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SNIE 10-67
5 January 1967

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

REACTIONS TO A POSSIBLE US ACTION

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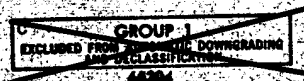
Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and the NSA.

Concurred in by the
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on 5 January 1967. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; and the Director, National Security Agency. The Assistant General Manager, Atomic Energy Commission, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

5 January 1967

SUBJECT: SNIE 10-67: REACTIONS TO A POSSIBLE US ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable Communist and Free World reactions to the deployment of B-52s to Thailand.

ASSUMPTIONS

The Thai Government consents to the deployment and publicly announces the move when actual operations commence.

The deployment would be to U Tapao, would take place during January, and would initially involve 4-6 aircraft. The buildup would be progressive; by spring or early summer about 30 B-52s would be stationed at U Tapao.

Just prior to the public announcement of the deployment, the US would, through diplomatic channels, explain the purposes of the move to a large number of friendly nations. The US would not necessarily directly inform the Soviet Union, but it would be expected that word of the deployment would quickly reach them. It is possible, moreover, that an explanation of the move might be conveyed to the USSR privately. There would be no special communication with Communist China on the subject.

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In explaining the purpose of the move, both in public statements and private background briefings, the US would emphasize that the move entailed no change in the pattern of B-52 operations, i.e., against targets in South Vietnam and against the Mu Gia pass area in North Vietnam and against targets near the DMZ. However, employment against other targets in North Vietnam would not be specifically excluded. The US would also make clear that the deployment arose from the increasing demand for B-52 operations in South Vietnam. The US, however, would reiterate that it sought no permanent military bases in Southeast Asia. The US would also reiterate previous policy statements to the general effect that B-52 operations in the Vietnamese war are confined to conventional weapons. Finally, the US would state emphatically that the deployment in no way changed the basic policy of not threatening the regime in North Vietnam and China.

THE ESTIMATE

1. Both Communist and Free World countries would be reacting not only to the fact of deployment, but to the implication that this signalled another escalation of the war. It would be widely believed that the ultimate US purpose was to use B-52s against a wider variety of targets in North Vietnam. US statements that its intention was more limited would probably have little initial effect on such beliefs.

2. Knowledgeable military opinion would recognize that the deployment promised a substantial reduction in US reaction time against South Vietnamese targets, which would enhance the flexibility

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of ground support operations. At the same time, such opinion would probably calculate that concern over possible losses to SAMs and MIG-21s would deter the US from extensive use of B-52s over North Vietnam.

3. A public announcement of the deployment of B-52s would focus attention on the general subject of US bombing and might stimulate new initiatives and pressures to cease all bombing of North Vietnam. Many non-Communist countries would interpret the move in light of their own preconceived notions about US policy; that is, many countries expect the US to escalate because of domestic politics and would tend to exaggerate the significance of the B-52 deployment.

4. Adverse reaction in the Free World, however, would die down after a time if there were in fact no change in US bombing policy. The subsequent buildup of Thai-based B-52s to the assumed levels would attract little attention so long as the target pattern was not changed.

5. The US move would create no great difficulties for any of the allies contributing forces in Vietnam, and some would be

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pleased. But some US allies, especially in Europe, would be inclined to believe that events were moving toward a more dangerous phase. It is highly unlikely that any ally would abandon the US, though some would question the wisdom of the action.

6. The specific timing of the US move could have some significance. If the B-52s were phased into Thailand before the end of Tet (8-12 February), there would be greater criticism than thereafter; many Free World countries have some lingering hope that this holiday period may yet bring some turn toward negotiations. The US move would be widely regarded as designed to block any such progress. Moreover, if such intermediaries as U Thant had not completed their approaches, the US would be vulnerable to criticism for undercutting their efforts. Thus, we believe the deployment of B-52s would be less vulnerable to criticism if it came after the Tet period, or if U Thant and others had clearly failed in their efforts to promote negotiations.

7. Communist Reaction. Communist propaganda would certainly exploit the deployment as inaugurating a new phase of escalation. The North Vietnamese and VC have already predicted that the US will station B-52s in Thailand and have warned of countermeasures. They would try to arouse world opinion against the US in order to

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try to deter any use of B-52s against North Vietnam, and also in an effort to generate pressures against the bombing of North Vietnam in general. The Communists, of course, would be looking for any exploitable incidents; one such possibility would be any overflight of Cambodia. Peking and Hanoi might issue some pointed warnings to Bangkok, but we doubt that they would make any open commitments to undertake specific action.

8. The current Communist campaign denouncing Thailand as a US puppet would be stepped up and would be more widely believed. Hanoi and Peking might strive to increase the insurgency in north-east Thailand, but we do not believe that, in the near term, they can substantially raise the pace and scale of subversion above that already in existence. They might attempt to sabotage an American base, including the one at U Tapao.

9. North Vietnam. Hanoi would of course be concerned over the increased flexibility of response the US would acquire against targets in South Vietnam. In addition, Hanoi would almost certainly prepare for the possibility that B-52s would be used against critical targets in North Vietnam. To this end it would seek to strengthen further its air defenses and would press China and the USSR for additional equipment. And perhaps, Hanoi might counter

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the US move by publicly acknowledging that certain Communist countries were providing "volunteers" for the North Vietnamese air defense system. It is possible that the North Vietnamese might attempt some drastic retaliation that would escalate the war, but we think this unlikely.

10. Chinese Reaction. Peking has not reacted much to the use of B-52s from Guam. The deployment to Thailand would be a different matter; the activation of a US heavy bomber base on the Asian mainland would add to Peking's sense of encirclement and further persuade China of US hostile intentions. Peking would almost certainly continue strengthening air defenses in South China and, if needed and requested, would deploy more air defense troops to North Vietnam. Peking might announce that it had already stationed forces in North Vietnam. We do not believe, however, that Peking or Hanoi would consider the situation critical enough to call for overt intervention of Chinese combat forces.

11. As for the impact on the current political struggle in Peking, the US deployment could aggravate tension over policy issues. We do not believe, however, that it would play much of a role in the leadership crisis in China and would almost certainly not prove decisive in tipping the balance to one faction or another.

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12. The USSR. Moscow, of course, would denounce the US for intensifying its "policy of aggression" in Southeast Asia. Though the Soviets would probably not regard the deployment as a major departure from previous American policy, they would probably feel obliged to manifest their displeasure by words and actions calculated to cause deterioration at least in the atmospherics of Soviet-American relations. They would renew pledges of support to Hanoi, and might respond in some demonstrative way to requests for more aid in air defense. This would probably not include a more overt involvement of Soviet personnel.

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