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NUMBER 58-5/1-62

Communist Reactions to Additional US Courses of Action in Laos and North Vietnam

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD
As indicated overleaf
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The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and NSA.

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COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO ADDITIONAL US COURSES OF ACTION IN LAOS AND NORTH VIETNAM

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the likely Communist responses to certain courses of action by US and allied forces with respect to Laos which are in addition to those considered in SNIE 58-5-62, "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US Actions with Respect to Laos," dated 31 May 1962. These courses of action were provided by the Departments of State and Defense.

THE ESTIMATE

A. *US air attacks against Communist supply bases in Laos and against the Laotian parts of the main overland supply routes from North Vietnam.* This course of action might be taken in connection with or subsequent to occupation of the major Mekong River areas of Laos by 8,000-10,000 US troops supported by Thai forces.

1. The Communists would almost certainly conclude that the US was preparing for extensive military operations in Laos, particularly if reinforcements and supplies were being built up in Thailand. They would attempt to cope with the US air attacks by both passive and active means and would maintain their forces in the areas of Laos they now control. Therefore, it seems likely that North Vietnamese antiaircraft units in Laos would be reinforced. In addition, small numbers of fighter aircraft, flown by Chinese Communist and possibly Soviet pilots, perhaps in the guise of North Vietnamese, probably would be introduced into North Viet-

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namese airfields. The Soviet airlift would almost certainly continue as feasible. To the extent of their limited capabilities, Communist aircraft would probably attempt some retaliatory action against US positions in Laos. However, as long as the US air attacks were confined to Laos, the Communists would almost certainly not extend their own air operations beyond the Laotian borders.

2. We believe that the Communist ground forces would probably intensify the actions we have already estimated they would take in response to the US occupation of the Mekong River valley areas: they would probably deploy to confine the areas under US control and harass US outposts, patrols, and lines of communications. North Vietnamese reinforcements would almost certainly be introduced. The Chinese Communists would reinforce their border garrisons and some forces might enter northern Laos. Moscow and Peiping would almost certainly increase their logistics support to North Vietnam.

3. At the same time the Communists would be concerned to keep the conflict from spreading beyond Laos, and would take vigorous political action, including intensified propaganda efforts, to obtain a cessation of hostilities and the resumption of negotiations.

B. *US air attacks against North Vietnam.* The US air attacks would be extended to include the North Vietnamese ends of the main supply routes into Laos, but not the principal population centers such as Hanoi. This course of action might be taken as part of a US offensive involving 45,000 US troops to occupy the panhandle area of Laos or might be undertaken in connection with the lesser action involving the occupation of the Mekong River valley only.

4. Attacks on North Vietnam territory would, in the Communist view, mark a major turning point in the situation. The Soviets and Chinese would declare their full support for Hanoi. In an immediate effort to obtain a cessation of the US attacks, they would orchestrate their political, diplomatic, and propaganda moves in the UN and elsewhere against what they would proclaim was an act of outright aggression.

5. Peiping and Moscow would almost certainly introduce air support to protect North Vietnamese territory. The chances of the introduction of Chinese Communist troops into Laos would increase significantly, but we do not believe that they would consider it necessary to introduce them into North Vietnam at this stage. The Communists would be concerned to keep hostilities from spreading and, initially, they would confine their action to the defense of North Vietnam. However, if the US attacks were intense and sustained, and particularly if they were associated with a US investment of the Laotian panhandle, the Communists would be likely to regard them as a forerunner of a general military offensive against North Vietnam. Under these circumstances, they would almost certainly attempt to extend their air attacks to include bases in Thailand and possibly in South Vietnam and US carriers. We do not believe that there would be significant differences between Moscow and Peiping insofar as the question of coming to the aid of Hanoi is concerned.

C. *Amphibious Operations Against North Vietnam.* This situation assumes a division-strength landing in the Vinh area followed by a drive west to the Laos border to link up with US forces in Laos. This course of action would be undertaken in connection with a US offensive involving 45,000 US troops to occupy the panhandle area of Laos.

6. Open invasion of North Vietnam would be considered by the Communist Bloc as a direct challenge to the integrity of the North Vietnamese regime and as a threat to the security of Communist China. Hanoi would take speedy and vigorous action to repel the invasion.¹ Communist China would almost certainly provide additional ground forces if they were needed. The Bloc would launch a violent propaganda campaign, warning of the danger of nuclear war, in an effort to obtain US withdrawal under international pressure and condemnation. If the US was undeterred and the invasion made headway, US ground and naval units in the immediate area would almost certainly be attacked by Com-

¹ The North Vietnamese Army consists of 280,000 regular troops supported by 100,000 militia.

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munist air elements, perhaps under the guise of a North Vietnamese air force. In addition, it is possible that Communist submarines would be brought to bear. Supply and operational bases in Laos, South Vietnam, and Thailand would probably be attacked by Communist air forces. The Communists would be highly unlikely to take the initiative to resort to nuclear weapons at this level of US action.

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