as estimate the resources required by the proposed action. The study would then circulate for review to the entire Central Committee which would forward its recommendation to the Political Bureau. It inturn would come to its decision at a plenary session and instruct the Central Committee to commence necessary party action. If the issue was a military one, the National Defense Council, composed almost exclusively of Political Bureau members, would determine on the government front the steps to be taken, prescribe the necessary orders, and issue them to the respective government departments, presumably in the name of the Council of Ministers. It, of course, would have had the opportunity to agree formally with the decision. Measures aimed at the decision's execution could very well have been put in train even earlier since Political Bureau members who also headed ministries would have known immediately when a decision had been reached. Of course, if a Political Bureau member dissented from the majority, he might endeavor in his government office to delay, modify, or even ignore instructions. In such a situation the party would face and accept the necessity of circumventing

or removing the obstruction.[6]

The decision to reunite Vietnam was never a point of contention, although there were varying views on the timing and means. The Constitution contained the declaration that "our people must carry on the struggle for...completion of the tasks of the national people's democratic revolution throughout the country" and establish "a stable and strong North Vietnam as a basis for the struggle for the peaceful reunification of the country."[7] National reunification was also one of the stated purposes listed in the Vietnam Workers' Party constitution.[8] "Our nation is one, our country is one. Our people will undoubtedly overcome all difficulties, achieve national reunification and bring the North and the South together again."[9] This typified Ho Chi Minh's repeated calls for reunification. The theme echoed in General Vo Nguyen Giap's "reunification is the profound aspiration of every Vietnamese; Vietnam has ever been one and indivisible."[10] To Premier Pham Van Dong the national goal was to "build a peaceful, reunified,

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[6]This could explain the disappearance from public view of certain Political Bureau members. One authority suggests that such may have been the case in 1957 when little was heard of General Vo Nguyen Giap. See Robert J. O'Neill, General Giap: Politician and Strategist (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 179-180.

[7]Smith, Area Handbook for North Vietnam, pp. 65 and 167. Emphasis added.

[8]Conley, The Communist Insurgent Infrastructure in South Vietnam, p. 239.

[9]U.S., Department of State, A Threat to the Peace, North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam, Part II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 3.

[10]General Vo Nguyen Giap, The South Vietnam People Will Win (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965), p. 50.

independent, democratic and prosperous Vietnam."[11] In almost the same phrases Truong Chinh wrote that the national aim was "to build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, rich and strong Viet-Nam."[12]

North Vietnam's quest for reunification originated in the Geneva Agreements of 1954 which ended the First Indochina War. The nationalist Vietnamese forces (Viet Minh), led and controlled by the Vietnam Workers' Party, decisively beat the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May of that year. After this ignominious military defeat France desired to extricate herself from Indochina and terminate the eight-year war there. A series of cease-fire agreements took the place of a formal treaty. One of the principal compacts, "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities," stipulated that Viet Minh forces would regroup north of the 17th parallel and French forces south of the line, accorded the people freedom to settle in either zone at their preference, and established an International Control Commission (ICC) to observe and report on the execution of the agreements. A further stipulation, ultimately the source of controversy, provided that the people would eventually decide on unification through a general election. This last point was re-emphasized in an unsigned "Final Declaration" which called for elections under ICC supervision within two years. After the ceasefire the government in the north was occupied in consolidating control and socializing the economy. The economic situation was aggravated by the decision of the

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[11] Against U.S. Aggression (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965), p. 29.

[12] Department of State, A Threat to the Peace, p. 5.

southern regime to close the mutual border to trade. Northern Vietnam was not sulf-sufficient in food and traditionally relied on rice from the fertile Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam. Despite the trade barrier North Vietnam managed to cope, buoyed perhaps by the expectation that the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in Saigon would collapse. Moreover, the North was confident that its difficulties would be resolved by the outcome of the elections. Hanoi was sure to win; the ceasefire division had given the North a majority of nearly 2 million people. The southern electorate, in any event, was splintered into a number of competing political, ethnic, and religious groups unable to form a united opposition.[13] Unfortunately for the North, Diem was not prepared to give up his position. He retained power and even enlarged his control. Formal notes from the government in Hanoi, in June 1955, May 1956, and July 1957, proposing negotiations to arrange for a general election were rejected by the recipients in Saigon.[14] Communist disappointment with the Geneva Agreements became apparent in 1957. The unfulfilled election provisions of the agreements denied the Political Bureau the full fruits of the struggle which reached a climax in the military victory over the French. The Political Bureau decided it would turn once again to military force to achieve the political goal of reunification.

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[13] Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 202-203 and 223. Prominent among the sects were the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen. For additional information see Duncanson, and Frances FitzGerlad, Fire in the Lake (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972),

[14] The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960), pp. 129-130.

Military Strategies

North Vietnam's theory of war had its roots in the writings of Mao Tse-Tung. According to Mao, revolutionary warfare has three distinct stages: organization, expansion, and mobile warfare.[15] In the initial stage the party organizes surreptitiously and employs terror to expand its control of people, intimidating the unwilling and discrediting the competence of the governing force to protect them. Once an underground organization has been created, the party moves to the second stage of expanding its control and begins to challenge government military forces directly. In this phase guerrilla forces are enlarged and upgraded with better weapons to attack isolated government garrisons. The concluding, decisive stage is reached when the party judges that its military strength matches the government's military might. A major offensive campaign is initiated in which the revolutionary forces, now organized on conventional lines, challenge the opposing forces in set-piece engagements and endeavor to beat them. This leads to the collpase of the government and the ensuing transfer of authority to the party and its revolutionary movement.[16]

The Vietnamese Communists adopted Mao's concept, modifying it to conform with their history and philosophy. Political Bureau member

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[15] Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), pp. 208-213. Also, for an interesting study of Mao's theory and its application to Indochina, see William Staudermaier, "Vietnam: Mao vs. Clausewitz," (unpublished study project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 1976), especially pp. 46-59.

[16] Ibid., and Robert Thompson, Revolutionary War in World Strategy, 1945-1969 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970), pp. 4-13.

Truong Chinh, a long-time admirer of Mao, explained his theory of what he called "resistance war" in a book published in 1947. His plan for defeating the French called for a "long resistance" which "will pass through three stages." He labeled the first "the stage of contention." Overall it was defensive in nature, but the tactics demanded repeated attacks. The successive "stage of equilibrium," though a long and difficult period, was the key phase. It too required frequent assaults, but was essentially defensive. Stiffened resistance assured security necessary to the buildup of the armed forces in preparation for the final stage. "The stage of the general counter-offensive" was the culmination in which "troops concentrate rapidly and actively launch planned lightning attacks on the cities and the enemy positions to encircle and annihilate them."[17]

Some years later General Vo Nguyen Giap, describing how the French were defeated, repeated Truong Chinh's three stages of what he called a "people's war" of "long-term resistance."[18] In a later book Giap added to the third stage the unique Vietnamese element of khoi nghai or "general uprising." This had a basis in Vietnamese history, but more significantly, according to Giap, it was the mass uprising of the people in August 1945 which contributed to the success of the military campaign leading to the establishment of the Democratic Republic.[19]

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[17]Truong Chinh, The Resistance Will Win (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960), p. 78 and all of Chapter X, pp. 70-79.

[18]General Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War People's Army (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), p. 29. No credit is given to Truong Chinh for first publishing the theory in Vietnam.

[19]General Vo Nguyen Giap, Banner of People's War, the Party's Military Line (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 70.

The theory of "People's War" stretching over a long period of time formed the basis of North Vietnam's military strategies during the Second Indochina War. But it would be an oversimplification to believe that a single strategic plan adhered rigidly to this three-stage doctrine with its precise phases. Rather the theory only furnished guidance in developing a series of strategies which for the most part were in reaction to plans which the United States and South Vietnam formulated and pursued. Giap himself stressed that it is but a theory which must be adapted to the circumstances when he stated:

> A war of this nature in general entails several phases; in principle, starting from a stage of contention, it goes through a period of equilibirum before arriving at a general counter-offensive. In effect, the way in which it is carried on can be more subtle and more complex, depending on the particular conditions obtaining on both sides during the course of operations.[20]

This paper identifies four distinct military strategies adopted by North Vietnam between 1959 and 1969. For ease of identification they have been arbitrarily labeled as follows: "People's War" (1959), "Reunification Campaign" (1964), "General Offensive" (1968), and "Protracted War" (1969). Each will be examined to see why they were implemented, what they consisted of and were expected to achieve, and, with special pertinence to this study, the manner in which the North Vietnamese military logistics system was required to support them.

People's War, 1959

Under the provisions of the Geneva Accords the belligerents were obliged to "regroup" their forces in the two respective zones.

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[20] Giap, People's War People's Army, p. 29. Emphasis added.

Accordingly, an estimated 90,000 Viet Minh military personnel travelled north of the 17th parallel.[21] Most of the Viet Minh political and administrative personnel, however, remained in the South, where President Diem, recognizing the Communist Viet Minh threat to his regime, moved to suppress them. His repression policy did not discriminate between Communist and non-Communist. Consequently, in addition to party members, others who were no longer loyal to the Viet Minh were harassed, arrested, and even executed. Though indiscriminate, the anti-Viet Minh campaign eliminated many key Communists thereby weakening the residual organization. Those who escaped detection went underground to rebuild the damanged network. New bases were established by the Communists in former Viet Minh secure areas -- for example, the U Minh forest and the Plain of Reeds in the Delta and War Zones C and D north of Saigon.[22] Although the Communists in North Vietnam were still occupied in consolidating control there, the plight of the movement in the South and the goal of reunification could not be ignored for long.

The Political Bureau's decision on what should be done was revealed in May 1959 following the 15th formal session of the party's Central Committee which was assembled to "review the developments in the struggle for national reunification." The communique issued at

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[21] Frances FitzGerald, Fire in the Lake (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 146 and 453. This is the official U.S. government estimate. Some writers say 80,000, others 100,000.

[22] Details concerning the Viet Minh during this period are contained in a study prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense. All the evidence presented is derived from interviews with 23 Viet Minh leaders. See J. J. Zasloff, Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960: The Role of the Southern Vietminh Cadres, RM-5163/2-ISA/ARPA (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1968).

the conclusion of the meeting went on to state that:

> The session expressed its unshakable belief that our whole people, uniting and struggling heroically and perseveringly, will certainly smash the U.S. imperialists' scheme to seize our land.... On the basis of the consolidation of North Vietnam and its steady development in all fields, of the broad and powerful development of the patriotic movement in the South, and with the approval and support of the peace loving people all over the world, our struggle for national reunification will certainly be successful.[23]

On 14 May 1959 a Radio Hanoi English language broadcast commenting on the communique sharpened the focus saying that the North would be "the firm base for the revolutionary struggle in the South."[24] "People's War" in effect was declared, switching the character of the conflict from a purely political struggle to a blend of political and military means. Arms would now be employed to bring down Diem. While he remained in power, the party in the South would be outlawed and persecuted, blocking any chance of peaceful reunification.

The few forces located in the South would be augmented.[25] The

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[23]U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971). This is the declassified version of the 1968 Department of Defense top secret study popularly known as the "Pentagon Papers." It consists of about 7,000 pages organized into five parts containing a total of 43 volumes. For convenience, the Government Printing Office arranged the study into 12 "books" of equal size. Since the pages are numbered in sequence in each of many segments, footnotes must indicate the Book, Part, Section and any Subsection, Volume, Annex, Tab etc. Accordingly, this quotation is from Book 2, Part IV, Section A, Subsection 5, Tab 3, pp. 58-59. Emphasis added.

[24]Ibid., p. 59. Emphasis added.

[25]The U.S. Government's "National Intelligence Estimate 63-59," dated 26 May 1959, estimated that there were only 2,000 full time Communist troops in South Vietnam. See "Pentagon Papers," Book 2, Part IV, Section A, Subsection 5, Tab 4, p. 25.

manpower would largely be drawn from the pool of 90,000 Viet Minh soldiers who marched north in the regroupment of 1954 and 1955. In 1959 the first large scale movement began. By the end of 1960 at least 4,500 troops had been sent to South Vietnam.[26] At this time only two infiltration routes were available: one by land, the other by sea. The land route crossed the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two states and then coursed its way further south through the central highlands in the west. The sea route was limited to transporting men to one small segment of South Vietnam's vast coastline. Less than 250 miles south of the DMZ in Quang Ngai province there were suitable landing beaches where local Communist inhabitants offered a secure reception area.[27]

Neither route could support the new strategy. Moreover, the deployment along the DMZ of additional South Vietnamese units, as they were raised, dictated the necessity for another and safer channel by which to reach South Vietnam. The growing South Vietnamese maritime force had a similar impact on the sea passage. The new route, in addition, had to be large enough to accommodate thousands of former Viet Minh soldiers being dispatched from the North to meet the demands of the armed struggle.

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[26] U.S., Department of State, Aggression from the North: The Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam, Department of State Publication 7839 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965), p. 3. According to the "Pentagon Papers," Book 2, Part IV, Section A, Subsection 5, Tab 3, p. 36, the figure of 4,556 infiltrators was confirmed on the basis of direct information from a minimum of two persons, returnees or captured documents.

[27] R. William Rae, Viet Cong Force Projections: Manpower and Weapons (formerly Confidential) (McLean, Virgina: Research Analysis Corporation, 1967), p. 26. Hereafter cited as RAC Technical Paper TP-251.

To support "People's War" the High Command's Logistics Directorate was given the task of establishing and maintianing clandestine routes over which large numbers of personnel could move safely to South Vietnam. The natural location of the new land route was through southeastern Laos -- in effect a covert way skirting the hazardous DMZ and opening an almost unlimited number of entry points into virtually uninhabited areas of South Vietnam. Infiltration by sea could continue, but operations would have to be planned and coordinated better to preclude detection. To accomplish its new assignment the Logistics Directorate created the 559th Transportation Group on 5 May 1959.[28] The 70th Transportation Battalion, a unit of the 559th Group, was formed and sent to southern Laos to begin the construction of the corridor which would later enter history as the "Ho Chi Minh Trail." By December 1959, the 603rd Transportation Battalion was in operation; its function: to improve maritime infiltration.[29]

For the first few years the effort was directed almost exclusively at moving personnel into South Vietnam, increasing the number of full-time Communist regular units there. These became known as "Viet Cong

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[28]The obvious, but unstated, source of the Group's designation was the date of its establishment: 5/5/59. Creation of this unit over a week before the conclusion of the Central Committee's 15th Session supports the author's earlier assertion that Political Bureau members could order decisions carried out by the government department which they controlled prior to formal ratification by the party's Central Committee or approval by the Council of Ministers or its subordinate body, the National Defense Council.

[29]"Pentagon Papers," Book 2, Part IV, Section A, Subsection 5, Tab 3, p. 35.

Main Force" units.[30] Troops entering South Vietnam came equipped with modern weapons manufactured mainly in Communist China, the Soviet Union, and some of the Eastern European countries. As an example, a 650-man group, which infiltrated in 1962, carried with it eight mortars, five machine guns, 166 submachine guns, automatic rifles, and carbines.[31] The direct shipment of weapons, ammunition, equipment, and supplies began in 1960, but did not rise to significant tonnages till 1964. Considerable reliance, especially for ammunition, was placed on local manufacture and pillaging munitions from South Vietnamese forces.

The North Vietnamese Army expanded its logistics apparatus over the years from 1959 to 1963, improving the paths, roads, way-stations, camps, and base areas which comprised the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex. Additional transportation units came into being to operate the system, facilitating the increased flow of men and materiel. Analysis of the critical developments in 1963, however, led the Political Bureau to reconsider their strategy for conducting the war. The outcome of these deliberations was a new strategy which required direct North Vietnamese involvement and intensified the armed struggle.

Reunification Campaign, 1964

The critical events of 1963 which altered North Vietnam's military strategy can be categorized as external and internal, or better, the "enemy situation" and the "friendly situation."

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[30]"Viet Cong" was a contraction of Viet Nam Cong San which meant Vietnamese Communist; "Main Force" distinguished the troops from local forces. Giap described the forces in the South as militia, guerrilla, local, and regular forces. See General Vo Nguyen Giap, The South Vietnam People Will Win (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1965), p. 56

[31]RAC Technical Paper TP-251, pp. 26-27

The principal developments on the "enemy" side concerned United States' strategy. Hanoi observed the ever increasing commitment to Diem. The provisions of the "Counter Insurgency Plan" which President Kennedy approved in 1961 was the basis of American strategy for the next few years. Essentially, the plan expanded the South Vietnamese armed forces, outfitted them with equipment, and furnished advisers to train them. Training and advice concentrated on counter-insurgency skills and techniques.[32] The declarations of U.S. statesmen and a generous foreign aid program pointed up American commitment to the continued division of Vietnam. But perhaps the strongest indicator of increasing U.S. support was the growing number of American military advisers:

Advisers Authorized[33]

June	1959	335
April	1961	685
June	1962	3,401
June	1963	3,510

General Giap described U.S. strategy during the span of 1961-63 as "special war." The "special" presumably was derived from both the "special" nature of counter-insurgent warfare and the employment of American "Special Forces." At the time he was trying to frustrate the attainment of United States - South Vietnamese goals, thereby discrediting the strategy. Despite intensified military action, neither side, however, could claim significant gains. Giap observed that since

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[32]"Pentagon Papers," Book 2, Part IV, Section B, Subsection 1, p. 9.

[33]Ibid., Book 3, Part IV, Section B, Subsection 3, Appendix I, p. 125.

the outcome was indecisive the U.S. was preparing a "new strategic plan" which he described as "the Johnson-McNamara plan, aimed at 'pacifying' the South during 1964-1965." To him "this new plan" did "not basically differ from [its predecessor] the bankrupt Staley-Taylor Plan."[34] He too apparently needed a new strategic plan.

The other development on the "enemy" side was a shocking one. North Vietnamese strategy was directed at bringing down President Diem. In their eyes, he was the primary obstruction to "peaceful reunification." Without him, so they believed, the government would collapse and could be replaced with a coalition of Communist, progressive, and neutralist factions desiring reunification. On 1 November 1963 the long-awaited event happened. Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown and assassinated in a military coup d'etat. But there was no rising of the people demanding a new government with Communist representation. The ruling junta announced its intention to continue to fight the Viet Cong. Even though ensuing coups and counter-coups may have engendered hope in Hanoi, the growing American military presence and increased economic aid erased the expectation that a regime sympathetic to Communism would emerge. Hanoi became increasingly aware that it had been shooting at the wrong target -- that, in fact, the American commitment rather than the Saigon government had to be destroyed. This, in any event, would be the objective of Giap's new strategy.

In 1963 the "friendly situation" was not encouraging either.

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[34] Russell Stetler (ed.), The Military Art of People's War, Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 196 and 190-195.

The need for manpower and adequate weaponry for the Viet Cong forces was becoming troublesome. Until 1963 the majority of combat personnel sent to South Vietnam were ethnic southerners who had regrouped in the northern zone eight or so years earlier. The supply of physically fit "regroupees" was being so rapidly exhausted that no more would be available by the end of 1964. Native northerners, both conscripts and serving North Vietnamese soldiers, were gradually taking their places. A Viet Cong document detailing personnel strengths in Quang Tri province (South Vietnam) illustrated the problem with these figures:

Type of Personnel[35]	Percentages		
	1961	1962	1963
Conscripts from North Vietnam	--	5	50
North Vietnamese Army soldiers	1	5	20
Returnees from regroupment	99	90	30

Northerners would increasingly preponderate in the fighting forces in the South. A strategy calling for intensification of military activity would have to take this factor into consideration.

Weaponry presented a similar situation. The classic concept of guerrilla warfare visualizes the guerrilla capturing the weapons required to fight. In spite of sketchy evidence, the Viet Cong apparently were capturing many more weapons than they were losing up to 1963. The ratio was in excess of seven to one according to one study. During the closing months of 1963 the ratio fell to two to one.[36] Although it was likely (and subsequently demonstrated) that the ratio would again swing markedly in favor of the Communists, the decline must have influenced the military strategists in Hanoi. More important, however, was the indisputable fact

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[35] RAC Technical Paper TP-251, p. 14.

[36] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

that if additional forces were sent South to offset the increase in U.S. effort, more weapons would have to be provided. By this time the North Vietnamese soldier was equipped largely with a standard 7.62mm family of carbine, either the Soviet AK-47 Assault Rifle (Chinese Communist Type 56) or the Soviet SKS Semiautomatic Carbine (Chinese Communist Type 56).[37] If a new plan called for use of North Vietnamese troops they would have to be continously supplied with the compatible ammunition. Despite the additional logistics requirements, a new strategy was adopted.

It marked the progression to stage two of the theory of "Resistance War" — the "stage of equilibrium." This was the phase in which the theorists had prescribed the combination of even more frequent attacks and the simultaneous buildup in safe areas of the forces required for the final stage. The goal was to defeat the U.S.'s "special war." The way to accomplish this was to direct military efforts primarily against the South Vietnamese forces which the "special war" strategy was designed to bolster. By striking quickly Hanoi could capitalize on the debilitating effects of the chaotic political situation on the South Vietnamese army in the field.

To execute the strategy, however, more men and improved weaponry were required. Northern conscripts could no longer replace the depleted "regroupees." Well trained troops were required to assure swift striking power. This meant the deployment of regular North Vietnamese

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[37]For details see, U.S., Department of the Army, Weapons and Equipment Recognition Guide, Southeast Asia, Pamphlet No. 381-10 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966), pp. 7 and 37.

army units in South Vietnam to spearhead attacks wherever the Viet Cong forces were weak. Northern conscripts would provide the replacements for both categories of forces. To retain the image of a "People's War" fought solely by southerners there was little mention of the change. Increased North Vietnamese involvement, however, was evident in a VWP Central Committee directive of April 1964 which ordered party members and others in the North to "increase their sense of responsibility in regard to the South Vietnam revolution by giving positive and practical support to South Vietnam in every field."[38]

In the same month that the directive was issued the 95th Regiment of the 325th North Vietnamese Army Division was ordered to accelerate training preparatory to deployment to the South. It began to move in October, reached South Vietnam in December 1964, and went into action the following February. The 32nd Regiment started in September and arrived in Pleiku province in January 1965. Another element of the 325th Division, the 101st Regiment entered Kontum province in February 1965, and the third regiment of the division, the 18th, appeared in Binh Dinh province in April. After a brief summer pause the flow was resumed with the arrival of the 33rd, 66th and 250th Regiments in October 1965 and the 6th Regiment a month later.[39] In all, eight North Vietnamese army regiments had made their presence known in South Vietnam in the ten months between February and November 1965.

In the meantime, in 1964, Viet Cong forces were gradually

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[38]As quoted in British Information Services, Vietnam: Background to an International Problem (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), pp. 23-24.

[39]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "North Vietnamese Army OB in RVN," Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam Order of Battle Study 66-2 (formerly Confidential), 1966, pp. 3, 8, 1, 4, 5, 10, and 12 respectively.

converted to the standard family of small arms of the North Vietnamese Army.[40] According to monthly estimates over 24 tons of weapons, 63 tons of ammunition, and 9 tons of explosives — nearly 100 tons in all — were delivered in South Vietnam that year.[41]

Rebuilding the Viet Cong with standard weapons placed a heavy burden on the Logistics Directorate. It had to assure not only the smooth flow of personnel to fight the war in the South, but also the continuous supply and transportation of the munitions the fighting forces required. The magnitude of the task was at least doubled. Both men and materiel had to be transported at the same time. Inadequate quantities of either would have defeated the new strategy. The logistics organization was greatly expanded to meet these extensive demands. Pathways along the Ho Chi Minh Trail had to be transformed into roads to accommodate trucks carrying munitions. Although porters and bicycles remained in use, less dependence could be placed on them to transport rapidly the necessarily large and heavy quantities of materials. This became especially evident when demand surged with heavy fighting. Large storage areas were constructed to meet peak demands and to offset interruptions from the inclement weather season. The duty was no longer limited to guiding small groups of men along jungle trails. It now became an immense endeavor involving tens of thousands of personnel including drivers, engineers, administrators, and guards to operate and maintain the full-fledged logistical apparatus.

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[40]Admiral U.S.G. Sharp and General W.C. Westmoreland, Report on the War in Vietnam (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 84.

[41]RAC Technical Paper TP-251, p. 30.

General Offensive, 1968

The "Reunification Campaign" was highly successful in 1964 and 1965. Ironically, however, its success provoked an even greater U.S. commitment which, in turn, neutralized earlier Communist successes. As the pendulum swung against North Vietnam, high level party officials began to question the suitability of the strategy in 1966. In the middle of the next year the Political Bureau decided to adopt a new strategy.

The confused political situation in Saigon, which encouraged intrigue among senior military officers, deprived the South Vietnamese army of clear direction in the field. There was little interest in conducting combat operations. Commanders were more interested in events taking place in the capital. Troop movements awakened suspicions in those looking for evidence of a plot. Battalions of South Vietnamese troops began to crumble in the face of political uncertainty and the heavy pressure of significantly upgraded Viet Cong units. The 9th Viet Cong Division, formed in 1963 and rearmed with modern weapons in the fall of 1964, destroyed two elite South Vietnamese battalions (33rd Ranger and 4th Marine) in the same December, inflicting heavy casualties on armored and mechanized units sent to assist the beleaguered battalions. Similar reverses continued. In June 1965, the 9th Division overran two other battliions. Another battalion was decimated by the Viet Cong in the northern coastal province of Quang Ngai. By midyear the South Vietnamese Army was collapsing. The Communists had gained control of most of the countryside with the government forces holding

the cities and major towns.[42]

Communist triumphs, however, spurred a massive influx of U.S. combat forces into South Vietnam, precluding an outright military victory. U.S. military strength soared from 23,000 at the beginning of the year to over 148,000 by December 1965. In addition, a South Korean infantry division and marine brigade as well as a reinforced Australian infantry battalion were in the country. United States and allied force levels continued to rise during 1966. By the end of the year there were over 385,000 American military personnel in South Vietnam. A second South Korean division raised that nation's contribution to some 45,000 men and the number of Australian troops climbed to 4,500.[43]

The buildup enabled the U.S. field commander to launch offensive operations. These were limited mainly to swiftly executed spoiling attacks on newly committed Communist divisions which suffered heavy losses. In January, "Operation Van Buren" cost the 95th North Vietnamese Army Regiment over 600 killed. The base camp of the 5th Viet Cong Division was destroyed in March. In June the loss of over 500 men rendered the 24th North Vietnamese Army Regiment combat ineffective, and in November the notorious 9th Viet Cong Division suffered 1,100 men killed in action. Fresh units and replacements continued to be sent from North Vietnam in an attempt to match the infusion of U.S. and allied troops. Two North Vietnamese infantry divisions, massed just

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[42] Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 84, 88, 95 and 97.

[43] Ibid. pp. 95, 110, 127 and 129.

north of the demilitarized zone, threatened a direct invasion but were held back. Allied intervention had provided the South Vietnamese army a year of respite. Slowly it regained its confidence, becoming again a fighting force.[44]

To General William C. Westmoreland, commander of the U.S. forces in South Vietnam, 1967 was "The Year of the Offensive." Nearly 280 infantry and tank battalions enabled the allies to mount major offensive operations. The magnitude of their success was evident in this sampling of the losses they inflicted on the enemy: "Operation Sam Houston," 700 killed; "Operation Cedar Falls," 700 killed; "Operation Prairie," nearly 1,400 killed; "Operation Junction City," the largest campaign of the year, 2,700 killed. An even bloodier 1968 seemed in store for the Communists as allied strength had risen to 486,000 U.S. troops, 47,000 Korean, 6,800 Australian, and 2,200 Thai.[45]

The U.S. bombing campaign of North Vietnam, "Rolling Thunder," had also grown in the intensity of its destruction. Begun in March 1965, the aerial attacks dropped up to 1,600 tons of bombs a week. After a brief suspension called after Christmas, bombing was resumed on 31 January 1966. Its intensity is indicated by the number of transport vehicles damaged or destroyed during 1966: 9,500 vessels, 4,000 trucks, and 2,000 pieces of railroad rolling stock. In 1967, even with temporary standdowns, the extent of the bombing increased: 11,500 vessels, 5,200 motor vehicles, and 2,500 rail cars were damaged or

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[44]Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 123, 125, 126 and 129.

[45]Ibid., pp. 131, 152, 153 and 156.

destroyed. It was well within the capability of the U.S. Air Force and Navy to make "Rolling Thunder" even more devastating in 1968.[46]

In an article entitled "Great Victory, Great Task," published in September 1967, General Giap admitted that Communist success in the South led the U.S. to escalate its military commitment. He wrote:

> Faced with defeat and danger, and confronted, toward the end of 1965, with the fact that the puppet troops were being repeatedly assaulted and demolished, President Johnson forced General Taylor to resign [as ambassador] and then decided to send massive United States expeditionary forces to fight in South Vietnam; he thus moved the aggressive war into a new strategic phase, that of 'limited war.'[47]

Giap also needed a new strategy. Militarily, Hanoi faced the choice of either reducing the level of the fighting or increasing it. To continue in the same manner as 1966 and 1967 would prolong the war, but at an extreme cost in casualties. The first option would also prolong the war but with fewer losses of men. This course of action could be accomplished by breaking the divisions into infantry battalions and letting them conduct the fighting. They would be less susceptible to the massive ground and air attacks available to the U.S. forces. At the same time their capacity for clandestine movement would enable them to strike vulnerable targets with complete surprise. This choice would lessen the logistical requirements for men and materiel, especially the latter as presumably less ammunition would be expended. The other option was to escalate the fighting by moving into the third stage of revolutionary warfare: the "general offensive" combined with

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[46]Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 21, 30 and 38.

[47]Stetler, The Military Art of People's War, p. 285.

the "general uprising." This was the course of action chosen by the decision-makers in Hanoi elected, but only after opposition to it was removed by the untimely death of the second-ranking member of the Political Bureau.

In the summer of 1966, the Communist commander in South Vietnam, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, a long-time rival of Giap's, was reluctant to puruse the strategy demanded by the "Reunification Campaign."[48] Writing in the party's official journal, Hoc Tap, Thanh warned against "mechanically copying one's past experience," adding that "to repeat exactly what belongs to history in the face of reality is adventurism." Reputedly he told senior party officials that "if we fight the Americans in accordance with modern military tactics, we will be badly battered by them." He went on to counsel that "...we must fight the enemy as we would fight a tiger as he leaps at his prey. Only by inventing a special way of fighting can we defeat the Americans."[49] Just prior to the Political Bureau meeting which was convened to decide on the future strategy, Thanh was severely wounded in a U.S. Air Force bombing raid on his headquarters in South Vietnam. He was evacuated to Hanoi where he died in July 1967. Without Thanh's voice, Giap apparently was able

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[48]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 115. The rivalry had its origins in the long-standing vendetta between Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap. In the late 1940's, Chinh, then Secretary-General of the party, placed political commissars answerable to him in the army over Giap's objections. Later on the basis of evidence secured by Chinh, Tran Chi Chau, one of Giap's personal friends and head of his supply service, was executed. In 1959, Nguyen Chi Thanh, a protégé of Chinh's, was promoted to senior general making him equal in rank to Giap. At this time, rumors attributable to Chinh, suggested that Thanh was the better general. See Honey, Communism in North Vietnam, pp. 40-42.

[49]Don Oberdorfer, Tet ! (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 40 and pp. 40-42.

to sway the Political Bureau to accept his strategy. Plans for the "General Offensive" began.

Hints of what he had in mind are contained in an article published in September 1967. He wrote that "the military struggle is becoming increasingly important and is playing a decisive role in defeating the enemy on the battlefield." Elsewhere in the essay he complimented "the Liberation Armed Forces' method of attacking cities...specifically attacks launched by the LAF in the heart of Saigon, Hue and other cities...."[50] This then was the essence of the new strategy: widespread attacks on urban areas spearheaded by Viet Cong main force units aimed at generating the mass uprising of the people against the Saigon government and its benefactor, the United States. When this occurred, the U.S. would be unable to contain the uprising even with its enormous military might and economic wealth. The Americans would be forced to depart South Vietnam defeated.[51]

Obviously extensive logistics were required to support an offensive of this magnitude. Additional North Vietnamese infantry divisions had to be deployed, a steady stream of replacements dispatched from the North, large quantities of ammunition shipped and stockpiled, hospitals readied, base areas expanded, and the like. All of this had to be done while lines of communication in North Vietnam and Laos were

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[50] Stetler, The Military Art of People's War, pp. 301 and 303.

[51] Whether or not Giap expected a decisive military victory similar to Dien Bien Phu is arguable. Some authors contend that the strategy was directed towards swaying American public opinion against the war. Regardless of its ultimate aim, the strategy clearly involved a large-scale military offensive.

under heavy aerial interdiction. By January 1968 the logistics system, then supporting 99 North Vietnamese and 98 Viet Cong combat battalions in South Vietnam, was at the peak of its efficiency.[52]

Protracted War, 1969

The "General Offensive-General Uprising" was launched at the end of January 1968 to coincide with a 36-hour ceasefire declared by the Republic of South Vietnam and a seven-day truce announced by the Viet Cong. An estimated 84,000 Communist troops were committed throughout the country. Five of the six largest cities, including Saigon, 36 of the 44 province capitals, and 64 of the 242 district capitals were attacked.[53] Some were penetrated, but the attackers were driven within three days from all except Saigon, Hue, and four provincial capitals. In those localities bitter fighting persisted for many days. Hue took the longest time to suppress the intruders, some 25 days. Communist casualties were enormous. By the end of February more than 45,000 had been killed, ten times the allied losses.[54] Main force Viet Cong and regular North Vietnamese units were soundly beaten. None was able to retain control of any objective attacked. The most disappointing aspect from a psychological point of view in Hanoi was the total absence of a popular uprising. The strategy was a military failure; it did not produce a decisive victory. Efforts to sustain the offensive continued, but each subsequent campaign lacked the determination of the

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[52]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 176.

[53]Ibid., p. 183

[54]Ibid. p. 161

initial onslaught. Communist casualties rose steadily, exceeding 180,000 killed by the end of the year. Viet Cong units were decimated, and their political organization was severely disrupted. The guerrilla no longer had an important role to play.[55] As more and more North Vietnamese replacements filled the ranks of "Viet Cong" units, the war became more conventional. A "post-Tet" offensive was launched in February. Attacks were widespread but primarily standoff in nature with rocket and light artillery fire and only limited ground probes. No significant population centers were threatened.[56] Casualties mounted with 48,000 Communists reported killed during the first quarter of the year.[57] In continuation of this trend an additional 53,000 Communists troops died in action by the end of June.[58] There was no longer any sense in pursuing this once ambitious strategy.

The new strategy adopted was really an old one. Giap switched to small unit actions characterized by ambushes, indirect fire attacks, harassment, and terrorism. These were punctuated from time to time with surprise attacks of short duration on weak positions. In addition to inflicting miscellaneous destruction and death the goal undoubtedly was to demonstrate that North Vietnam would outlast American resolve. The strategy was a return to "long-term resistance" or protracted war.

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[55]Staudenmaier, "Vietnam: Mao vs Clausewitz," p. 122.

[56]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, January-March 1969," (formerly Secret), p. 2.

[57]Ibid., p. 143.

[58]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, April-June 1969," (formerly Secret), p. 176.

The logistics system was still obliged to facilitate the movement of replacements and the delivery of munitions. Lines of communication, especially the Ho Chi Minh Trail had to be kept open despite continous efforts at air interdiction. Bases had to be maintained in order to offer sanctuary to the forces, now predominantly composed of indigenous North Vietnamese, staying in or near South Vietnam. Logistical support remained a necessity with a key role to play.

Military Logistics

Military logistics played a critical role in each of the four major strategies pursued by North Vietnam over the eight year period from 1961 to 1969. The first three demanded a progressive increase in the logistical effort which brought the system to its peak of efficiency in support of the 1968 General Offensive. It achieved a high level of effectiveness in spite of formidable constraints which presented extraordinary challenges to a system notable in many ways for its primitive improvisations.

Logistical Constraints

The first of the wide range of constraints concerned manpower. Initially there was no problem finding combat personnel for the war in the South. Hanoi relied almost exclusively on the 90,000 Viet Minh soldiers who had regrouped in North Vietnam. Gradually regular North Vietnamese soldiers were introduced into the South. Later northern conscripts were dispatched to fill the demand for manpower which the

steadily more aggressive strategy created. By 1966 the original pool of regroupees had been exhausted, and virtually all the replacements were conscripts. The rest of those infiltrated were regular soldiers deployed in the military units to South Vietnam.[59] The heavy casualities resulting from larger scale fighting brought to the fore the question of whether or not Hanoi could sustain a correspondingly high rate of replacements.[60]

Analysis of demographic data indicated that North Vietnam had more than enough eligible men to offset the high losses. In 1966 a Department of Defense study estimate the North Vietnam population at 17 million and its growth at 350,000 a year. The study assumed that 150,000 would be eligible for induction with 60 percent of the conscripts available for infiltration. This meant that 90,000 men could be sent South each year.[61] Another study, which the Department of the Army completed in the same year, put the number fit for military service at the more conservative level of 100,000 a year.[62] A subsequent study,

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[59]As early as August 1964, 75 percent of the soldiers entering South Vietnam were natives of North Vietnam. See Department of State, Aggression from the North, p. 11.

[60]This does not mean that a majority of the Vietnamese Communist soldiers in South Vietnam were North Vietnamese. As late as February 1969, 134,000 of the 240,000 Communist troops in the South were believed to be natives. Most of the conventionally organized battalions, however, were wholly North Vietnamese. The main force Viet Cong battalions also were largely made up of northerners. Southerners filled the ranks of numerous local force and guerrilla units. See Military Assistance Command, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, January-March 1969," pp. 142-143.

[61]RAC Technical Paper TP-251, pp. 14-15.

[62]Smith, Area Handbook for North Vietnam, p. 409.

in 1969, held to the same figure for males fit for service each year at the draft age of 17. This study added that there were altogether 2.7 million males fit for duty in North Vietnam within the legal draft span of 17 to 45. Although 82 percent of North Vietnamese military personnel captured during 1968 were inducted between the ages of 17 to 25, there was evidence that men as old as 40 to 45 were being recalled.[63] Despite the disparity in data, all three official studies of the Defense Department agreed that at least 90,000 men could be committed each year to the war in the South. In addition, Hanoi drew upon a large manpower reservoir in the North when demand exceeded the normal rate of replenishment. This supply, coupled with active recruitment in the South, explained why a minimum of 230,000 soldiers was maintained in South Vietnam between 1965 and 1969.[64] Manpower was a constraint, but not a serious one. North Vietnam had the capability of sending nearly 100,000 men to fight in the South annually for an indefinite period. This was sufficient to maintain military activity at a high level.

The availability of materiel presented a question of different complexion. North Vietnam did not possess the industrial capacity to produce the armaments required for the type of warfare demanded by the country's more aggressive strategies. Therefore it was almost completely dependent on external sources of supply. Hanoi's two main benefactors were the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

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[63] U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "North Vietnam Personnel Infiltration into the Republic of Vietnam," Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam Study 70-05 (formerly Confidential), 1970, pp. 3-6. Hereafter cited as CICV Study 70-05.

[64] U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation, December 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 64, and "Monthly Evaluation, December 1966," (formerly Secret), p. 97, and "Quarterly Evaluation Report, January-March 1969," (formerly Secret), pp. 175-176.

Information on the amount of arms supplied to North Vietnam is sketchy. Undoubtedly there were extensive economic and military aid programs, but specifics concerning the materiel arriving by sea, or by rail from China, are lacking. A further complication lay in the difficulty in distinguishing the exact source since the Chinese manufactured copies of Soviet-designed weapons and ammunition. An indication of the joint military materiel assistance was presented in the form of hard evidence in the reports of Soviet-Chinese munitions which U.S. and South Vietnamese forces captured in South Vietnam and Cambodia. In "Operation Dewey Canyon," conducted from January to March 1968, the following materiel was seized:[65]

12	122mm guns
4	85mm guns
770	122mm rockets
7,287	122mm artillery rounds
4,983	120mm mortar rounds
23,281	82mm mortar rounds
34,633	60mm mortar rounds
23,730	37mm anti-aircraft gun rounds

The amount of materiel captured in Cambodia in May and June 1970 further amplified the extent of Soviet and Chinese support to North Vietnam. Munitions uncovered there included:[66]

Weapons:	
Individual	22,892
Crew-served	2,509

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[65]Military Assistance Command, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, January-March 1969," p. 9

[66]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam, 6th Revised Edition, June 1970 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 396.

Ammunition:	
Rifle	10,694,990
Machine gun	4,067,177
Anti-aircraft	199,552
Mortar	68,539
Large rockets	2,123
Small rockets	43,160
Recoiless rifle	29,185
Grenades	62,022
Mines	5,482

These examples underlined the apparent conclusion that Hanoi received sufficient materiel to enable the Communists to execute the various strategies they developed. Rivalry between the Communist superpowers probably encouraged each to strive to match the others effort.[67] Certainly there were limitations on shipping, handling, and storage capacities, but the overall quantity delivered and then channeled to fighting forces through North Vietnam's intricate supply network met the practical test of sufficiency for Hanoi to pursue its goal over an extended period of time.

The third potential constraint was easily overcome. Logistical support for the first strategy adopted, "People's War," required a land route from North to South Vietnam through Laos. Before North Vietnam could develop the route the Communists had to attain control of the southeastern section of Laos bordering Vietnam.

Vietnamese Communist involvement in Laos can be traced back to

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[67]China's provision of materiel aid to Vietnamese Communists was not without precedence. Chinese aid to the Viet Minh began in 1950 and rose from an estimated 1,500 tons a month in 1953 to some 4,000 tons a month by June 1954. For analysis see, J.J. Zasloff, The Role of the Sanctuary in Insurgency: Communist China's Support to the Vietminh, 1946-1954, RM-4618-PR (Santa Monica California: RAND Corporation, 1967), especially pp. 21 and 33.

1945 when Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic. Thereafter the Viet Minh recruited soldiers from the 50,000 Vietnamese residing in Laos.[68] During the First Indochina War there was little fighting in Laos until 1953 when the Viet Minh shifted their campaign from northern Vietnam to northeastern Laos, reducing the French holdings to positions on the Plain of Jars and the royal capital, Luang Prabang. The French reacted by reasserting their presence in the northeast, building a base near the Laotian border at a village called Dien Bien Phu — site of the subsequent French defeat.[69] Laos gained its independence at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Long before then the Vietnamese Worker's Party had sponsored and nurtured a semisecret Marxist-Leninist organization known as the Lao People's Party. The Laotian Communist party guided the activities of an ostensibly nationalistic political group known as the Neo Lao Haksat or Lao Patriotic Front — later to be known, with its combat arm, as the Pathet Lao. Beginning in 1956, the Pathet Lao embarked on a campaign to gain control of the country. There were two other factions which were "rightist" and "neutralist" in their political tinge. Events fluctuated between armed clashes and attempts to reconcile political antagonisms until 1959 when the North Vietnamese Political

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[68]Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, The North Vietnamese Military Adviser in Laos: A First Hand Account, RM-5688-ARPA (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1968), p. 2.

[69]Colonel V.J. Croizat (trans.), A Translation from the French: Lessons of the War in Indochina, Volume 2, RM-5271-PR (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1967), p. 21. This is the English translation of an official secret document issued by the Commander-in-Chief, French Forces, Indochina, in May 1955.

Bureau's decision to launch "People's War" in South Vietnam precipitated serious fighting.[70] At first success alternated between the Pathet Lao and the opposition. As soon as North Vietnam augmented its material support of the Pathet Lao with the commitment of regular army units to spearhead attacks the situation changed. By early 1962 the North Vietnamese had consolidated control over the entire Laotian border with Vietnam securing the area for the Ho Chi Minh Trail. An agreement reached in Geneva and signed in July 1962 by 14 nations, including the United States, United Kingdom, France, the U.S.S.R., Communist China, and both North and South Vietnam, assured the continuing security of the region for North Vietnam. In declaring the neutrality of Laos, the signatories promised not to introduce into Laos "troops or military personnel in any form whatsoever," establish "any foreign military base," or "use the territory of the Kingdom of Laos for interference in the internal affairs of other countries."[71] In compliance foreign personnel fighting on the Royal Lao Government side were withdrawn from Laos under the supervision of the International Control Commission. The U.S. withdrew all 666 American combatants. Only 40 North Vietnamese, however, passed through the designated checkpoint, leaving behind an estimated 10,000 regular soldiers.[72]

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[70] P.F. Langer and J.J. Zasloff, Revolution in Laos: The North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao, RM-5935 (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1969), chapter V, pp. 80-110.

[71] U.S., Department of State, United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, Volume 14, Part 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 1105-1107.

[72] Langer and Zasloff, Revolution in Laos, pp. 106-107.

The North Vietnamese military presence in Laos continued to grow, exceeding 40,000 men by 1968.[73] These can be divided into three groups: those supporting the Pathet Lao, those operating against South Vietnam from bases in Laos, and those engaged in running the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Together they ensured the security of the logistics system.

The last consideration was a genuine constraint which treaties could not circumvent or superpowers ameliorate. The pattern of Indochina's weather was beyond manipulation. North Vietnamese strategists had to adapt their plans to the dictates of seasonal climatic changes. Historically, Indochina's weather has been dominated by two monsoons, distinct climatic seasons which have had a profound impact on military activities. The Southwest Monsoon prevailed from May to September and the Northeast Monsoon, from November through February, with a variable transitional season between the two. The heavy rains which accompanied the monsoons made large scale operations all but impossible. Trafficability was so substantially reduced that men afoot moved with grave difficulty and vehicles were often brought to a virtual standstill. Concomitant low ceilings and poor visibility similarly curtailed air operations. Combat as well as logistical activities were hampered.[74]

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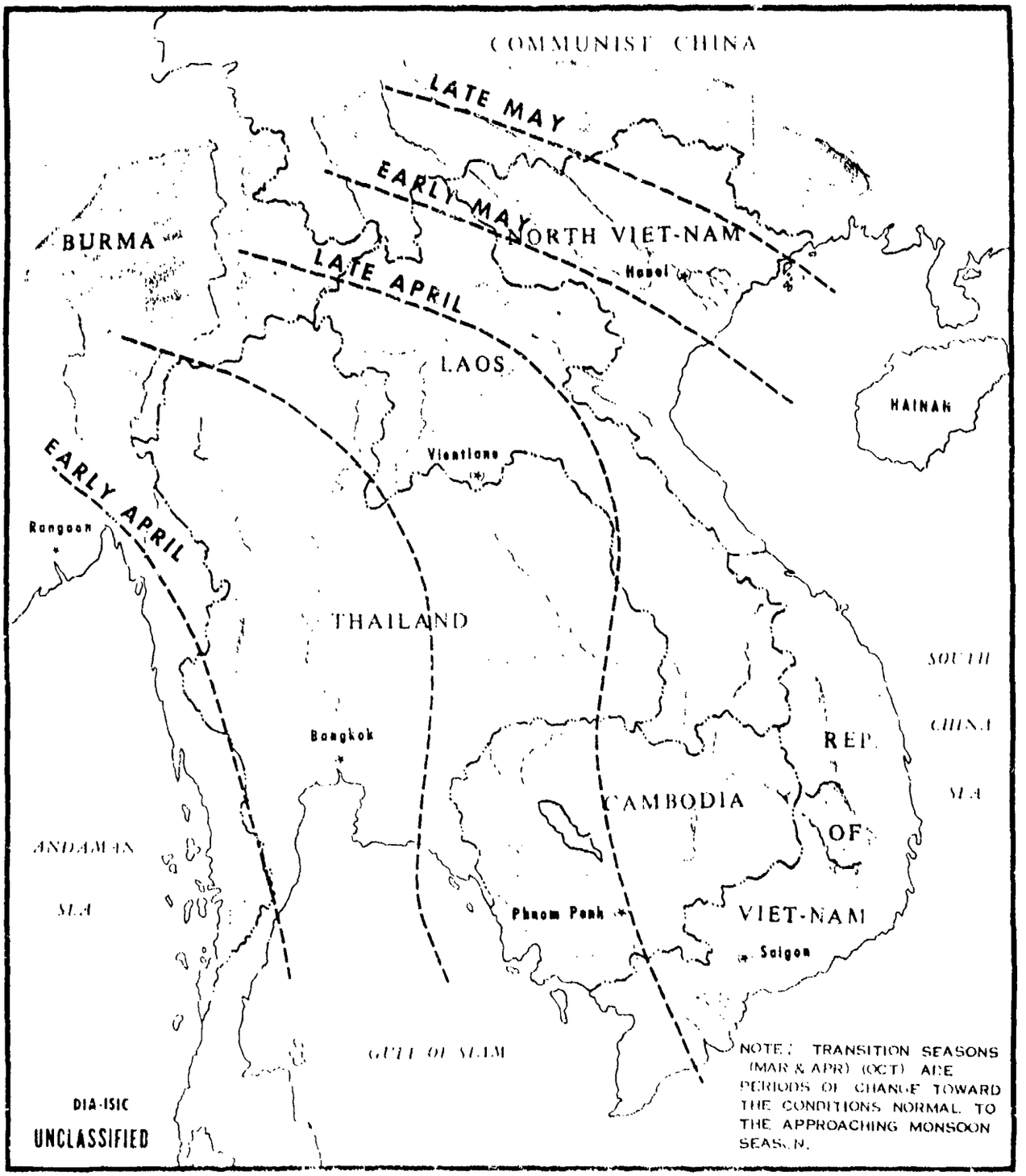
[73] Estimates varied. The Military Assistance Command in its "Quarterly Evaluation Report, October-December 1968," estimated 40,000 North Vietnamese military in Laos (p. 8). The Military Balance, 1968-1969 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1968), p. 37, stated 45,000, while an official Royal Lao Government white paper estimated that more than 57,000 North Vietnamese troops were in Laos in violation of the 1962 Geneva Accords, see Livre Blanc sur les Violations des Accords de Geneve de 1962 par le Gouvernement du Nord Vietnam (Laos: Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, 1970), p. C

[74] U.S., Defense Intelligence Agency, "Southeast Asia Weather," (Special Intelligence Supplement, 18 June 1965), and U.S., Air Force, "Climate of the Republic of Vietnam," (1st Weather Wing Special Study, 105-9, April 1965), especially pp. 3-5.

GROUND TRAFFICABILITY

SOUTHWEST MONSOON (MAY-SEPT)



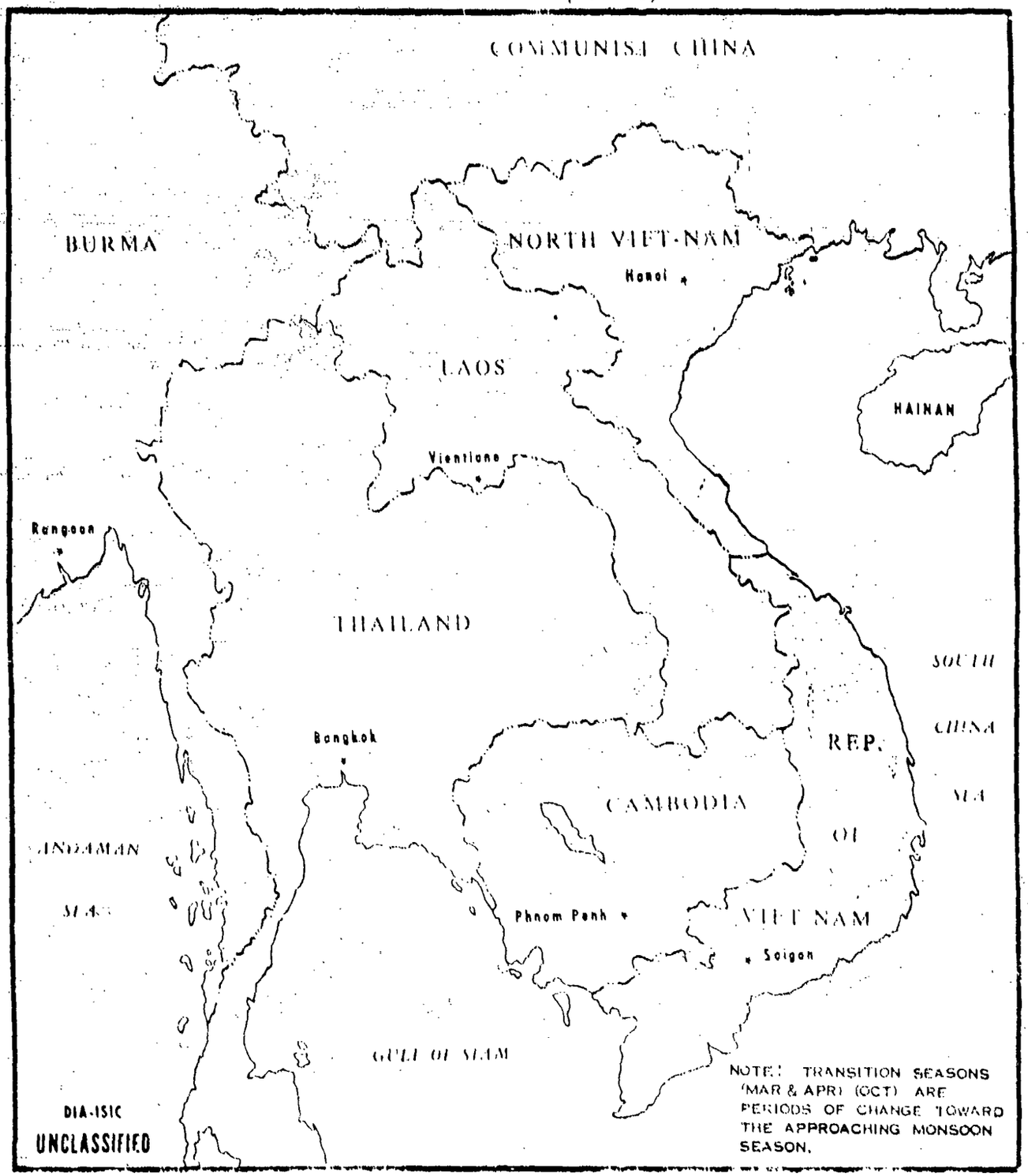
POOR - DIFFICULT TO OPERATE FOR MORE THAN 50% OF THE SEASON.

FAIR - OPERATIONS POSSIBLE FOR MORE THAN 50% OF THE SEASON.

GOOD - OPERATIONS POSSIBLE FOR MORE THAN 90% OF THE SEASON.

DATE LINE - APPROXIMATE STARTING TIME OF SOUTHWEST MONSOON WEATHER.

GROUND TRAFFICABILITY
NORTHEAST MONSOON (NOV-FEB)



POOR DIFFICULT TO OPERATE FOR MORE THAN 50% OF THE SEASON.

FAIR OPERATIONS POSSIBLE FOR MORE THAN 50% OF THE SEASON.

GOOD OPERATIONS POSSIBLE FOR MOST OT THE SEASON.

Frequent, heavy precipitation during the Southwest Monsoon inundated southeastern Laos, the central highlands and all southern South Vietnam, including the populous regions surrounding Saigon and in the Mekong delta. Fighting was generally restricted to small unit actions. The Northeast Monsoon, from November to February, on the other hand, brought heavy rain to the coastal regions which were untouched by the earlier May-to-September monsoon. Only during the intervening period, roughly February to June, were major operations throughout the country practicable. Hence all three grand offensives of the Second Indochina War occurred at this time: Tet-1968, February-March; Easter-1972, March-April; and the final one, March-April 1975.

The Southwest Monsoon directly affected the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Logistics depended upon that vital artery and its use had to be timed accordingly. The solution avoided the difficulties caused by the weather and satisfied the operational demands. A "logistical offensive" normally commenced during November when the route through Laos was dry. The drive tapered off in May and generally terminated in June with the onset of the Southwest Monsoon.[75] It was a complementary arrangement. Men and materiel moved south for the few months preceding the seasonal round of countrywide operations. This allowed stores to be built-up

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[75]Statistics concerning the infiltration of personnel into South Vietnam for the 1968 and 1969 campaigns clearly depicted a movement cycle revolving around the two monsoons. Groups of infiltrators began departing North Vietnam in late October 1967 and November 1968 and ceased being dispatched by the following June. As a matter of record, over the two-year period none was sent South during July, August, or September 1967 and only three groups during those months in 1968. See Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 62-66.

and new arrivals to flesh out understrength units. Some unit level training could be conducted. Once the weather cleared and offensive action was initiated, personnel and munitions flowed in a steady stream. Replacements and supplies for units depleted in intensive fighting were available for the good campaigning months.

The four constraints of availability of men and of materiel, control of southeastern Laos, and the weather posed problems for North Vietnam's military planners. In the final analysis, however, these factors did not seriously disrupt the overall logistical effort.

Major Logistics Routes

The North Vietnamese used both sea and land routes for infiltration, using the maritime passage almost exclusively for the shipping of munitions.[76] The major land routes, four in all leading from North Vietnam, were used for virtually all personnel movement and the transport of large quantities of materiel. One transited the border between North and South Vietnam; the others passed directly into Laos. The latter three consisted of networks of roads stemming from one or another of three passes connecting North Vietnam with Laos through rugged mountainous terrain.

The hub of all military transport activity in North Vietnam was Vinh, a city in Nghe An province, to which troops traveled from

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[76]There were occasions when men were infiltrated by sea, but it is believed that this method was limited to extremely small groups of specialized administrative, technical, and intelligence personnel. For example, four Communist agents attempted to infiltrate by sea in April 1963 and were captured shortly after landing in South Vietnam. See Department of State, Aggression from the North, pp. 12-13.

over 26 training camps and materiel passed from Hanoi and the port of Haiphong. The four major routes originated, of course, in Vinh. The most direct course ran south to Dong Hoi and then slanted southwest to cross the western end of the Demilitarized Zone. From there it led to a large base area in Laos known as "611" south of Khe Sanh. The other routes wound through defiles leaving North Vietnam. The northernmost ran westward from Vinh generally along National Route 8.[77] It crossed to Laos through the Nape Pass, turned south, joined National Route 12, and then slid eastward to the Laotian side of the Mu Gia Pass. The second route traveled south along National Route 1A through Ha Tinh and then turned westward along National Routes 15I and 15, joining National Route 12 at Mu Gia Pass. The third route presented a choice of rail or boat in going from Vinh to join Route 137 which led through Ban Karai Pass into Laos.[78] A number of minor roads and trails, which were conduits from the Mu Gia and Ban Karai passes, terminated either at a large base area near the Laotian village of Tchepone, designated "604", or at Base Area 611 which was also fed by the DMZ passage. Reaching one of these staging areas completed the first phase of the transport effort. In the next phase men and materiel were sent forward along the

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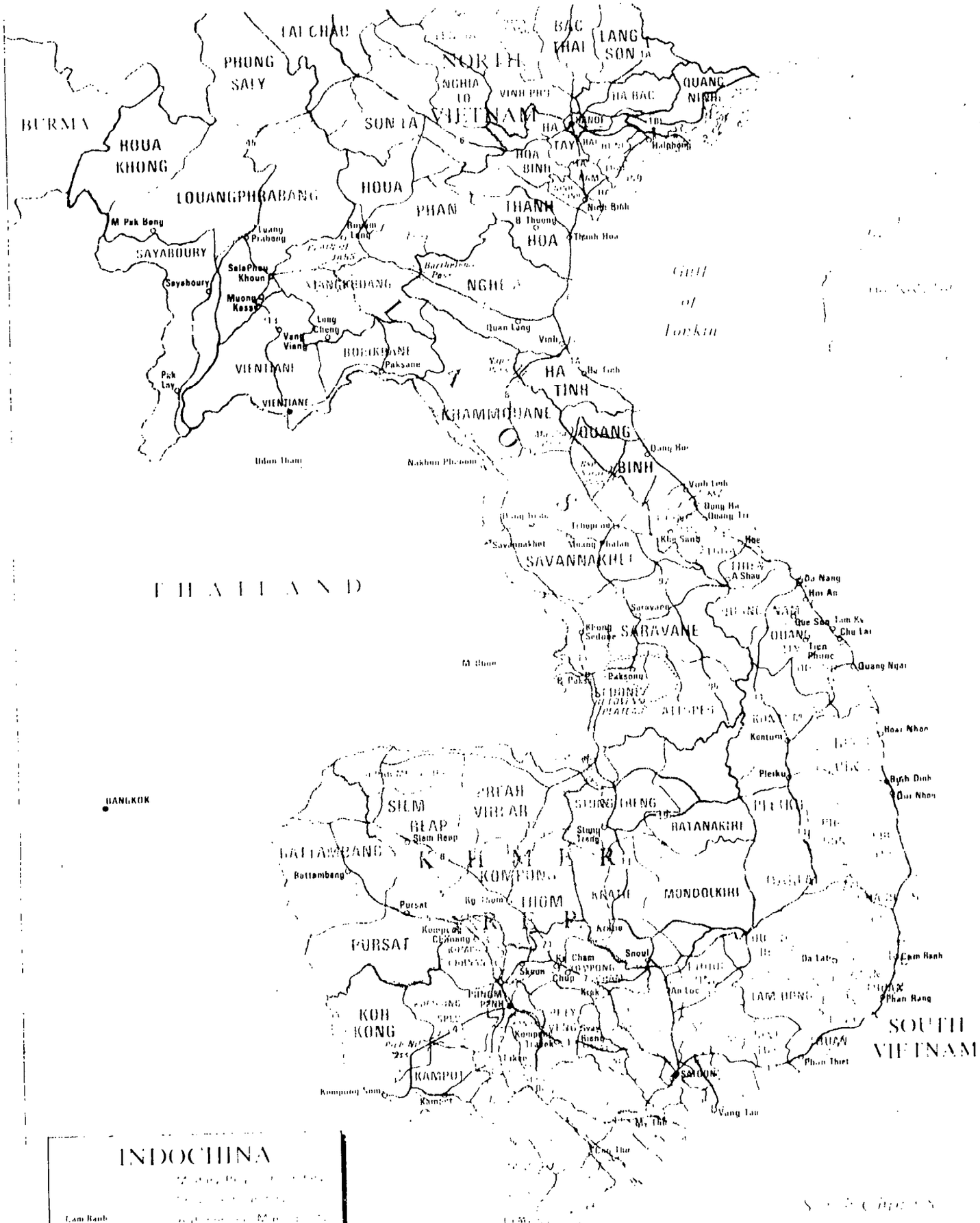
[77]The Military Assistance Command assigned arbitrary three-digit numerical designations to Communist base areas for ease in identification. Although national route numbers are cited, these were not necessarily the actual roads used. A complex network of lesser roads and trails was constructed parallel to nationally numbered routes. This redundant system facilitated heavy traffic and alleviated congestion at bottlenecks. National Route numbers indicate location and the general axis of direction.

[78]There was a fourth defile, the Ban Raving Pass, which was located 15 miles northwest of the Demilitarized Zone. Little is known about its use, and it is not believed to have been a major infiltration route.



INDOCHINA

Cam Ranh

Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos in accordance with delivery plans.[79]

Logistics Organization

North Vietnam created and maintained an elaborate, and, in certain respects unique, army organization for the logistical support of the Communist forces fighting in South Vietnam. Overall responsibility rested in the General Logistics Directorate of the High Command in Hanoi. To execute the directorate's plans, two transportation groups were established, beginning with the 559th Transportation Group in May 1959. Later expanding requirements of the more ambitious strategies brought into existence the 500th Transportation Group. Geography divided their responsibilities. Logistics functions within North Vietname were the task of the 500th Group, and the 559th Group performed the same functions in the panhandle region of southeastern Laos. Its mission encompassed the essence of North Vietnam's groundborne logistical effort connoted in the term Ho Chi Minh Trail.[80]

The specific functions of the 559th Group, which may have numbered as many as 30,000 men, were:

(1) Movement and storage of supplies from NVN [North Vietnam] to depots along the Laotian/RVN border and to several points within the RVN [Republic of Vietnam - South Vietnam].
(2) Improvement, maintenance, and protection of the roads and major trails within the area.
(3) Logistical support and route guides for infiltration personnel along the commo-liaison route, as well as evacuation of casualties.
(4) Maintenance of hospital, dispensary, and aid station facilities.[81]

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[79] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, p. 27.

[80] Ibid., p. 2.

[81] Ibid. pp. 28-29.

Two unique types of units were formed and placed under the direct command of the 559th Group to accomplish these functions. One was called the Binh Tram, and the other, which can be transliterated from Vietnamese, the "commo-liaison station."

A Binh Tram, roughly equivalent to a regimental logistical headquarters, normally had a fixed location in a specific geographic area for which it was responsible. Facilitating the movement and security of men and materiel moving through its area was its principal function. Engineer, transportation, signal, and infantry units were assigned to Binh Trams to fulfill these tasks as required by the local situation. Binh Tram 33, for example, had two engineer battalions, a transportation and a signal battalion, and three air defense artillery battalions, while Binh Tram 43's environment required the assignment of three battalions -- one each of signal, engineer and infantry.[82]

By 1970, 11 Binh Trams had been identified in the Laotian panhandle where they were based at key road junctions or in base complexes as subordinates of the 559th Group. Binh Tram 1, located along National Route 12 west of the Mu Gia Pass, serviced traffic coming through Nape pass as well as Mu Gia pass. Binh Trams 32 and 34 were in major staging areas -- Base Areas 604 (near Tchepone) and 611. Binh Tram 33, deployed near the junction of Routes 9 and 92, advanced traffic moving eastward into South Vietnam. Similarly, Binh Tram 42 facilitated movement into South Vietnam through the A Shau Valley. Binh Trams 43, 44, 35, and 37 also operated Base Areas 607, 614, 612, and 609 respectively.

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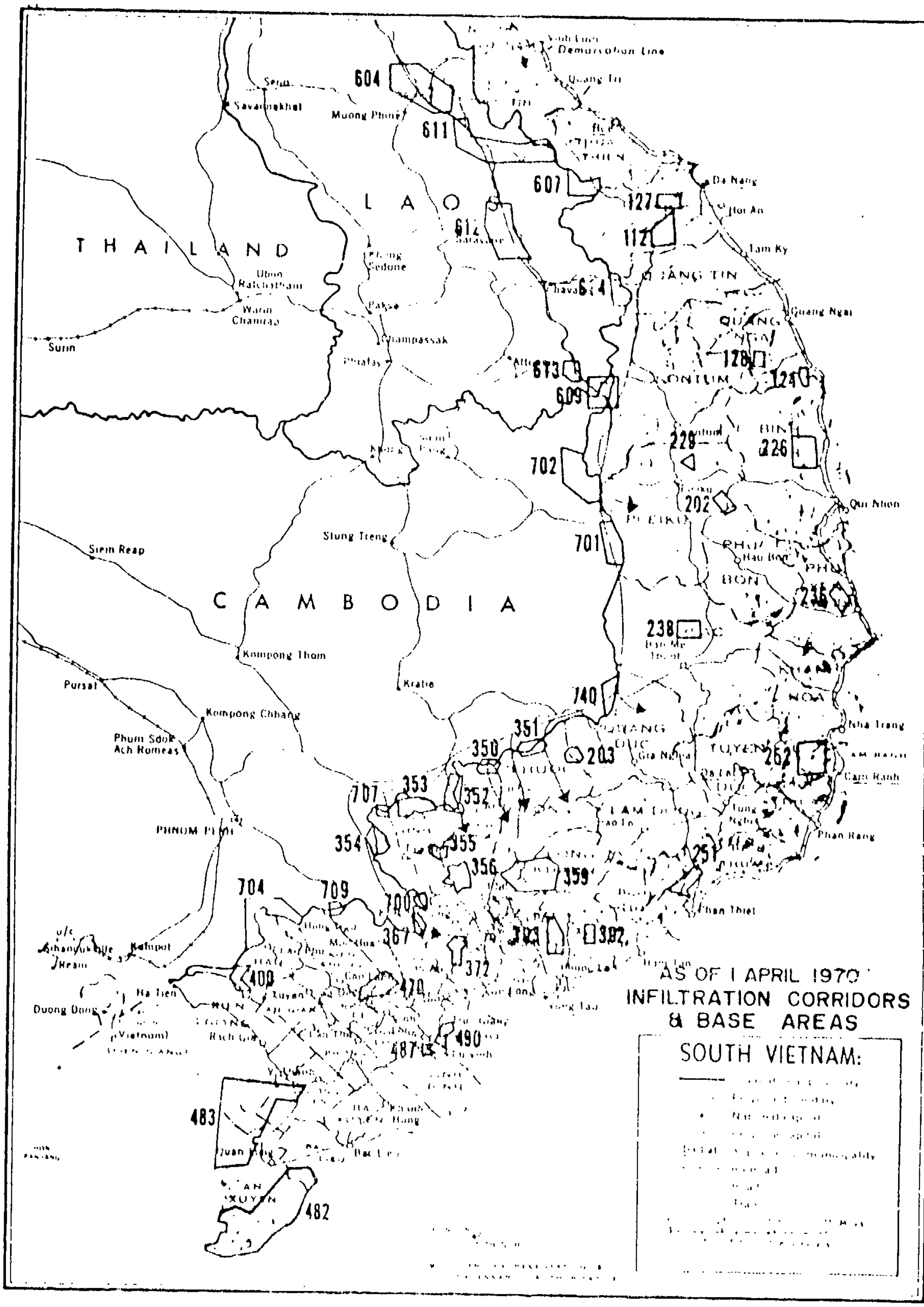
[82]Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 29-30.


AS OF 1 APRIL 1970
INFILTRATION CORRIDORS
& BASE AREAS
SOUTH VIETNAM:
THAILAND
LAOS
CAMBODIA
Demarcation Line
Quang Tri
Savannakhet
Muong Phine
Da Nang
Hoi An
Tam Ky
Quang Ngai
Ubon Ratchathani
Warin Chamrap
Surin
Pakse
Champassak
Qui Nhon
Stung Treng
Siem Reap
Kompong Thom
Kratie
Pursat
Kompong Chhang
Phum Sdok Ach Romeas
PHNOM PENH
Nha Trang
Cam Ranh
Phan Rang
Phan Thiet
Ha Tien
Duong Dong
Rach Gia
Kampot
604
611
607
127
112
612
614
613
609
128
124
229
226
202
702
701
236
238
740
351
350
203
262
707
353
352
354
355
356
359
251
704
709
700
367
373
302
372
400
470
487
490
483
482

Binh Tram 36 at the junction of Route 96 and the primary east-west road leading into the northern portion of Kontum province in South Vietnam. Although Binh Tram 5's exact location was unknown it probably aided infiltration into Cambodia from southern Attopeu province.[83]

While Binh Trams dealt primarily with maintenance of roads, transportation of supplies, and ground and air defense of designated areas, commo-liaison stations were concerned mainly with personnel movement. Stations assisted groups of infiltrators by: (1) feeding and quartering them, (2) guiding them to the next station, and (3) providing medical care.[84] The typical way station was placed near a stream and consisted of a dispensary, cookhouse, eating facility, and bivouac site. It was manned by 15 to 20 soldiers, including liaison and supply officers and a platoon leader. Normally, jungle canopy completely screened the station from aerial observation.[85]

Over 50 commo-liaison stations had been identified by U.S. military intelligence by 1969. The chain of way stations stretched the entire length of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, from the passes out of North Vietnam to the Cambodian border nearly 300 miles to the south. Stations were situated one day's march apart. Intervals between them were not uniform since they took into account the terrain and the time

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[83] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 29 and 31.

[84] Medical care was especially important. One official study based on interviews with 40 North Vietnamese prisoners of war or defectors revealed that substantial numbers of personnel became ill en route, many with malaria and some with beri-beri. See Konrad Kellen, A Profile of the PAVN Soldier in South Vietnam, RM-5013-ISA/ARPA (formerly Confidential) (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1966), pp. 27-28.

[85] CICV Study ST 70-05, p. 32.

required to make the trip afoot. Stations were laid out along a web of trails which took different courses to reach the next and the ultimate destination. Consequently soldiers did not pass sequentially through all the stations. Stations in varying numbers were assigned to commo-liaison battalions which managed the overall operation. At least eight such battalions were in existence in 1969. Some controlled as few as four stations; one battalion had as many as nine.[86]

This was how the 559th Transportation Group carried out its mission, maintaining and operating the Ho Chi Minh Trail and assuring the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam to Communist forces in the South. It was not, however, the extent of the North Vietnamese military logistics organization. Each of the four commands charged with combat operations in South Vietnam had its own logistics units, and the 559th Group's mission merely ended with delivery of men and munitions to the rear base areas of these commands. The onward movement and distribution then became the task of the separate command's rear service units.

Personnel Infiltration Process

The North Vietnamese military personnel replacement process illustrated the intimate involvement of the Vietnamese Worker's Party in defense affairs. An agency of its Central Committee, in fact, had

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[86] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 32, 53 and 55. The relationship between Binh Trams and commo-liaison battalions is unclear. Some analysts believe that the battalions were subordinate to the Binh Trams, but there is no corroborating documentation. Probably a battalion reported directly to the 559th Group and only coordinated activities with the Binh Tram in the area where it was located.

to approve requests for military personnel to replenish combat losses sustained in the South. One of the principal elements of the VWP Central Committee was the Central Reunification Department, and all matters dealing with reunification, the national objective, were channeled through this department. As a further step, a single operational headquarters for all party activities in South Vietnam, both political and military, was established in March 1962. Known as the Central Office for South Vietnam, or COSVN, this organization came under the immediate supervision of the Central Reunification Department. COSVN's Military Affairs Committee was the channel through which instructions from Hanoi were issued as orders to the headquarters of the "South Vietnamese Liberation Armed Forces." It commanded all Vietnamese Communist combat forces in the South at the time. The swiftening tempo of the war, however, forced an alteration in the command structure in step with an influx of North Vietnamese recruits and regular units. Three additional commands, independent counterparts of COSVN, were estbalished in 1967. By the next year, all four commands were reporting directly to the High Command in Hanoi and received military policy guidance and directives from the General Staff and General Political Directorates.[87] The expansion in commands, moreover, enlarged the scope of the supervision which the Central Reunification Department exercised.

In 1968, the four commands were:

(1) The Liberation Armed Forces Headquarters which

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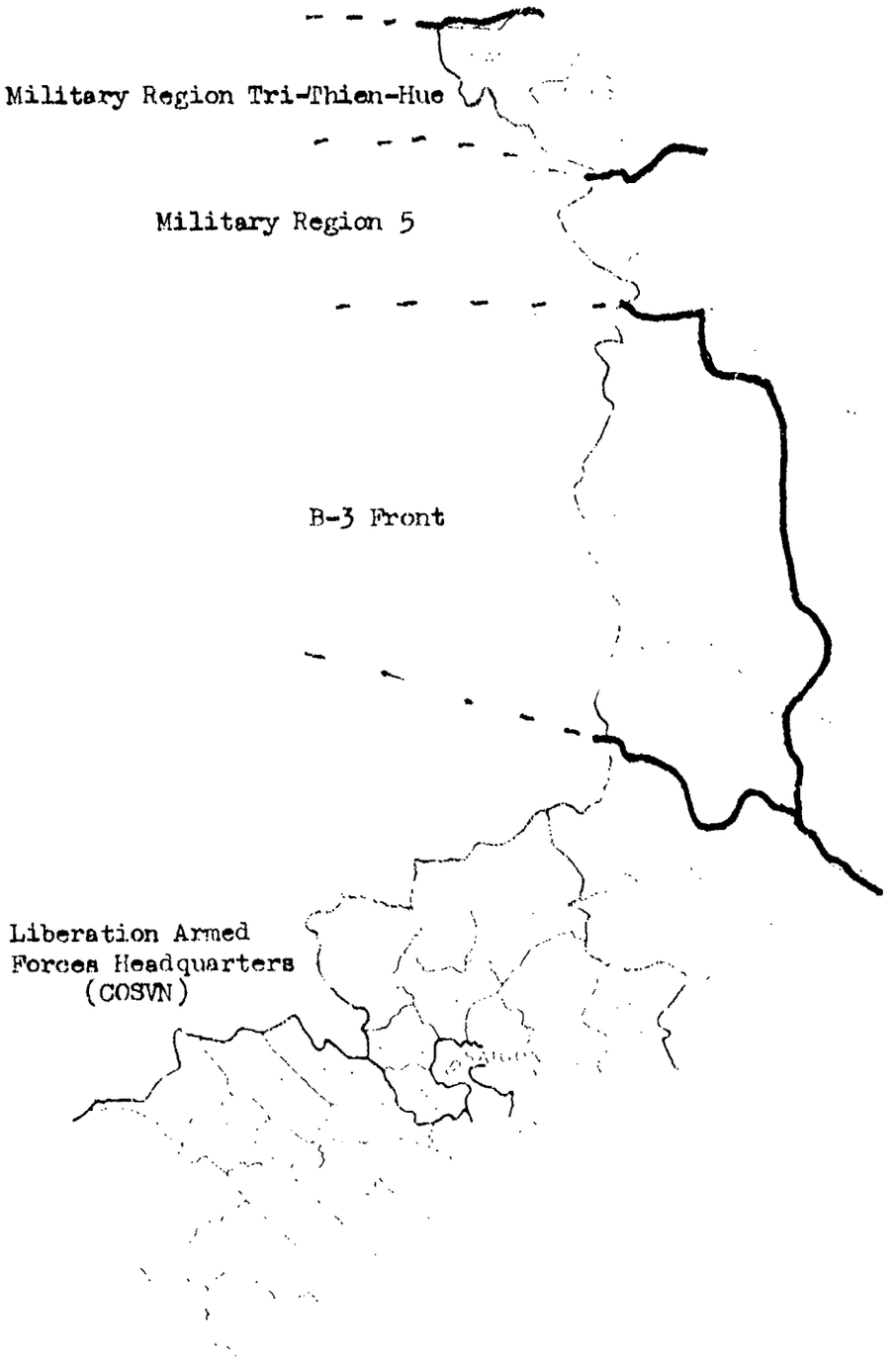
[87]Conley, The Communist Insurgent Infrastructure in South Vietnam, p. 25, Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 203-205, and Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST-70-05, p. 2.

NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY COMMANDS IN SOUTH VIETNAM



operated in COSVN's area. It encompassed all southern South Vietnam from Quang Duc province eastward to the sea and southward to the southernmost tip of the country.

(2) The B-3 Front which was responsible for operations in the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac in the western central highlands.

(3) Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue which directed forces in the two northernmost provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien, and the autonomous municipality of Hue.

(4) Military Region 5 which was responsible for the vast remaining area. It stretched south from Quang Nam province to include all the coastal provinces as far as the Ninh Thuan border. All North Vietnamese army units and all Viet Cong main, local, and guerrilla forces were assigned to one or another of these commands.[88]

The Central Reunification Department, once in effect the foster parent of COSVN, found itself with much the same relationship to the trio of new combat commands. This was especially true of requisitions for personnel — replacements or new units. A request flowed up the chain of command. For example, the 9th Viet Cong Division would consolidate its requirements and forward the request to its immediate command authority, the Liberation Armed Forces Headquarters, which would pass it in turn to COSVN's Military Affairs Committee. A requisition for the entire command then would go forward to the Central Reunification Department in Hanoi. That department's Verification Agency would evaluate the

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[88]Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 3-4.

request and report its findings to the Central Committee. If the request was approved, it would be forwarded to the General Staff Directorate of the Ministry of Defense. To satisfy a requirement with individual replacements, the General Staff would order its Military Proselyting Department to recruit men for basic training through its countrywide branches. If it were decided to satisfy the Central Committee's request by deploying a regular unit of the standing army, the General Staff Directorate would select a unit, direct it to undergo the necessary training, and then arrange for its move.[89]

Training preparatory to infiltration revolved around the travel cycle which the monsoons dictated. New recruits and others requiring specialized training generally received about six months' instruction. Basic training classes would run from June through December, thereby assuring a steady stream of personnel for infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the ensuing dry weather of the Northeast Monsoon.[90]

All personnel received preinfiltration training which stressed physical endurance and march discipline. For established units this meant a few weeks of intensive preparation before being dispatched to the South. Political indoctrination motivated troops to anticipate and accept the rigors of the Trail. Physical conditioning concentrated on forced marches with heavy packs, preparing infiltrators to carry 65-pound loads up to 30 miles a day over wooded and mountainous terrain which simulated actual march routes. During the normal eight-hour day,

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[89]Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 3-4.

[90]Ibid., p. 11.

there would be only ten-minute breaks each hour. Training culminated with short leaves for family farewells, a series of stirring political speeches, and finally a unit party to raise morale.[91]

At the beginning of the training, replacements were organized into groups of varying size with 500 men the apparent ideal. Prior to departure, each group was assigned a unique identification number, including regular army battalions selected for infiltration. Group identification numbers facilitated administrative control, and provided some degree of security by concealing a unit's true identity. To aid in routing a group on its way, the numerical designation indicated the unit's intended final destination. In 1968 a four-digit identification numbering system came into use. The first digit normally indicated the receiving command; the 1000 series usually meant Military Region 5, 3000 series the B-3 Front, and the 2000 and 4000 series was generally reserved for COSVN. The last three digits were issued in numerical sequence.[92]

There were two other administrative controls used to help manage infiltration. One was a five-digit "Letter Box Number" which served as a covert mailing address for North Vietnamese army units. The other measure was intended to deter desertions, prevent loitering and

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[91] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 15-17.

[92] Ibid., pp. 18, 60 and 62-65. Prisoners and defectors by stating their infiltration group number during interrogation unwittingly furnished clues on the number of groups sent to the various commands during the travel season. Extrapolations from this information formed a basis for estimating the extent of North Vietnamese personnel infiltration.

unauthorized movements along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Each soldier was issued an "infiltration pass" which identified him by name, contained two fingerprints, gave his physical description, his group's identification number, its destination, and the date of issue.[93]

About one week prior to departure an infiltrator was issued two green, unmarked uniforms, two pairs of underwear, a pair of rubber sandals, a waterproof sheet, a hammock, a one-man tent, mosquito netting, a canteen, and a knapsack. He carried his personal weapon, a medical kit containing mainly anti-malaria medication, and a supply of food sufficient for five to seven days.[94]

Once trained and outfitted, the infiltration group was ready for the long journey. A variety of transport, including trains, trucks, boats, and barges, moved the units through North Vietnam. After crossing into Laos, however, they walked. The network of paths which connected the comm-liaison stations formed distinct routes, and southbound groups were sent by one or another route in accordance with the condition of the trails and the capacity of the stations.[95]

Personnel destined for Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue, if they did not directly cross the Demilitarized Zone, entered South Vietnam from Base Area 604, near Tchepone, by way of National Route 9. Alterna-

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[93]Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 18-19. Captured correspondence with letter box numbers, and identity documents assisted intelligence analysts in deducing North Vietnamese order of battle and estimating the number of infiltrators.

[94]Kellen, A Profile of the PAVN Soldier in South Vietnam, pp. 27-28, Department of State, Aggression from the North, p. 5, and CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 22-23.

[95]CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 24 and 51.

tively, they came from Base Area 611 and headed toward Hue along Route 548 from A Shau. The K-12 Transportation Battalion, the Region's logistics unit guided the incoming group to an area where the replacements were turned over to the combat units. Average travel time to Base Areas 604 and 611 was about 20 days.[96]

Groups of personnel en route to Military Region 5 also passed through A Shau. They then turned southeast along Route 614 and subsidiary roads and trails. Base Area 614 was the staging area for the Region's southern area of operations. Although the Region's 240th Transportation Regiment was primarily engaged in moving supplies, it guided infiltration groups if necessary.[97]

Base Area 609 was the terminus of the 559th Transportation Group's chain of commo-liaison stations. It took about 50 days to reach there from Vinh. Most of the time was spent marching through Laos. From 609, where the borders of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam met, to southwestern Darlac province, the B-3 Front operated 19 of its own way-stations. These assisted groups to reach Base Areas 702 and 701 which were logistic bases which supported the Front's military operations in the Central Highlands. These way-stations, dubbed the "Liberation Trail," were in effect an extension of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and were used by groups intended for COSVN. It took three weeks to traverse the Liberation Trail on foot.[98]

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[96]Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 34, 38, and 52.

[97]Ibid., pp. 34-35 and 38.

[98]Ibid., pp. 51-53.

COSVN's own logistics organization was large and even more complex than the 559th Group. It maintained 34 commo-liaison stations in Cambodia near the South Vetnamese border. These extended the logistics routes to half a dozen base areas which the Liberation Armed Forces command maintained. COSVN had set up eight rear service groups, and presumably personnel drawn from these units manned the stations. Guiding infiltration groups was only one function of the rear service groups; procuring food and supplies locally and shipping them along with weapons and ammunition to the fighting forces were their main tasks. Maintenance of three units with a unique mission indicated the difficulty COSVN had encountered in controlling large numbers of personnel in vast base areas and others wandering among them. In July 1969 the Liberation Army Headquarters activated the 92nd and 94th Straggler Recovery and Replacement Regiments to augment the existing 90th Regiment. Apart from policing deserters and stragglers, the regiments indoctrinated recalcitrant personnel and recruited and trained local conscripts.[99]

This then was the process for bringing replacements and reserves from North Vietnam to the combat zones in South Vietnam. The initial phase was centralized. The 500th and 559th Transportation Groups, subordinates of the General Logistics Directorate in Hanoi, moved the men through North Vietnam and Laos respectively. The four independent military commands assumed the responsibility for onward movement from there with their own separate logistics units. The long journey, apart

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[99] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 37, 40, 42 and 53.

from the stretch through North Vietnam, had to be made on foot. Travel time from the starting point at Vinh to the southernmost way-station, some 600 miles away, took over 100 days. Heat, fatigue, disease, and interdiction exacted a high cost in attrition. Captured documents and prisoner of war reports pointed to a loss rate of over 15 percent. Apparently malaria was the primary reason soldiers fell out of their infiltration group. In spite of these hardships, the personnel infiltration system succeeded in delivering men to fight in South Vietnam.[100]

Transportation of Supplies

Supplies were delivered to Communist forces in South Vietnam by land and sea. Delivery by land paralleled the personnel infiltration process. The movements of men and of materiel were two parts of the one logistics system. The same organizations were involved and generally the same land routes were used. The maritime system was reserved almost exclusively for the movement of materiel.

Geography was a leading influence in selecting the method of delivery, and security determined how goods would be sent to the requesting military commands. In some cases a combination of both land and sea methods were appropriate. Generally speaking, supplies for Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue went by land. Similarly, land-locked B-3 Front depended on overland deliveries. The vast area of operations of Military Region 5 encouraged delivery by sea to forces near the coast, but, for

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[100]Kellen, A Profile of the PAVN Soldier in South Vietnam, pp. 27-28 and Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 52 and 67. Some infiltrators recuperated from their illnesses, but information on the recovery rate is not available.

the most part, goods arrived by road. COSVN's location contributed to the development of a unique supply system which relied primarily on foreign commercial shippers and local procurement. The Liberation Army's major base areas were located in Cambodia near the Vietnamese border. The Cambodian leader, Prince Sihanouk, tolerated Vietnamese Communist military presence in the border regions. An equally important fact was Cambodia's ostensibly neutral stance which accorded the North Vietnamese the privilege of importing munitions through the deep-water port of Sihanoukville and buying other goods, mainly foodstuffs, locally.

The overland transport of supplies initially utilized the same four logistics routes on which infiltrating personnel traveled, although the specific trails were different. Only seldom did a marching unit travel with a supply train. After trucks took the place of porters and bicycles in 1965, contact between consignments of men and materiel was avoided, if at all possible. The introduction of motor vehicles necessitated the construction and maintenance of roads for their exclusive use. Troops were restricted to the narrower paths. By 1967 trucks entered Laos only by way of the Mu Gia or Ban Karai passes where responsibility was transferred from the 500th Transportation Group to the 559th. The supply convoys then moved on roads which the group's Binh Trams maintained in fulfilling their primary mission to move, store, protect, and dispense supplies.[101]

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[101] U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings Before the Electronic Battlefield Subcommittee, 18, 19, and 24 November 1970, Investigation into Electronic Battlefield Program (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 110 and Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 28-29.

Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue got its supplies through the Demilitarized Zone or from Base Areas 604 and 611 in Laos. The Region's K-12 Transportation Battalion arranged for pickup, haulage, and distribution. Similarly, the 240th Transportation Regiment of Region 5 collected supplies at Base Areas 607, 611, and 614 and freighted them to combat units in South Vietnam. At least three different routes were the potential channels for supplies consigned to the B-3 Front. Some came through Region 5's area and were carried south, others were drawn from Base Area 609, and the Front's southern portion received supplies brought north from COSVN's area. The Front had its own 250th Transportation Regiment for internal logistics support.[102]

Commercial cargo ships under contract to international shipping firms delivered weapons, equipment, and other munitions for COSVN to Sihanoukville. Companies engaged by the North Vietnamese included Gwon-Gwon Shipping, British Asian, Winke Lloyd, and American Pacific Corporation. Two private shippers hauled war materiel from the port to secure base areas near the South Vietnamese border. The Hak Ly Company had worked for the North Vietnamese since 1957. By 1969 the firm's only customer was North Vietnam. The company had a fleet of 100 ten-ton trucks. The second shipper, the Machhim Bopea Company, had 68 trucks of the same capacity. For transport within the Cambodian sanctuaries and for onward shipment to units of the Liberation Army, COSVN utilized its eight rear service groups.[103]

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[102] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. vi, 28-31 and 38.

[103] Ibid., pp. 37-40.

The 603rd Transportation Battalion, a direct subordinate of the General Logistics Directorate, managed the noncommercial infiltration of supplies by sea. The unit used a variety of large and small coastal vessels for the covert delivery of munitions to commands which had access to the sea in South Vietnam. The extent of the operation was never fully defined, but there was evidence that indicated wide use in the early 1960's. In February 1965 a vessel carrying over 100 tons of munitions was sunk off the coast of Phu Yen province in central South Vietnam. In the cargo which was retrieved there were approximately one million rounds of small arms ammunition, 2,500 rifles, 1,000 submachineguns, and more than 1,000 hand grenades.[104] In the mid-1960's sampans, junks, and similar small coastal vessels were used. As there were over 64,000 boats of this general type in South Vietnamese waters, chances that a few carrying supplies from the North could go undetected were reasonably high.[105]

The supply portion of the North Vietnamese logistics system was extensive, well organized and efficiently run. Diverse methods of transport were employed. Utilization of the sea was ingenious, especially the employment of international commercial carriers. One knowledgeable source estimated that "80% of war supplies used by the Communists operating in South Vietnam came from Sihanoukville."[106] As with personnel

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[104] Department of State, Aggression from the North, pp. 15-19.

[105] U.S., Department of Defense, Blue Book of Coastal Vessels, South Vietnam (Columbus, Ohio: Battelle Memorial Institute, 1967), p. 97.

[106] In a lecture entitled "The Vietnam War: As Assessment by a Vietnamese Officer," presented by Colonel Cao Xuan Ve to the Royal United Service Institution, London, England, on 18 November 1970.

infiltration, the logistics system fulfilled its mission of delivering supplies to the fighting forces in South Vietnam

Logistics Accomplishments

The accomplishments of the North Vietnamese Army logistics system, especially between 1964 and 1969, were amazing. The ability to provide large numbers of men and comparable quantities of materiel not only allowed the leadership in Hanoi to prosecute the war, but armed their troops for ever more violent strategies. There is no evidence that logistics seriously constrained the High Command. Well run logistics, in fact, enabled the Communists to match the enemy buildup in South Vietnam and intensify the fighting there.

That the logisticians satisfied every demand or even met the minimum levels of requested support, of course, was never a documented fact. Without access to the pertinent war plans and supply requisitions such a conclusion was beyond reach. In the absence of such information, this paper was restricted to describing the numbers of men reaching combat commands in the South and offering a general conception of the amount of weapons, ammunition, and other supplies delivered. The impact of these deliveries was related to the marked expansion of combat forces and the commensurate increase in violence as the different strategies were unfolded.

In 1964 an estimated 12,000 men were infiltrated into South Vietnam.[107] The input enabled the Viet Cong to expand their main force

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[107]"Pentagon Papers," Book 2, Part IV, Section A, Subsection 5, Tab 3, p. 36.

units to some 31 infantry battalions.[108] Later in the year large scale infiltration began. The initial conversion of Communist troops in the South to a standardized rifle was coincidental. This placed an additional, long-term burden on the incipient logistics system.

Increased logistics requirements became evident in 1965 as the "Reunification Campaign" gradually unfolded. Infiltration doubled to 24,000 men. Significantly this number reflected the introduction of regular North Vietnamese army units. By the end of the year there were 27 North Vietnamese infantry battalions in South Vietnam. The aura of early victory coupled with the thrust of Viet Cong political control into populated areas produced a marked increase in local recruitment and lifted the overall Communist troop strength from 113,000 to 230,000.[109] The number of Viet Cong main force battalions doubled, and the combined total climbed to 94 battalions.[110] The end result was that the South Vietnamese army began to crumble. Its units were overrun and destroyed by Communist battalions which were larger and possessed greater firepower than ever before.

Growth on an ever grander scale was visible the next year. At least 58,000 fresh soldiers arrived from the North upping the number of North Vietnamese battalions to 65.[111] Local recruitment

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[108] U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Enemy Force Buildup, July 1964 - December 1965," Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam, Order of Battle Study 66-1 (formerly Confidential), 1966, p. i.

[109] Ibid., "Monthly Evaluation Report, December 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 64.

[110] Ibid., CICV Order of Battle Study 66-1, p. i.

[111] Ibid.,"Monthly Evaluation Report, December 1966," (formerly Secret), p. 97, and Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 114.

remained high, bringing the total end-of-year strength to over 280,000 men formed into 146 infantry battalions, artillery units, combat engineers, local forces and guerrillas.[112] Heavy fighting punctuated the year. On several occasions the Communists mounted regiment-sized attacks, and battalion-level assaults became more frequent. A sign of the continuous flow of munitions was the vast quantities of stores uncovered in raids on Communist base areas. A U.S. official report summarizing military activity during 1966 concluded "there is no indication of any lessening of enemy determination."[113]

The observation was accurate. Infiltration continued to rise, climbing to over 100,000 during 1967.[114] The battalion count exceeded 200; more than half of them were regular North Vietnamese units. This, however, was General Westmoreland's "Year of the Offensive," and the resulting havoc was a severe blow to Communist forces. Despite the high casualties inflicted by the aggressive American operations, their forces still numbered 225,000 men by the end of the year.[115] Some 75,000 of them were northerners.[116] Not only was the supply of munitions adequate to sustain the sharp fighting, but the logistics system also managed to introduce new, more sophisticated weapons. Foremost among these were

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[112] Military Assistance Command, "Monthly Evaluation Report, December 1966," p. 97.

[113] Ibid., p. 100.

[114] Ibid., CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 59-60.

[115] Ibid., "Quarterly Evaluation Report, January - March 1968," (foremrly Secret), p. 97.

[116] Ibid., CICV Study ST 70-05, p. 59.

the Soviet-manufactured 122mm and 140mm barrage rockets with 11,000 and 8,000-meter ranges respectively.[117] The weight of the launcher, over 100 pounds, and the rocket itself, which weighed nearly 70 pounds, is indicative of the substantial tonnages the logistics system was able to accommodate.[118] As at the end of the preceding year, there was no evidence that the momentum of the fighting or the extent of the logistical effort could not be maintained.

In January 1968, in compliance with the Political Bureau decision to implement a new strategy, a "General Offensive-General Uprising" was lauched coinciding with the "Tet" or lunar new year holidays. This was the largest military campaign the Communists had conducted in Indochina up to that time. Support for it required a huge logistical effort. Infiltration exceeded 234,000 men during the year.[119] That represented the introduction of more soldiers than were present in South Vietnam during the closing months of the previous year. The number of infantry battalions swelled to 245 — the equivalent of 25 divisions of combat troops.[120] By June 70 percent of the combat personnel in the South were northerners.[121] The numbers of men traversing the Ho Chi Minh Trail were enormous: January - 24,000, February - 14,000, March - 33,000,

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[117]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 146.

[118]Republic of Vietnam, Joint General Staff, "War Materiel Used by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam or Presumably Available to North Vietnam," 1974 reprint of the original 1968 edition, pp. 180 and 184.

[119]Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 59-60.

[120]Ibid., "Quarterly Evaluation Report, January - March 1969, p. 143.

[121]Ibid., CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 59-60.

April - 26,000, May - 30,000 and June 25,000. The evidence indicates that more than one 500-man group left North Vietnam every day.[122] No comparable data was compiled on the amount of supplies transported. The support of twice as many infiltrators as in the previous year, as well as the heightened intensity of the fighting and higher fequency of attacks, required upwards of two or three times the amount of ammunition alone.

During the first half of 1969 another round of countrywide attacks were ordered, and the troops necessary for the assaults required the infiltration of 87,000 men. The revised campaign, however, lacked the ferocity of the Tet Offensive although the casualties were high. Later in the year the general offensive strategy was discarded in favor of one of "Protracted War." Nevertheless, the preservation of Communist military presence in the South demanded logistical operations of major proportions. In the subsequent infiltration season, March 1969 through June 1970, a further 43,000 North Vietnamese soldiers tramped their way down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[123] Supplies, too, had to be transported and stockpiled. This meant that the roads and paths had to maintained along with the associated base areas and way-stations. The number of logistical personnel in Laos remained about the same.[124] For the major Communist commands in South Vietnam to continue the war in conformity with the new strategy still required an extensive logistics system.

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[122] Military Assistance Command, CICV Study ST 70-05, pp. 59-60.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid., p. 29.

CHAPTER III

WASHINGTON'S APPROACH

Washington's policymakers recognized the role played by the North Vietnamese military logistics system in frustrating the American political objective in Indochina — the preservation of a non-Communist South Vietnam. The degree of importance attached to the system and the means of dealing with it, however, differed in the policies adopted by three administrations over the years between 1961 and 1969. United States' military strategies pursued in fulfillment of national policies, in turn, reflected the shifting perceptions and politically motivated solutions.

Policy Formulation

U.S. policy for the Indochina war flowed, of course, from the White House, and the resultant military strategy had for its design the achievement at which the policy was aimed. There is, of course, no need to acquaint the reader with the organization of the United States government with its three coequal branches — executive, legislative, and judicial. Their roles, as they were defined in the Constitution or evolved in practice, are known. More pertinent is an examination of the decisionmaking process and the policies of the administrations of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard M. Nixon, who were the Presidents over the years of 1961 through 1969.

Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963

On taking office Kennedy dismantled the formal National Security Council system, replacing it with a flexible organization more suitable to his personal style. The Council ceased being a "superdepartment" overseeing traditional agencies of government, assuming instead equal footing with Cabinet-level departments. Agencies with primary interest in a given field again found themselves responsible. Thus State Department again became supreme in the field of national security with the Defense Department closely integrated in the development of international security policies. The Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs played a key role in coordinating the preparation of studies by the respective agencies, arranging formal Council meetings and promulgating Presidential decisions. The establishment of special "task forces" became common. Under this concept a Cabinet official would undertake the study of a particular issue and draft recommendations concerning it in response to the President's request. He would seek contributions from other interested agencies, and the recommendations would be presented at a formal Council session.[1] In light of the ensuring discussion at the meeting or subsequent to it the President would decide a course of action. Whenever decisions took the form of directives they were disseminated as a "National Security Action Memorandum," abbreviated NSAM, to agencies concerned in their execution. Major Vietnam policy decisions were embodied in a series of top secret NSAM's

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[1]Stanley L. Falk, The National Security Structure (Washington: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1967), pp. 48-52.

beginning with the Kennedy administration and continuing through Johnson's.[2] These NSAM's not only established U.S. goals, but often directed the execution of certain specific actions. There directives committed combat forces, st troop levels, and even ordered specific attacks and military operations. In short, NSAM's regulated the conduct of the war, especially during the Kennedy period.

NSAM-52, which McGeorge Bundy, the President's national security adviser signed on 11 May 1961, prescribed U.S. policy for Vietnam. The national objective was succinctly stated as being "to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam."[3] A subsequent security memorandum, NSAM-111, issued on 22 November 1961, further expanded the U.S. commitment by declaring that "the U.S. Government is prepared to join the Viet-Nam Government in a sharply increased joint effort to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Viet-Nam."[4] The policy remained the same, but the degree of involvement became greater.

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[2]The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, The Senator Gravel Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), volume 1, p. 631. Whenever possible reference has been made to the U.S. Congress's version of the "Pentagon Papers" (see below). However, certain documents and definitions were omitted in the official publication. In such cases it has been necessary to quote from the four-volume Beacon Press edition which contains the 4,100 pages of the Department of Defense's original, top secret study which Senator Gravel entered into the record of a specially convened meeting of his Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds on the evening of 29 June 1971.

[3]U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), Book 11, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, p. 136. Hereafter cited as "Pentagon Papers."

[4]Ibid., p. 419.

Johnson Administration, 1963-1968

Lyndon Johnson's sudden and unprepared ascension to the Presidency in 1963 undoubtedly was the reason for the retention of the Kennedy Council system operating unchanged until McGeorge Bundy's departure in 1966. By then other Kennedy associates had been replaced by persons recommended from various executive departments. The Council staff became less of an active contributor and more of a coordinating body that kept agencies informed and in step with the President's policies. Informal gatherings of selected members of the Council took place of formal meetings. The Secretaries of State and Defense, for example, routinely met for lunch at the White House on Tuesdays. All this better suited Johnson's preference for thrashing out national security matters in private with small groups of confidants. Gradually, the Secretary of Defense's influence grew as Johnson directed more and more of his attention to the operations of the Vietnam war. Bundy's replacement, Walt Whitman Rostow, retained responsibility for advising the President and disseminating decisions in his name. NSAM's continued to be published in numerical sequence throughout the Johnson administration.[5]

The desire for continuity appeared not only in the retention of the Council's organization and procedure, but also in the reiteration of previous policy. The first of the Johnson NSAM's concerning Vietnam, number 273, issued on 26 November 1963, barely four days after Kennedy's

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[5]Stanley L. Falk and Theodore W. Bauer, The National Security Structure (Washington: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1972), pp. 48-51.

assassination, repeated many of the provisions of NSAM-263 of 11 October 1963.[6] NSAM-273 pledged support to the provisional government in Saigon which had come to power following the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem in a coup d'etat on 1 November. The U.S. goal in South Vietnam set forth in NSAM-273, consistent with earlier policy, remained that of assisting "the people and the government of that country win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy."[7]

Johnson's next memorandum, signed on 17 March 1964, was even more forceful in stating the U.S. goal. NSAM-288 decalred that "we must seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam."[8] The rationale for this objective was a reiteration of the "domino-theory," which forecast that "almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance" and the threat to India, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan "would be greatly increased" unless South Vietnam remained free.[9]

The next succeeding declaration of U.S. policy was not contained in a highly classified NSAM. It took the form of a public resolution which the Congress passed on 7 August 1964 by a vote of 88-2 in the Senate and 416-0 in the House. The joint resolution was the reaction

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[6]For a comparison between the two memoranda see "Pentagon Papers," Book 12, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, pp. 578 and 555 for NSAM-263 and Book 3, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 1, pp. 1-4 and 46-47 for NSAM-273.

[7]"Pentagon Papers," Book 2, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 1, pp. 46-47.

[8]Ibid., p. 47.

[9]Ibid., p. 47.

to the reported attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats on two U.S. warships in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin off the Vietnamese coast. The "Tonkin Gulf Resolution," later to become the heated focal point of controversy, authorized the President "to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom."[10] South Vietnam was a "protocol state" under the treaty. The policy stated in the resolution was in line with that recorded in prior NSAM's, but preservation of a non-Communist South Vietnam became, by Congressional mandate, the public policy objective of the Johnson Administration. Interestingly, NSAM's no longer stated the national objective in South Vietnam after the adoption of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Presumably, such statements were no longer considered necessary.

Nixon Administration, 1969

As Vice President in the Eisenhower Administration, Nixon had been a member of the National Security Council, and the experience influenced his attitude when he entered the White House in 1969. He restored the Council to its former preeminent position. The revised organization resembled Eisenhower's Council, but it also reflected the new President's personal requirements of those of his dynamic Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger. The Council's formal sessions were usually restricted to the five statutory members,

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[10] U.S., Department of State, Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268. Emphasis added.

Kissinger, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and if appropriate, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.[11] A number of interagency bodies were created to support the Council, including geographic and functional "Interdepartmental Groups" and the "Senior Review Council." The principal one concerned with Indochina was the ad hoc Vietnam Special Studies Group. This latter body analyzed the military situation and reported to the Council on the feasibility and implications of various courses of action. The NSAM was replaced by the NSDM, or "National Security Decision Memorandum," which served the same purpose.[12]

NSDM's are not public documents and, unlike the NSAM's, those concerned with Vietnam decisions have not been published. In the absence of confidential documentation, official presidential statements outlining U.S. policy towards Vietnam in 1969, the last year within the scope of this study, will be cited. In a major address to the nation delivered on 14 May 1969, Nixon declared that it was up to the people of South Vietnam to decide their future. The U.S. was "prepared to accept any government in South Vietnam that results from the free choice of the South Vietnamese people themselves, even a neutral one." There was "no objection to reunification, if that turns out to be what the people of South Vietnam and the people of North Vietnam want."[13] This seemingly was a noticeable change from Johnson's policy which

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[11] In 1969 the statutory members of the Council were the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness. See Falk and Bauer, p..52.

[12] Ibid., pp. 51-58.

[13] U.S., National Archives, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1969 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 371.

sought "an independent and non-Communist South Vietnam." Examination of Nixon's proposals, however, permits the inference that the outcome of a popular choice would be the same because most of the population of South Vietnam was under Saigon's control. He proposed a negotiated settlement wherein all non-South Vietnamese forces would withdraw from South Vietnam.[14] Nixon announced the initial withdrawal of U.S. forces, some 25,000 men, after meeting with President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam on Midway Island about a month later, in June 1969. He explained that the "Vietnamization Program," by which the equipping and training of South Vietnamese soldiers were being accelerated, was so successful that they could begin replacing U.S. combat troops.[15] Withdrawal, however, would not be total or one-sided.[16] The United States had no intention of abandoning South Vietnam, and Nixon's policy in that regard did not differ from the policies of his predecessors.

Military Strategies

The military strategies in support of national policy which the U.S. armed forces employed in Indochina from 1961 to 1969 can be divided to coincide with the administrations of the three Commanders-in-Chief who directed the overall conduct of American involvement there.

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[14] Public Papers of Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1969, p. 373. Emphasis added.

[15] Ibid., p. 443.

[16] Ibid., p. 370.

Within these periods distinct strategies employing ground, air, and naval forces were developed to fulfill the missions Washington assigned.

Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963

In the Kennedy period, accurately characterized as the "advisory years," U.S. military strategy was to supply the material assistance and advice necessary for the South Vietnamese armed forces to defeat the Communist insurgents.[17] NSAM-52, approved in May 1961, listed specific military action to be undertaken in "A Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam." The Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, for example, was to be enlarged to about 785 military personnel to enable it to train an additional 20,000 men of the expanding South Vietnamese armed forces.[18] A U.S. Army Special Forces Group of approximately 400 men also was to be deployed to Vietnam to accelerate the training of South Vietnamese special forces. Another enumerated action was the support and training of the Vietnamese "Junk Force" to improve its counter-infiltration capability.[19] NSAM-65 of August of the same year increased the amount of assistance so that the South

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[17]General Westmoreland provided this label in his public report to the President. See Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 75.

[18]The original advisory element, the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Indochina, was organized on 17 September 1950 to manage the supply of military equipment to the French Union forces. It was redesignated the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, on 1 November 1955 following the Geneva Accords of 1954. See Major General George S. Eckhardt, Command and Control, 1950-1969 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1974), pp. 7-13.

[19]"Pentagon Papers," Book 11, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, pp. 136-142.

Vietnamese armed forces could be expanded from 170,000 to 200,000 men.[20] In October 1961, the President, in NSAM-104, directed "guerrilla ground-action, including the use of U.S. advisors if necessary, against Communist aerial resupply missions in the Tchepone area" of Laos.[21] The following month NSAM-111 ordered an increase in U.S. airlift support to include helicopters and fixed wing transports. Other additional equipment to be furnished were small vessels along with "such United States uniformed advisers and operating personnel as may be necessary for operations in effecting surveillance and control over the coastal waters and inland waterways."[22] In February 1962, a Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was established as a subordinate, unified command under the control of the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, who reported directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Paul D. Harkins, the deputy army commander for the Pacific area, was selected to head the new command which was charged with advising the South Vietnamese on the organization and employment of their forces.[23] The number of advisers rose to over 3,400 men in 1962.[24] The last of the Kennedy NSAM's pertaining to Vietnam, number 263, dated October 1963, approved

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[20]"Pentagon Papers," Book 11, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, pp. 241-242.

[21]Ibid., p. 328.

[22]Ibid., p. 419-420.

[23]The Military Assistance Command was responsible for military policy, operations, and assistance including advising the South Vietnamese on the organization and employment of their paramilitary and military forces. The Military Assistance Advisory Group remained a separate entity responsible to the Command only for advisory and operational matters. The Group reported to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, on the administration of the Military Assistance Program. See Eckhardt, pp. 22-23 and 27-28.

[24]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 77.

recommendations made by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and General Maxwell D. Taylor following a visit to Vietnam. Their advice was to encourage the South Vietnamese to raise the tempo of their campaigns, especially in the Delta region, to emphasize "clear and hold operations" rather than "terrain sweeps," and to train the Vietnamese so that they would be able to perform the essential functions of U.S. military personnel by the end of 1965.[25] The extent of support grew over the years, but the strategy was restricted to assisting rather than participating in the fighting.

Johnson Administration, 1963-1968

In the Johnson years an independent and self-subsisting U.S. military strategy emerged, involving ground, naval, and air forces, and the consequent of increasing numbers of American combat troops, warships, and aircraft. Until combat forces were committed in March 1965, the Military Assistance Command, however, was still concerned largely with advisory tasks. The first open confrontation between North Vietnamese and U.S. forces occurred in August 1964. By early 1965 American advisers had clearly become special targets of the Viet Cong. Other adverse conditions manifested themselves in the failure of clandestine raids against North Vietnam, threats of other forms of military pressure, and rapid deterioration in the military situation in the South. All of this contributed to the demand not only

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[25]"Pentagon Papers," Book 12, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, pp. 555 and 576.

for the direct deployment of U.S. combat forces but also for new strategies for their employment.

In the meantime, however, the Johnson administration pursued the Kennedy policy of advice and support. The new administration's first NSAM, number 273, for example, essentially reaffirmed Kennedy's NSAM-263 with little new in military direction apart from confining cross-border operations to a 50-kilometer area of Laos.[26] The next memorandum on Vietnam, NSAM-288, had a more vigorous connotation. That it ordered new and specific military actions attested Johnson's willingness to widen the character of American assistance. This NSAM differed from others in that it was a copy of a 16 March 1964 memorandum to the President from the Secretary of Defense containing recommendations based upon McNamara's trip to Vietnam earlier in the month. Issued as a NSAM the next day, it directed a 50,000 man increase in the South Vietnamese armed forces and ordered the supply of close air support aircraft to the air force, armored personnel carriers to the army, and river boats to the navy. Significantly, it also authorized:

> continued high level U.S. overflights of South Vietnam's borders and ... 'hot pursuit' and South Vietnamese ground operations over the Laotian line for the purpose of border control More ambitious operations into Laos involving units beyond battalion size should be authorized only with the approval of Souvanna Phouma [the Royal Government Premier]. Operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia ... Prepare immediately to be in position on 72 hours' notice to initiate the full range of Laotian and Cambodian 'Border Control' actions (beyond those authorized ... above) and the 'Retaliatory Actions' against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 30 days' notice to initiate the program of 'Graduated Overt Military Pressure' against North Vietnam.[27]

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[26]"Pentagon Papers," Book 3, Part IV, Section B, Subsection 3, p. 38.

[27]The Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel edition, volume 3, pp. 509-510.

Although a marked increase in American involvement appeared certain, the NSAM did not envision a further buildup of U.S. forces or the need for the Military Assistance Command to assume a greater degree of control over the conduct of the war. On the contrary, two such proposals — U.S. command over South Vietnamese forces and the deployment of a U.S. combat unit to secure the Saigon area -- were rejected because "the possible military advantages of such action would be far outweighed by its adverse psychological impact."[28] The effort was still very much an advisory one for "the South Vietnamese must win their own fight."[29]

Even though the U.S. role remained primarily advisory in nature, the magnitude of the effort grew. The number of advisers and support personnel doubled from 11,000 men at the beginning of 1963 to 23,000 by the end of 1964.[30] The awkward arrangement in which two separate headquarters, the Military Assistance Advisory Group and the Military Assistance Command, reported to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, was changed in May 1964. The Advisory Group was disbanded. The Assistance Command assumed its functions, eliminating duplication and simplifying coordination with the Vietnamese. A month later General Westmoreland replaced General Harkins as commander.[31]

On 2 August 1964 three North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the U.S.S. Maddox, a destroyer sailing 28 miles off the coast of North

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[28]"Pentagon Papers," Book 3, Part IV, Section B, Subsection 3, pp. 41-42.

[29]Ibid., p. 48.

[30]Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 80 and 95.

[31]Eckhardt, p. 42.

Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. U.S. air and naval forces returned the fire, damaging and driving off the patrol boats. Two days later, North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the Maddox and another destroyer, U.S.S. C. Turner Joy, some 60 miles off the coast.[32] After consultations at a special National Security Council meeting, the President directed retaliatory attacks against a patrol boat base and oil storage facility.[33] The next step was the adoption of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution three days later.

A series of actions in Vietnam and Laos, actual and prospective, were accorded authorization a month later, on 10 September 1964, in NSAM-314. These had a wide range. In addition to the resumption of U.S. naval patrols outside the 12-mile limit, the memorandum prescribed a variety of South Vietnamese activites in the Laotian corridor and by renewed clandestine attacks on North Vietnam. The most significant aspect was the emphasis placed on directing U.S. forces to be ready to retaliate in event of attack.[34] Undoubtedly the NSAM's authors had in mind the first North Vietnamese - United States confrontation in the previous month. The directive hung fire, in effect, for five months, until 7 February 1965, when a U.S. advisory compound near Pleiku in South Vietnam's Central Highlands underwent attack. In retaliation the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the execution of a contingency plan, known as "Flaming Dart." Forty-five planes from aircraft carriers Coral Sea

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[32]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 12.

[33]"Pentagon Papers," Book 4, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 2(b), pp. 5-11.

[34]The Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel edition, volume 3, p. 565.

and Hancock attacked an army barracks and port facilities at Dong Hoi in North Vietnam. The air and naval campaign against North Vietnam began, revealing a distict strategy.[35]

In 1965, however, the political instability in Saigon and the heavy pressure of Viet Cong and regular North Vietnamese regiments brought about the near collapse of the South Vietnamese army as battalion after battalion was overrun. Insofar as the public record shows, there was no NSAM directing the first increment of U.S. combat, as distinct from advisory, personnel to South Vietnam. It began with the arrival of a Marine Corps brigade on 8 March 1965 to secure the airbase at Danang in northern South Vietnam. Two weeks later a U.S. Army Military Police battalion arrived in Saigon to guard American-occupied installations in the capital.[36]

The next NSAM on Vietnam responded to a request for additional combat units which had the support of the Army Chief of Staff and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. The National Security Council met to consider the request. The outcome of the Council's deliberations, NSAM-328 of 6 April 1965, was a crucial document. It authorized the use of American troops in ground combat, thereby altering the character of the U.S. military commitment. The number of additional military personnel was limited. Two more Marine Corps battalions, a Marine air squadron and some 20,000 support troops were to be deployed. The mission

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[35]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 14.

[36]Ibid., p. 108.

of the Marine battalions was phrased "to permit their more active use."[37] Further the governments of South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand were to be consulted with "the possibility of rapid deployment of significant combat elements from their armed forces" to South Vietnam.[38] The way in which the war was directed took a new turn. NSAM's apparently ceased being the means for deciding Vietnam policy and providing strategic direction.[39] As far as the conduct of the war in South Vietnam was concerned, the policymakers' role thereafter became that of deciding on requests for additional manpower from the Military Assistance Command in Saigon. The plans developed to fulfill Westmoreland's strategic objectives required an ever-increasing number of men and even more logistical support to sustain them. The war against North Vietnam was more closely regulated as different ways to achieve the national objective were tried.

The more active phases of the war in Indochina were controlled by three distinct strategical concepts, rather than a single strategy -- one for South Vietnam, one for North Vietnam, and one for Laos. The strategies developed along command lines, and there was a command responsible for each country.

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[37] "Pentagon Papers," Book 4, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 5, p. 125.

[38] Ibid., p. 125. Emphasis added.

[39] This statement is based upon the material contained in the Pentagon Papers. The only subsequent NSAM mentioned in that study is NSAM-362 of 9 May 1967, dated over two years after NSAM-328. NSAM-362 transferred responsibility for the pacification program from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon to the Military Assistance Command. "Pentagon Papers," Book 5, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 6(b), pp. 131-132.

The Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, was the senior commander of U.S. forces deployed in the vast region stretching from the Bering Sea to the Indian Ocean. He reserved to his command the responsibility for air and naval campaigns against North Vietnam.[40] The Pacific Command also had within its jurisdiction the Military Assistance Command but had accorded it, in effect, independent responsibility for conducting the war in South Vietnam.[41] The commander in South Vietnam had naval and air assets as well as Army and Marine units. Although all U.S. Navy units were assigned to Pacific Command, the Military Assistance Command exercised "operational control" over them as it did with the U.S. Marine Corps forces in the country. The situation with Air Force elements was more complex. The Commanding General of the 2nd Air Division (later upgraded to the Seventh Air Force) accepted direction for air operations over South Vietnam from the Military Assistance Command. For operations elsewhere in Indochina, even if launched from bases in South Vietnam, the orders came from the Pacific Command.[42] In Laos the situation was unique. There the American ambassador had overall responsibility for the U.S. surrogates fighting in support of the Royal Lao Government. U.S. air operations also came within his purview.[43] His war for the most part, was unrelated,

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[40]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. i.

[41]Eckhardt, pp. 61-63.

[42]Ibid., p. 58.

[43]In his memoirs, Westmoreland, only partially in jest, equated the power of the American ambassador in Laos to that of a "field marshal." See General William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 76-77 and 196.

however, to the fighting in South Vietnam, although aspects of the interdiction bombing along the Ho Chi Minh Trail did bear on the warfare in the South.

Attrition was the military strategy which General Westmoreland developed during his tenure of commander of the Military Assistance Command from June 1964 to July 1968. According to his views, the strategy was "dictated by political decisions."[44] Unfavorable connotations attached to attrition due to high mortality rates on the Western Front in World War I were, in his eyes, inapplicable to South Vietnam where, he believed, it was a viable strategy "against an enemy with relatively limited manpower."[45] As the South Vietnamese government expanded its control over the countryside, he saw the Viet Cong recruiting base reduced. Heavy Communist losses made them increasingly dependent on North Vietnam for replacements. As the demand rose, the level of training of the northerners sent south fell off. At the same time, he reasoned, continuous pressure on Communist forces provided the battered South Vietnamese army a much needed respite in order to build up and expand the pacification program. Westmoreland doubted that there was an alternative open to him. Political restrictions against "broadening" the war precluded him from taking the steps he considered necessary to break "the enemy's will to continue the war."[46] These measures included the bombing the North Vietnamese port of Haiphong,

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[44]Westmoreland, p. 153.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid., p. 355.

invading the southern portion of North Vietnam, raiding enemy bases in Cambodia and Laos, and cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail with ground forces.[47]

In 1968 Westmoreland described his concept for the strategy he later labeled attrition.[48] It was a three-phase sustained campaign. The purpose of the initial phase was to stop the losing trend, stifle the enemy's initiative, and provide as much security as possible to the populated areas. The first phase began in June 1965 with its completion envisioned by the end of the year. He called 1965 "the year of military commitment."[49] The succeeding phase was intended to wear down the enemy, put him on the defensive, and drive him from the large populated areas. To accomplish this required major offensive operations by U.S. and allied forces in order to secure the initiative and destroy the enemy's regular, main, local, and guerrilla forces. This phase commenced "during the first half of 1966," which he called "the year of development."[50] The third phase, involved destruction of Communist regular and main force units in remote base areas and the elimination of guerrillas. In each of the three phases the basic objective was:

> to cut off the enemy from his sources of supply — food, manpower, and munitions. Simultaneously pressure would have to maintained against all echelons of the enemy's organization — main forces, local forces, guerrillas, terrorist organizations and political infrastructure.[51]

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[47] Westmoreland, p. 355.

[48] Ibid., p. 153 and Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 100.

[49] Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 97.

[50] Ibid., p. 113.

[51] Ibid., p. 100.

In a semiofficial history of one aspect of the war, Tactical and Materiel Innovations, which Westmoreland commissioned as the Army's Chief of Staff, General John Hay dated Phase I from the middle of 1965 to the middle of 1966.[52] During that period U.S. forces were built up to over 200,000 men and a supporting logistics base was developed. The successful defense of South Vietnam allowed time for the revitalization and expansion of that nation's own armed forces. Large offensive operations in Phase II, from the middle of 1966 to late 1967, drove the enemy into his sanctuaries. His bases were entered, and his supplies destroyed.[53] The American buildup continued, reaching 485,000 in 1967 and the South Vietnamese forces improved and expanded. Gradually combined operations with U.S. and South Vietnamese were encouraged. According to Hay, Phase III began at the time of the Communist-launched "Tet Offensive" early in 1968. This phase resulted in the destruction of the enemy's forces. Further upgrading of South Vietnamese forces prepared them for an ever-increasing combat role. This was the military strategy adopted and executed by the U.S. commander in South Vietnam.[54]

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[52]Lieutenant General John H. Hay, Jr., Tactical and Materiel Innovations (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1974), pp. 171-177.

[53]The devastation inflicted on Vietnamese Communist forces during this period was recorded in Chapter II above.

[54]In his writings General Westmoreland emphatically denies that "search and destroy" was a strategy. Rather, "search and destroy" was an operational term describing a "tactic." To him it was nothing more than the infantry's traditional offensive mission to "find, fix in place, fight and destroy (or neutralize) enemy forces." It was not the distorted popularly held notion of "aimless searches in the jungle and the destruction of property." See Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 91.

Manpower was the only constraint imposed on General Westmoreland, apart from confining his activities to South Vietnam. His strategic concept was not questioned, but he had to justify requests for increases in forces necessary to satisfy his three-phased strategy. To raise the overall manpower ceiling he enumerated the additional number of infantry, tank, artillery, and engineer battalions he sought, along with commensurate logistical units, and the increase in aircraft, including helicopters, he desired. The Military Assistance Command forwarded his requests through the Pacific Command to the Joint Chiefs of Staff who reviewed the requests and made their own recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. He then considered the military recommendations and formulated his recommendations for Presidential consideration.[55]

Unlike the situation in South Vietnam, Washington was deeply involved in formulating the strategy and directing the war against North Vietnam. General Westmoreland had a relatively free rein compared to Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Jr., the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, the individual directly responsible for the air and naval campaign against the North. The reason for this stemmed in part from the conception of air and naval power as "strategic" applications of force conducted on a grand scale and directed against an adversary's entire war-making capacity. Therefore it demanded direction at the highest levels of command. Another reason, coupled with this conception of air and naval strategy, was the evident practice of attempting to use air power to persuade Hanoi to comply with diplomatic overtures. Here again there was a

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[55]This process is covered in detail in "Pentagon Papers," Book 5, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 6(a). See especially pp. 93-110.

necessity for orchestration by Washington's top policy makers.[56]

In 1965, President Johnson defined the objective of the air campaign against North Vietnam to be:

> --To back our fighting men and our fighting allies by demonstrating that the aggressor could not bring hostile arms and men to bear against South Vietnam from the security of a sanctuary.
> --To exact a penalty against North Vietnam for her flagrant violations of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962.
> --To limit the flow, or substantially increase the cost, of infiltration of men and materiel from North Vietnam.[57]

A pair of additional reasons for bombing North Vietnam emerged: "to break the will of North Vietnam" and "to affect negotiations for the end to the war."[58] Although these points were labeled "objectives," they could also be viewed as rationales for the bombing. The manner in which the air campaign evolved, however, suggested that the ultimate "objective" was to dissuade Hanoi from supporting the war in South Vietnam. That a "carrot and stick" strategy had been adopted seemed implicit. The bombing would gradually escalate until an interruption brought a pause of uncertain duration in which Hanoi had an opportunity to manifest some form of compliance to avert the threat of even heavier attacks.

The initial air strikes against North Vietnam were reprisals in February 1965 for Viet Cong attacks on U.S. advisory personnel in

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[56]This is the subject of Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(a) and (b) of the "Pentagon Papers." For one example see pp. 63-92.

[57]General George J. Eade, "Reflections on Air Power in the Vietnam War," Air University Review, November-December 1973.

[58]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Bombing as a Policy Tool in Vietnam: Effectiveness, A Staff Study Based on the Pentagon Papers, 12 October 1972 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), p. (1).

South Vietnam. In March a sustained bombing campaign called "Rolling Thunder" replaced the "Flaming Dart" operations. On 2 May 1965 the first "pause" occured when "Rolling Thunder" was suspended and Hanoi informed that the purpose of the halt was to bring about "significant reductions" in Communist attacks. The ultimatum emphasized "that the road toward the end of armed attacks against the people and Government of Vietnam is the only road which will permit the Government of Vietnam (and the Government of the United States) to bring a permanent end to their attacks on North Vietnam."[59] The President ordered "Rolling Thunder" to be resumed on 18 May after the American overture had been rejected. In the renewed campaign, "the area and intensity of armed reconnaissance were expanded but at a carefully measured and moderate pace."[60]

In July 1965 Secretary of Defense McNamara outlined the five principles of the "carrot and stick"strategy which embraced a gradual incremental escalation of the bombing: (1) "Emphasize the threat" -- pressure on North Vietnam was premised on the fear of heavier destruction in the future. (2) "Minimize the loss of the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam - North Vietnam] 'face'" — make it easier for Hanoi to negotiate, most likely during a period when the North is not being bombed. (3) "Optimize interdiction vs. political costs" — as "it makes no difference whether a rifle is interdicted on its way into North Vietnam, on its way out of North Vietnam, in Laos or in South Vietnam," choose

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[59]"Pentagon Papers," Book 4, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 3, p. 114.

[60]Sharp and Westmoreland, p. 18. Emphasis added.

the area where repercussions were less likely. (4) "Coordinate with other influences on the DRV" -- if the Communist believe that they are winning, the bombing will have little influence; so the bombing should be designed to make peaceful settlement more favorable to them than a continuation of the fighting. (5) "Avoid undue risks and costs" -- avoid any bombing which would risk Soviet or Chinese involvement or "appall allies and friends."[61] This strategy was adopted. The bombing was expanded and intensified, but the possibility of another pause remained. The Viet Cong proposed a truce over the 1965 Christmas holidays. The U.S. responded with a 24-hour halt in the bombing of North Vietnam. According to McNamara's principles, the suspension was extended and lasted for 37 days. Again there was no response from Hanoi indicating a willingness to negotiate, and the bombing was resumed on 31 January 1966. During the rest of 1966, apart from short standdowns for the Tet, Christmas, and New Year holidays, "Rolling Thunder" continued to expand in intensity and scope.[62] The most significant expansion was the large scale attack against petroleum storage facilities at Hanoi and Haiphong. By November the level of monthly sorties had risen to 13,200.[63] At the same time the types of targets increased, including a number which were not related to interdiction.

In 1967 despite recommendations to the contrary from General

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[61]"Pentagon Papers," Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(a), pp. 15-16.

[62]Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 24-26.

[63]Ibid., p. 25.

Westmoreland, Admiral Sharp, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, another extended bombing pause was ordered. North Vietnam was informed of a bombing halt at the beginning of the Tet holidays on 8 February. Once again, Hanoi remained silent and used the respite for massive shipments of munitions southward. Disappointed, the President ordered the resumption of the bombing on 14 February. "Rolling Thunder" was further expanded and in addition to impeding the movement of men and materiel" Admiral Sharp was authorized to embark on "destroying the war-making resources in North Vietnam."[64] Targets were restricted but included iron and steel factories, oil storage tanks, cement mills, and electric power plants. There were brief truces during Buddha's birthday on 23 May 1967 and Christmas and New Year's Day, but "Rolling Thunder" continued unabated throughout the year except in inclement weather. In another attempt to bring the North Vietnamese to the peace table, the bombing was curtailed, though not suspended, on 1 April 1968. The President announced the end of the bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel. This excluded 90 percent of the population from air raids, and the bombing concentrated on truck parks, military complexes, and storage areas as well as vehicular movement in the southern portion of North Vietnam.[65] Finally, on the eve of the American national elections, President Johnson announced on 31 October the cessation of bombing North Vietnam and with it the abandonment of the air strategy

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[64] Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 38-39.

[65] Ibid., p. 47.

which had been intended to dissuade Hanoi from supporting the war in the South.

Nixon Administration, 1969

The new administration did not reinstitute attacks on North Vietnam, and the air strategy was confined to interdiction in Laos and, later, Cambodia. Similarly, there was no new strategy for the conduct of the war in South Vietnam. General Creighton W. Abrams replaced Westmoreland in July 1968. Although Abrams retained the strategy of attirtion, he shifted the emphasis by focusing on the protection of the population from harassment by regular North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force elements. Fire bases were used as screens. These outposts ordinarily were unable to prevent intrusions, but they offered sufficient warnings of penetrations to set in motion forces to confront intruders, engage them before they assaulted populated areas and pursue them in flight. Neutralization of the Viet Cong political infrastructure within the "pacified" areas was stressed. South Vietnamese regular and paramilitary units were encouraged to perform this task as well as root out Viet Cong local and guerrilla forces in the area.[66] The evidence, although inconclusive, indicates that this modification to Westmoreland's strategy was the result of fresh political direction from the new administration.

In his campaign for the Presidency, Nixon declared that he

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[66] Brian M Jenkins, The Unchangeable War, RM-6278-2-ARPA (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1970), pp. 4-5.

had "a plan" for ending the war. After his inauguration in January 1969, the elements of his plan emerged with "Vietnamization" as the chief military aspect. This term, coined by the new Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, meant that the U.S. would gradually turn over the fighting to South Vietnamese forces, allowing American combat forces to withdraw from the region.[67] This was the prelude to Nixon's announcement in June that 25,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn by the end of August. Implicit in the deescalation of American fighting in the ground war was the desire to keep U.S. battle casualties low. In keeping with the government's policy, small unit patrols, instead of battalion and brigade sweeps, became common. A reduction in the intensity of the fighting in South Vietnam, however, did not mean a commensurate reduction in the air strategy.

Interdiction Operations

Interdicting the movement of men and supplies from North Vietnam to the fighting commands in the South was part of the respective strategies of each of the three American "commanders" in Indochina.

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[67] Westmoreland, p. 387. The concept of "Vietnamization" was not something new. NSAM-263 estbalised as early as October 1963 a program "to train Vietnamese so that essential functions now performed by U.S. military personnel can be carried out by the Vietnamese by the end of 1965. It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel by that time." "Pentagon Papers," Book 12, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, pp. 555 and 578. Westmoreland believed in November 1967 that "it will be possible ... to phase down our level of commitment and turn more of the burden of the war over to the Vietnamese Armed Forces." In his memoirs he wrote that his plan for a "self-contained" South Vietnamese army was "never fully approved" by the Johnson administration. Westmoreland, pp. 234-235.

In the case of the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, interdiction was a primary mission. The resources available to him; air, naval-air, and warships, were wellsuited for such operations. The U.S. ambassador in Laos also was intimately involved in directing air strikes against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. On the other hand, the man charged with defeating Communist forces in South Vietnam was severely restricted from interfering with the enemy's logistics system outside of his area of responsibility.

The Military Assistance Command's interdiction efforts can be divided into land, air, and sea operations. The use of ground forces in Laos had its origins in NSAM-104 of October 1961. It authorized "the use of U.S. advisors if necessary" against Communist resupply missions in Laos.[68] Insofar as the evidence reveals, the first planned use of American military personnel in Laos emerged in the Pacific Command's Operations Plan (OPLAN) 34A. The first phase was put into action in February 1964. The plan provided for covert South Vietnamese operations in North Vietnam and Laos. Participating South Vietnamese personnel were trained and equipped by the Pacific Command and the Central Intelligence Agency, but the Military Assistance Command controlled the operations.[69] NSAM-273 of 26 November 1963 allowed cross-border operations into a limited area of Laos, and NSAM-288 of March 1964 authorized further South Vietnamese ground operations in that neighboring country.[70] To plan and execute these operations the

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[68]"Pentagon Papers," Book 11, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, p. 328.

[69]Ibid., Book 3, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 2(a), pp. 1-2.

[70]See notes 26 and 27 above.

Assistance Command created the "Studies and Observation Group." Known by the acronym "SOG", it was a "joint conventional warfare task force" which included personnel from all the U.S. armed services and the Central Intelligence Agency. Presumably this was one reason for the close supervision the Joint Chiefs of Staff exercised over the Group's activities. Each contemplated operation had to have the approval of the Secretaries of Defense and State as well as the White House. SOG grew in size, eventually numbering some 2,500 U.S. personnel and 7,000 South Vietnamese mercenaries. The first SOG operations in Laos, known as "Leaping Lena," consisted of small teams, five to six men, parachuted into the country to reconnoiter and harass North Vietnamese along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The following year, 1965, "Prairie Fire" replaced "Leaping Lena." In the new operation, the teams were enlarged to as many as nine South Vietnamese. But more significantly they included up to three Americans. Gathering intelligence on the North Vietnamese logistics system was their primary mission. At times teams were authorized to mine the paths and destroy undefended supply stocks.[71]

The use of aircraft controlled by the Military Assistance Command over Laos brought to the fore a conflict over command responsibilities. At Westmoreland's insistance, his authority finally was extended over a limited area in Laos. Under a program dubbed "Tiger Hound," beginning in late 1965, small propeller-driven spotter planes were permitted to

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[71] Westmoreland, pp. 106-107. To detect infiltrators as they entered South Vietnam (a topic outside the scope of this paper) border surveillance camps were built and manned by some 45,000 men, primarily mercenaries of Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) advised by U.S. and South Vietnamese Special Forces personnel. See Westmoreland, pp 59, 78 and 147.

fly over southern Laos up to 12 miles from the South Vietnamese border. Tactical fighter-bomber and B-52 heavy bomber aircraft were used in air strikes when the spotters observed suitable targets. Each strike, however, required the prior concurrence of the American ambassador to Laos.[72] In a similar program, "Operation Tally Ho," initiated in July 1966, reconnaissance aircraft flew over southern North Vietnam just north of the Demilitarized Zone.[73]

For maritime interdiction the Military Assistance Command had wider latitude. As with other military operations in Indochina, the origin of naval interdiction was contained in presidential memoranda. As early as May 1961 NSAM-52 directed the improvement of the counter-infiltration capability of the South Vietnamese "Junk Force."[74] In two years the force grew from 80 sailing junks 64 motorized junks.[75] The Junk Force was a paramilitary organization. Civilian irregulars manned the vessels, and the South Vietnamese Navy only "nominally officered" the fleet. It remained separate and undermanned at less than 50 percent of its authorized strength with only 3,700 civilians and 400 regular navy officers assigned.[76] In the meantime the fledgling

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[72]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, December 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 30 and Westmoreland, p. 196.

[73]Ibid., "Monthly Evalaution Report, July 1966," (formerly Secret), p. 41, and Westmoreland, p. 196.

[74]"Pentagon Papers," Book 11, Part V, Section B, Subsection 4, pp. 136-142.

[75]Commander R.L. Schreadley, "The Naval War in Vietnam, 1950-1970," Naval Review 1971 (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1971), p. 184.

[76]Ibid., pp. 185-186.

South Vietnamese Navy was enlarged with the subsequent expansion of the U.S. advisory effort. By the end of 1963 the navy had grown to 6,200 men and 50 patrol vessels. The Communist decision to standardize small arms in South Vietnam led the Military Assistance Command to expect increased maritime infiltration of weapons and ammunition. Skepticism concerning the performance of the Junk Force, coupled with the anticipated expansion of the Viet Cong supply system encouraged General Westmoreland to persuade the South Vietnamese high command of the efficacy of a joint naval patrol effort.[77] The outcome of the deliberations was "Operation Market Time," a maritime interdiction program which began in March 1965. A month later a decree integrated the Junk Force into the regular South Vietnamese Navy, assigning its assets to the "Coastal Force."[78] Although originally envisioned as a means to "inspire the Vietnamese Navy to increase the quality and quantity of its searches," the main effort of "Market Time" for a few years was largely conducted by the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard.[79] The primitive vessels of the defunct Junk Force were replaced with fewer but more sophisticated craft. By June 1968 there were 116 vessels assigned to "Market Time" duties, including 26 U.S. Coast Guard cutters and 84 specially designed 50-foot aluminum "Swift

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[77]Schreadley, p. 188.

[78]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, April 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 26. The South Vietnamese Navy was composed of four elements: the River Force, the Coastal Force, the Sea Force and the Marine Brigade. Coastal and Sea Forces participated in "Market Time" operations.

[79]Schreadley, p. 188 and U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, July 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 19.

Boats."[80] The concept of the operation called for the establishment and maintenance of three anti-infiltration barriers at sea. "Swift Boats" patrolled the inshore barrier, medium-size warships, including cutters and minesweepers, covered the second barrier, and reconnaissance aircraft based in South Vietnam and the Philippines patroled the third zone which extended 150 miles off the South Vietnamese coastline.[81] Aircraft passed information concerning suspicious shipping to seagoing vessels for possible interception. The South Vietnamese government formally authorized U.S. Navy ships to search and seize suspected vessels on her behalf within the national three-mile limit and in the contiguous zone extending out 12 miles. Vessels believed to be of South Vietnamese registry could be searched beyond that zone. If they proved to be foreign vessels, the South Vietnamese government agreed to pay any compensation demanded.[82] South Vietnamese participation in "Market Time" increased as American-supplied craft expanded their naval inventory. By 1967 specific patrol areas were assigned to the South Vietnamese Navy in accordance with a joint plan.[83] The following year the program of turning over resources and responsibilities to the South Vietnamese Navy was accelerated. By 1969 it conducted much of the

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[80]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, April-June 1968," (formerly Secret), p. 43.

[81]Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., On Watch, A Memoir (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), pp. 36-37.

[82]Schreadley, p. 188.

[83]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, October-December 1967," (formerly Secret), p. 66.

maritime interdiction effort.[84]

In the Pacific Command's bombing campaign against North Vietnam, although the emphasis on objective varied from time to time, interdiction held a primary position. Even when the target list took in the nation's "war-making resources," installations and conveyences involved in the movement of munitions and men to South Vietnam continued to be attacked. Targets destroyed or damaged under "Rolling Thunder" in the span of 1966-1968, shown in the table below, indicates the magnitude of the aerial interdiction effort against North Vietnam:[85]

Target type	1966 number	1967 number	1968 number
Fuel storage areas	4,481	132	214
Staging supply areas	1,141	1,572	533
Ports	122	88	13
Railroad yards	129	179	6
Motor vehicles	4,084	5,587	4,704
Railroad vehicles	2,314	2,511	348
Water vehicles	9,500	11,763	2,715

The bombing of North Vietnam was curtailed in April 1968 when President Johnson stopped air attacks north of the 20th parallel. At the end of October, he ordered all bombing of North Vietnam to cease. This explains the sharp decline in 1968 depicted in the table above. Cessation of the air raids on the North did not end the aerial interdiction campaign altogether; it just resulted in an increase of effort elsewhere in Indochina. The Pacific Command retargetted aircraft

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[84]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, April-June 1969," (formerly Secret), p. 85.

[85]Sharp and Westmoreland, pp. 29, 42 and 46.

formerly engaged over North Vietnam against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, augmenting the four-year old air campaign there.[86]

Air interdiction in Laos can be traced to NSAM-288 of March 1964 which authorized "U.S. overflights of South Vietnam's borders" and stressed the need to obtain the approval of the Laotian Premier, Souvanna Phouma, for "more ambitious operations."[87] The first use of U.S. aircraft over Laos began a few months later, in May, under the operational code name "Yankee Team." Originally this operation was restricted to reconnaissance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail area of southeastern Laos. In October it was expanded to armed escorts for the Royal Lao Air Force's strike missions in support of the ground war against the Communist Pathet Lao, necessitating deeper penetrations into the Plain of Jars in north central Laos. The U.S. aircraft operated under strict "rules of engagement" -- firing only when first fired on. At the same time, between October and December, Royal Lao aircraft flew interdiction missions against portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Provisions of the Geneva Agreement of 1962 which established the "neutrality" of Laos precluded U.S. aircraft from attacking. On 10 December 1964 the American ambassador in Laos reported that Premier Souvanna Phouma "fully supports the U.S. pressures program" and particularly interdiction of the Trail, even though he would decline

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[86]Redirecting to Laos aircraft idled by a halt in the bombing of North Vietnam was not without precedent. It occurred during the 37-day "pause" of December 1965 - January 1966. See U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, January 1966," (formerly Secret), p. 34.

[87]The Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel edition, volume 3, p. 509.

to say publicly that the U.S. had expanded military activity in his country.[88] Four days later, "Operation Barrel Roll," the bombing of North Vietnamese targets in Laos by U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft commenced.[89] "Yankee Team" reconnaissance flights continued to furnish targetting information for "Barrel Roll" strikes.[90] An unpublicized U.S. air interdiction program against the Ho Chi Minh Trail system was instituted. It continued for some seven years in growing intensity and sophistication. A variety of jet tactical fighter-bombers and bombers including B-52 strategic bombers were employed.[91] The diversion of Pacific Command air assets from North Vietnam to Laos in 1968 raised interdiction to enormous proportions statistically. One report has estimated that over 2½ million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos, from 1964 to 1972, making it by that time "the world's most bombed country."[92]

The air interdiction campaign in Laos was not limited to bombardment with high-explosives. Napalm, a jellified gasoline fire-

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[88] The Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel edition, volume 3, p. 253. Curiously, the pages concerning this topic have been omitted from the U.S. Congress's version. In the "Pentagon Papers," Book 4, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 2(c), where the information should appear, there is an unexplained gap between pages 58 and 62.

[89] Westmoreland, pp. 110 and 427.

[90] U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, January 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 20.

[91] For details of the type of aircraft used, see U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, February 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 22. The use of B-52 bombers is mentioned in Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, March 1967," (formerly Secret), p. 49.

[92] Christopher Mullin, "Crops of Pineapple Gravel," The Daily Telegraph Magazine (London, England), Number 482, 1 February 1974, p. 16.

bomb, was used extensively.[93] Less publicized was the use of defoliants. The spraying of herbicides in South Vietnam to destroy crops and kill vegetation that might conceal Communist troops was widely reported. Its use in Laos was not. As early as December 1965, as part of "Tiger Hound" operations, 42,375 gallons of defoliant were sprayed in southeastern Laos.[94] Another scientific technqiue employed to support the interdiction campaign was "rainmaking." Rain was not actually "made." Seeding clouds with silver or lead iodide crystals increased the amount of rainfall. The technique was especially effective during the Southwest Monsoon which inundated southeastern Laos from May to September. Tests conducted over Laos in 1966 convinced the Pacific Commander that cloud seeding "could be used as a valuable tactical weapon."[95] For five years, beginning on 20 March 1967, U.S. Air Force planes, based in Thailand, flew over 2,600 rainmaking missions over Indochina.[96]

Air interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail required the continued acquiescence of Premier Souvanna Phouma. It fell upon the American ambassador in Laos to foster and maintain close, cordial contacts with the premier. So delicate was this diplomatic relationship that Washington considered it necessary for the ambassador to control all U.S. military activities in the country, including air strikes. In effect

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[93] Mullin, "Crops of Pineapple Gravel," pp. 14-15.

[94] U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Monthly Evaluation Report, December 1965," (formerly Secret), p. 30.

[95] Seymour M. Hersh, "U.S. Admits Rain-Making, 1967 to 1972, in Indochina," The New York Times, 19 May 1974, p. 1.

[96] Ibid.

he was one of a triumvirate of American commanders responsible for the conduct of the war in Indochina. William Sullivan served in this capacity from 1964 to 1969. That all interdiction missions against the Ho Chi Minh Trail required his approval was only one phase of his military activities. He directed a clandestine war against the Pathet Lao fought largely by mercenaries sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency and took part in planning and ordering air strikes in their support. But the ambassador's involvement in the interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail added to the complexity of managing the endeavor. Westmoreland reported that Sullivan in reviewing planned missions "had a tendency to impose his own restrictions over and above those laid on by the Department of State."[97]

At the termination of air raids in North Vietnam in 1968, the step-up in interdiction was not confined to Laos. According to a report released by the House Judiciary Committee, U.S. Air Force B-52 bombers conducted 3,695 strikes against Vietnamese Communist supply depots and base camps in Cambodia.[98] These raids were a closely guarded secret, access to information was limited to a few persons and even the bomber crews were unaware that the targets were located up to 10 kilometers inside of Cambodia. Secrecy was imperative. Unlike the situation in Laos, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Cambodian leader, neither requested

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[97]Westmoreland, p. 196.

[98]Michael Getler, "Cambodia Raid Data Released," The Washington Post, 30 July 1974, p. 15. Also see U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee of Armed Services, Bombing in Cambodia, Hearings, 7, 8, 9 August 1973 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973).

nor approved the intrusion. Since the strikes occurred in border areas occupied by Vietnamese Communists, he did not control the region. Sihanouk was either ignorant of the raids or silently condoned them as a means of punishing the Communist intruders.

Summary

The interdiction of the North Vietnamese military logistics system from its source to the borders of South Vietnam was an integral part of American policy. Military strategies were accordingly formulated by the three U.S. commands responsible for the conduct of the Indochina war. Interdiction was three dimensional, involving the use of ground troops, warships, and aircraft. The principal arm, however, was the airpower available to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific. Heavy bombing began with strikes against North Vietnam and Laos, and after the bombing halt of North Vietnam it was concentrated on Laos and later Cambodia.

CHAPTER IV

WASHINGTON'S APPROACH ANALYZED

This inquiry had for its purpose a determination of the extent to which the North Vietnamese military logistics system facilitated Hanoi's prosecution of the war in Indochina during the years of major American involvement, from 1961 to 1969. The accomplishments of the system in support of the various military strategies which the North Vietnamese carried out were recorded in some detail in chapter II. Although the North Vietnamese experienced difficulties, there was no evidence that logistics considerations seriously constrained the High Command from executing elaborate plans in fulfillment of a selected strategy.

From the evidence presented in chapter III American civilian and military decisionmakers clearly recognized the vital importance of North Vietnam's logistics system in assuring the infiltration of men and munitions to South Vietnam. A variety of interdiction operations were initiated to combat the threat the system posed. As these expanded in scope, the bombing in particular became more violent in terms of firepower. This concluding chapter will evaluate the U.S. military interdiction efforts to ascertain why they were unsuccessful in dealing with the recognized problem.

Policies Compared

The respective national political objectives of Hanoi and

Washington were diametrically irreconcilable. North Vietnam's Political Bureau's goal of reunification was incompatible with a non-Communist South Vietnam which was the goal of three American administrations.. The inevitable result was a test of national wills. Neither side indicated that it would accept a compromise solution that would deny the attainment of the respective ultimate objective. U.S. policy-makers persevered in the opinion that the tremendous military might available to them would ultimately dissuade the Political Bureau from supporting the war in South Vietnam.

Washington clearly appreciated the major role played by North Vietnam's military logistics system in sustaining the war in the South. A 1965 White House statement said in part, "The key to the situation remains the cessation of infiltration from North Vietnam." But the official release also asked for a "clear indication by the Hanoi regime that it is prepared to cease aggression against its neighbors."[1] This was the consistent theme of U.S. policy. It emphasized the demand that North Vietnam desist instead of taking decisive measures to prevent Hanoi from supporting the fighting in South Vietnam. When this policy was translated into military strategy, the notion of dissuasion followed. It permeated to varying degrees the military operations planned and conducted by the three principal U.S. commanders overseeing the war in Indochina.

The "means" in a strategy of attrition is such a high level of fighting that the cost in human life becomes very dear for the enemy.

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[1]British Information Services, Vietnam: Background to an International Problem (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), pp. 26-27.

This, in turn, should force him to cease -- the intended "end" of the strategy. General Westmoreland has stated attrition was the strategy he pursued. The basic point that emerged from the complex clandestine war which the American ambassador waged in Laos was that, by supporting the Royal Lao Government, the U.S. not only defied North Vietnam but also offset Hanoi's support of the Communist Pathet Lao. Although it was a seesaw war in seasonal gains and losses, the simple message the U.S. wished to impart to North Vietnam was that the Communists could not win with the implicit corollary "cease your efforts for they are of no avail." Interdiction, one of the declared objectives of the air campaign against North Vietnam, was primarily the element of force in a "carrot and stick" strategy. The strategy was aimed at forcing Hanoi to negotiate a settlement favorable to Washington. The dichotomy in policy tended to distract commanders from the objective of their military operations. This was particularly true in the case of interdiction.

Interdiction Evaluated

The interdiction of Hanoi's logistics system employed the three functional types of military forces: ground, air and sea. Little need be said about the interdiction of the Communist logistics apparatus outside of South Vietnam by ground forces. Although the physical disruption of the supply system running through southeastern Laos was initially envisioned this mission was deemphasized as the war went on. The primary role of raiding teams the Studies and Observation Group sent was to gather intelligence and not to attack the system directly. In effect, these ground adjuncts of the air interdiction campaign

against the Ho Chi Minh Trail can be appraised accordingly.

Of the number of Defense Department studies which evaluated interdiction by air, the most authoritative and unbiased analysis was the work of a group of 47 civilian scientists representing the nation's best talent in a variety of technical disciplines. Unaffiliated directly with the government, they were hired on a contractual basis. The Institute for Defense Analysis, the Defense Department's in-house "think-tank," sponsored the program through its subordinate "Jason" division, which acted as the Institute's agent for contracting with private scholars and specialists for special studies on high-level defense related problems. This particular "Jason" group began working in early June 1966. The group was given access to pertinent information, including highly classified intelligence reports. After three months of work, at the end of August, the group submitted its top secret study on the effectiveness of the air interdiction campaign.[2] The group sharply discounted the value of the bomber offensive. It concluded:

(1) "As of July 1966 the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam (NVN) had no measurable direct effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South at the current level."

(2) "North Vietnam has basically a subsistence agricultural economy that presents a difficult and unrewarding target system for attack."

(3) "The countermeasures introduced by Hanoi effectively reduced the impact of U.S. bombing."

(4) North Vietnam "supports operations in the South mainly by functioning as a logistics funnel and by providing a source of manpower." The country has "an ample manpower reserve

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[2]"Pentagon Papers," Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(a), volume 1, pp. 148-149.

> for internal military and economic needs including repair and reconstruction and for continued support of military operations in the South." The essential supplies required by the Communist forces "are provided by the USSR and Communist China."[3]

After pointing to the failure of the air interdiction campaign, the study group warned that an expansion of the bombing program "would make it more difficult and costly for Hanoi," but "the low volume of supplies required, the demonstrated effectiveness of the counter-measures already undertaken ... make it quite unlikely that Hanoi's capability to function would be seriously impaired."[4]

Having denied the ability of the bombing to <u>prevent</u> the movement of men and materiel, the authors of the "Jason" study group report addressed the possibility that the bombing could force Hanoi to <u>desist</u>. The group stated that:

> The direct effects of the bombing on the will of the North Vietnamese to continue fighting and on their leaders' appraisal of the prospective gains and costs of maintaining the present policy have not shown themselves in any tangible way. Furthermore, we have not discovered any basis for concluding that the indirect punitive effects of the bombing will prove decisive in these respects.[5]

Very limited distribution was accorded this study. Copies disseminated outside of the Pentagon were restricted. Available information indicates that only Walt Rostow, the President's special adviser, received a copy.[6]

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[3]"Pentagon Papers," Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(a), volume 1, p..150.

[4]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 151.

[5]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 152.

[6]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 149

Despite the negative conclusions of the study, the bombing continued. The next year another "Jason" study group reassessed the interdiction program. The report, completed in December 1967, repeated the previous conclusions in stronger and more positive tones, adding a warning that continuation would be futile. The general assessment was that "as of October 1967, the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam has had no measurable effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South."[7] Noting that Warsaw Pact countries and Communist China continued to be the source of essential military supplies, the study significantly reported that "the volume of such supplies is so low that only a small fraction of the capacity of North Vietnam's flexible transport network is required to maintain that flow."[8] In spite of the bombing's destructive character, the group estimated that North Vietnam "is now a stronger military power than before the bombing" as a result of the $600 million in economic aid and $ 1 billion in military aid received from abroad.[9] The study went on to warn that "the USSR could furnish NVN with much more sophisticated weapons systems; these could further increase the military strength of NVN and lead to larger U.S. losses."[10] Reporting that the bombing had not prevented the war's continuation, the group reiterated the campaign's

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[7]"Pentagon Papers," Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(b), volume 2, p. 123.

[8]Ibid., p. 123.

[9]Ibid., p. 125.

[10]Ibid., p. 125.

failure to break Hanoi's will to persist: "the bombing campaign against NVN has not discernably (sic) weakened the determination of the North Vietnamese leaders to continue to direct and support the insurgency in the South."[11] The study ended with the emphatic statement that the group was "unable to devise a bombing campaign in the North to reduce the flow of infiltrating personnel into SVN."[12]

The judgment of the "Jason" group shattered any illusions concerning the ability of aerial interdiction, even if intensified, to prevent North Vietnam from sustaining the the war in the South. The proponents of air interdiction, nevertheless, argued that it was successful. Apparently such a contention was possible because of the broad meaning of the term "interdiction." In the jargon of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to interdict meant "to prevent or hinder, by any means, enemy use of an area or route."[13] The issue then became how efficient was the bombing in hindering the North Vietnamese logistics system. The first National Security Study Memorandum of the Nixon Administration, NSSM-1, illustrated in early 1969 how data concerning interdiction could be manipulated to prove a particular viewpoint.

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[11]"Pentagon Papers," Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(b), volume 2, p. 126.

[12]Ibid., p. 127.

[13]Joint Chiefs of Staff, Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 113. It is interesting to note that the official Air Force definition is stronger in that it begins "to stop, prevent, or hinder movement or lines of communication on land, sea or in the air." Emphasis added. See Woodford A. Heflin (ed.), The United States Air Force Dictionary (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 273.

The Military Assistance Command and the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued that two important passes connecting North Vietnam and Laos had been successfully interdicted in late 1968. They reported that the roads were blocked 80 percent of the time, thereby reducing the amount of traffic able to use them. The Secretary of Defense's office, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency agreed that traffic was disrupted by the partial closure. They pointed out, however, that since the North Vietnamese only had to use the passes 15 percent of the time, the bombing did not block traffic, it only delayed it. Similarly, it was agreed that the bombing destroyed 12 to 14 percent of the vehicles observed moving through the passes. To the military this was a significant number. To the Secretary of Defense's analysts and those of the Central Intelligence Agency, it was an insignificant number in that:

> the enemy needs in SVN (10 to 15 trucks of supplies per day) are so small and his supply of war material so large that the enemy can replace his losses easily, increase his traffic flows slightly, and get through as much supplies to SVN [South Vietnam] as he wants to in spite of the bombing.[14]

A secret Military Assistance Command report further exemplified the respective arguments. It reported that from July through September 1968, 21,461 North Vietnamese trucks were observed in Laos. By air strikes in the same period only 578 were reported destroyed.[15] In

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[14]U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Bombing as a Policy Tool in Vietnam, A Staff Study, 12 October 1972 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 11-12.

[15]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, July-September 1968," (formerly Secret), p. 45.

reality, the bombing did not really "block" roads, it just hindered movement by destroying some vehicles and delaying others.

Unlike the air interdiction campaign, the maritime interdiction program, conducted by the U.S. Navy under the control of the Military Assistance Command, was highly effective in preventing the delivery of men and munitions directly from North to South Vietnam. Operation "Market Time" succeeded in reducing, if not eliminating entirely, the resupply of Communist forces in the South. Physically it cut the line of communication. An evaluation of the operation in 1969 indicated its success. The official report stated that "no known infiltration attempts from the sea have occurred this quarter ... it is highly improbable that any large scale infiltration exists."[16] During this 90-day period 155,957 vessels were boarded and searched. Use of coastal vessels for resupply missions ceased to be viable for North Vietnam. Hanoi by this time had instituted an alternative means of maritime resupply safe from interdiction. By the clandestine use of international, commercial shipping firms, North Vietnam delivered the munitions it required through Sihanoukville in "neutral" Cambodia.

Conclusions

The heart of North Vietnam's ability to execute military strategies fulfilling the national objective of reunification was the army's military logistics system. If the North had been prevented

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[16]U.S., Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, April-June 1969," (formerly Secret), p. 85.

from furnishing the men and materiel necessary to maintain over 100,000 North Vietnamese and 160,000 Viet Cong soldiers in South Vietnam, its fighting forces would have lost most of their potency.[17] They would no longer have been able to launch large-scale attacks. Regular units, depleted in strength and deprived of the ammunition required for their unique weapons, would have been unable seriously to threaten the South's pacification efforts and would have found increasing difficulty in protecting themselves, even in their own sanctuaries. Of course, they could have broken their fighting forces into smaller elements and reverted to a type of guerrilla warfare of the past. Such an outright admission of defeat undoubtedly would have been extremely demoralizing. In any event the guerrilla bands themselves would have been placed under the pressure of the one million South Vietnamese and allied regular troops supporting the half a million paramilitary personnel. This was the situation the U.S. sought. But it was never achieved because the military strategies the U.S. commanders put into action never demanded that interdiction prevent North Vietnam from replenishing the Communist forces in the South. Both air and sea interdiction programs were indecisive.

Dr. Harold Brown, just before he resigned as Secretary of the Air Force in 1969, summarized the utility of air interdiction based upon the Vietnam experience. He explained:

> air interdiction of supply lines can destory, disrupt and delay the enemy's resupply and replacements, forcing him to adjust his

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[17] Military Assistance Command, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, April-June 1969," pp. 175-176.

> level of combat to fit his uncertain logistics and insuring his defeat in sustained combat. Interdiction can also place a severe strain on the enemy's economy, manpower supply, and political control system. This raises the cost of the war and makes a negotiated peace seem more desirable.[18]

In accordance with the inference to be drawn from his commentary, the bombing could not prevent Hanoi from supporting the war in the South and could only cause his defeat on the battlefield if there was a high, continuous level of combat. In the absence of the latter, interdiction was limited to encouraging the adversary to desist.

The defeat of the North Vietnamese-directed forces in sustained combat was unattainable for the simple reason that Hanoi regulated the level of combat. After experiencing heavy losses by directly confronting U.S. forces in 1966 and 1967, the Communists changed their method. Contact was avoided and combat accepted only when the odds were favorable to them or when cornered. This tactic was subsequently modified in favor of a cycle of low and high points. Units evaded contact and refitted for an extended period of time. After an irregular number of weeks of "quiet" they emerged from their sanctuaries and launched a round of attacks.[19] When portrayed on a graph depicting the number of enemy-initiated attacks superimposed on a calendar, the reader readily discerned the valleys of the quiet period marked periodically by the high points of coordinated attacks.[20] Attrition took its toll, but

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[18]Dr. Harold Brown, "Air Power in Limited War," Air Univeristy Review, May-June 1969, p. 3. Emphasis added.

[19]Lieutenant General Julian J. Ewell and Major General Ira A. Hunt, Jr., Sharpening the Combat Edge: The Use of Analysis to Reinforce Military Judgement (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1974), pp. 8-9.

[20]For details concerning this tactic, supported documents issued by the Communist Central Office for South Vietnam, see Military Assistance Command, "Quarterly Evaluation Report, April-June 1969," pp. 19-23.

General Giap, not General Westmoreland, was in control of the rate of consumption. Hence, even the subsidiary contribution of air interdiction described by Dr. Brown was not achieved.

The flaw in maritime interdiction was that it neglected to deal directly with deliveries made by international merchant ships and firms under contract to provide logistical support to the Communist forces deployed in Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam.

An examination of alternative methods for the successful interdiction of North Vietnamese military logistics system was beyond the scope of this paper. Its purpose was restricted to determining the contribution of the logistics system to the war and to offer an explanation of why the U.S. interdiction efforts were unsuccessful in decisively coping with the system. Two solutions, however, became apparent, and these could provide a basis for additional research.

Obviously some form of "quarantine" would be necessary for dealing with resupply through the port of Sihanoukville. It need not to have been a blockade, but rather an inspection of suspected ships for contraband. The legality of such searches, of course, is subject to debate by international lawyers, but the concept is not without precedent.

The solution to the land-based logistics apparatus running through southern Laos was to block the routes with ground forces. This course of action was recommended as early as 1966 by the Secretary of Defense. In an October memorandum to President Johnson,

McNamara proposed that:

> A portion of the 470,000 troops [of the U.S. in South Vietnam]... should be devoted to the construction and maintenance of an infiltration barrier. Such a barrier would lie near the 17th parallel -- would run from the sea, across the neck of South Vietnam (choking off the new infiltration routes through the DMZ) and across the trails in Laos.[21]

An examination of the reasons why this proposal was never fully put into effect as originally envisioned would be a distinct contribution to the overall study of the failure of the United States to achieve its declared national objective in South Vietnam.

These two solutions possessed the potential for accomplishing what should have been the primary military objective of the war: to prevent North Vietnam from supporting the war. This could only have been done decisively by severing Hanoi's lines of communication to South Vietnam.

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[21] "Pentagon Papers," Book 6, Part IV, Section C, Subsection 7(a), volume 1, p. 164.

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