

# Rostow's Memo on Bombing Of Hanoi's Petroleum Facilities

*Excerpt from memorandum from Walt W. Rostow, Presidential assistant for national security, to Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara, May 6, 1966, as provided in the body of the Pentagon study. Paragraphs in italics are the study's paraphrase or explanation.*

Rostow developed his argument for striking the petroleum reserves on the basis of U.S. experience in the World War II attacks on German oil supplies and storage facilities. His reasoning was as follows:

From the moment that serious and systematic oil attacks started, front line single engine fighter strength and tank mobility were affected. The reason was this: It proved much more difficult, in the face of general oil shortage, to allocate from less important to more important uses than the simple arithmetic of the problem would suggest. Oil moves in various logistical channels from central sources. When the central sources began to dry up, the effects proved fairly prompt and widespread.

What look like reserves statistically are rather inflexible commitments to logistical pipelines.

*The same results might be expected from heavy and sustained attacks on the North Vietnamese oil reserves.*

With an understanding that simple analogies are dangerous, I nevertheless feel it is quite possible the military effects of a systematic and sustained bombing of POL in North Vietnam may be more prompt and direct than conventional intelligence analysis would suggest.

I would underline, however, the adjectives "systematic and sustained." If we take this step we must cut clean through the POL system—and hold the cut—if we are looking for decisive results....