

# McNamara Draft Memorandum For Johnson in November, '66

*Excerpts from draft memorandum for President Johnson from Secretary McNamara, dated Nov. 17, 1966, and headed "Recommended FY67 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation," as provided in the body of the Pentagon study.*

A substantial air interdiction campaign is clearly necessary and worthwhile. In addition to putting a ceiling on the size of the force that can be supported, it yields three significant military effects. First, it effectively harasses and delays truck movements down through the southern panhandles of NVN and Laos, though it has no effect on troops infiltrating on foot over trails that are virtually invisible from the air. Our experience shows that daytime armed reconnaissance above some minimum sortie rate makes it prohibitively expensive to the enemy to attempt daylight movement of vehicles, and so forces him to night movement. Second, destruction of bridges and cratering of roads forces the enemy to deploy repair crews, equipment, and porters to repair or bypass the damage. Third, attacks on vehicles, parks, and rest camps destroy some vehicles with their cargoes and inflict casualties. Moreover, our bombing campaign may produce a beneficial effect on U.S. and SVN morale by making NVN pay a price for its enemy [sic]. But at the scale we are now operating, I believe our bombing is yielding very small marginal returns, not worth the cost in pilot lives and aircraft.

The first effect, that of forcing the enemy into a system of night movement, occurs at a lower frequency of armed reconnaissance sorties than the level of the past several months. The enemy was already moving at night in 1965, before the sortie rate had reached half the current level; further sorties have no further effect on the enemy's overall operating system. The second effect, that of forcing the enemy to deploy repair crews, equipment, and porters, is also largely brought about by a comparatively low interdiction effort. Our interdiction campaign in 1965 and early this year forced NVN to assign roughly 300,000 additional personnel to LOCs; there is no indication that recent sortie increases have caused further increases in the number

of these personnel. Once the enemy system can repair road cuts and damaged bridges in a few hours, as it has demonstrated it can, additional sorties may work this system harder but are unlikely to cause a significant increase in its costs. Only the third effect, the destruction of vehicles and their cargoes, continues to increase in about the same proportion as the number of armed reconnaissance sorties, but without noticeable impact on VC/NVA operations. The overall capability of the NVN transport system to move supplies within NVN apparently improved in September in spite of 12,200 attack sorties.

*In a summary paragraph, the draft memo made the entire case against the bombings:*

The increased damage to targets is not producing noticeable results. No serious shortage of POL in North Vietnam is evident, and stocks on hand, with recent imports, have been adequate to sustain necessary operations. No serious transport problem in the movement of supplies to or within North Vietnam is evident; most transportation routes appear to be open, and there has recently been a major logistical build-up in the area of the DMZ. The raids have disrupted the civil populace and caused isolated food shortages, but have not significantly weakened popular morale. Air strikes continue to depress economic growth and have been responsible for abandonment of some plans for economic development, but essential economic activities continue. The increasing amounts of physical damage sustained by North Vietnamese are in large measure compensated by aid received from other Communist countries. Thus, in spite of an interdiction campaign costing at least \$250 million per month at current levels, no significant impact on the war in South Vietnam is evident. The monetary value of damage to NVN since the start of bombing in February 1965 is estimated at about \$140 million through October 10, 1966.