

Joint Chiefs' Memo Disputing McNamara View on Bombing

Excerpts from Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum, signed by Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, to Secretary of Defense McNamara, Oct. 14, 1966, as provided in the body of the Pentagon study.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not concur in your recommendation that there should be no increase in level of bombing effort and no modification in areas and targets subject to air attack. They believe our air campaign against NVN to be an integral and indispensable part of over all war effort. To be effective, the air campaign should be conducted with only those minimum constraints necessary to avoid indiscriminate killing of population. . . .

The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not concur with your proposal that, as a carrot to induce negotiations, we should suspend or reduce our bombing campaign against NVN. Our experiences with pauses in bombing and resumption have not been happy ones. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the likelihood of the war being settled by negotiation is small, and that, far from inducing negotiations, another bombing pause will be regarded by North Vietnamese leaders, and our Allies, as renewed evidence of lack of US determination to press the war to a successful conclusion. The bombing campaign is one of the two trump cards in the hands of the President (the other being the presence of US troops in SVN). It should not be given up without an end to the NVN aggression in SVN. . . .

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the war has reached a stage at which decisions taken over the next sixty days can determine the outcome of the war and, consequently, can affect the overall security interests of the United States for years to come. Therefore, they wish to provide to you and to the President their unequivocal views on two salient aspects of the war situation: the search for peace and military pressures on NVN.

a. The frequent, broadly-based public offers made by the President to settle the war by peaceful means on a generous basis, which would take from NVN nothing it now has, have been admirable. Certainly, no one—American or foreigner—except those who are determined not to be convinced, can doubt the sincerity, the generosity, the altruism of US actions and objectives. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the time has come when further overt actions and offers on our part are not only nonproductive, they are counter-productive. A logical case can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war to a successful

conclusion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advocate the following:

(1) A statement by the President during the Manila Conference of his unswerving determination to carry on the war until NVN aggression against SVN shall cease;

(2) Continued covert exploration of all avenues leading to a peaceful settlement of the war; and

(3) Continued alertness to detect and react appropriately to withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from SVN and cessation of support to the VC.

B. In JCSM-955-64, dated 14 November 1964, and in JCSM-962-64, dated 23 November 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided their views as to the military pressures which should be brought to bear on NVN. In summary, they recommended a "sharp knock" on NVN military assets and war-supporting facilities rather than the campaign of slowly increasing pressure which was adopted. Whatever the political merits of the latter course, we deprived ourselves of the military effects of early weight of effort and shock, and gave to the enemy time to adjust to our slow quantitative and qualitative increase of pressure. This is not to say that it is now too late to derive military benefits from more effective and extensive use of our air and naval superiority. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend:

(1) Approval of their ROLLING THUNDER 52 program, which is a step toward meeting the requirement for improved target systems. This program would decrease the Hanoi and Haiphong

Continued on Following Page

Terms in Texts

AAA—Aircraft Artillery.
ARVN—Army of the Republic (South) of Vietnam.
CINCPAC—Commander in Chief, Pacific.
COMUSMACV—Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.
C.T.Z.—Corps tactical zone.
DMZ—Demilitarized Zone.
D.P.M.—Draft Presidential memo.
FW/MAF—Free World Military Assistance Force.
L.O.C.—Lines of communication.
MACV—Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.
N.S.A.—National Security Agency.
NVA—North Vietnamese Army.
NVN—North Vietnam.
PACOM—Pacific Area Command.
P.O.L.—Petroleum, oil, lubricants.
RSSZ—Rungsat Special Zone.
RVN—Republic of (South) Vietnam.
RVNAF—Republic of (South) Vietnam Armed Forces.
SEA—Southeast Asia.
SVN—South Vietnam.
TAOR—Tactical area of responsibility.
VC—Vietcong.

Continued from Preceding Page

sanctuary areas, authorize attacks against the steel plant, the Hanoi rail yards, the thermal power plants, selected areas within Haiphong port and other ports, selected locks and dams controlling water LOC's, SAM support facilities within the residual Hanoi and Haiphong sanctuaries, and POL at Hai-

phong, Ha Gia (Phuc Yen) and Can Thon (Kep).

(2) Use of naval surface forces to interdict North Vietnamese coastal waterborne traffic and appropriate land LOCs and to attack other coastal military targets such as radar and AAA sites.

... The Joint Chiefs of Staff request that their views as set forth above be provided to the President.