

# 1954 Study by the Joint Chiefs On Possible U.S. Intervention

*Excerpts from memorandum from Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, May 26, 1954, on "Studies With Respect to Possible U.S. Action Regarding Indochina." The italicized emphasis appears in the original document.*

1. Reference is made to the memorandum by the Acting Secretary of Defense, dated 18 May 1954, subject as above, wherein the Joint Chiefs of Staff were requested to prepare certain studies, and agreed outline answers to certain questions relating thereto, for discussion with the Acting Secretary of Defense on or before 24 May, and for subsequent submission to the National Security Council (NSC).

2 a. The Studies requested by the Acting Secretary of Defense were developed within the parameters prescribed in the memorandum by the Executive Secretary, NSC, dated 18 May 1954, subject as above. This memorandum is interpreted as assuming no concurrent involvement in Korea. This assumption may be quite unrealistic and lead to mal-employment of available forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff desire to point out their belief that, from the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, *Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces in Indochina would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities.* The principal sources of Viet Minh military supply lie outside Indochina. The destruction or neutralization of these sources in China proper would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina.

b. In connection with the above, it may be readily anticipated that, upon Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina, the French would promptly request the immediate deployment of U. S. ground and air forces, additional naval forces, and a considerable increase in MDAF armament and equipment. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have stated their belief that committing to the Indochina conflict naval forces in excess of a Fast Carrier Task Force and supporting forces as necessary in accordance with the developments in the situation, of basing substantial air forces in Indochina, will involve maldeployment of forces and reduce readiness to meet probable Chinese Communist reaction elsewhere in the Far East. Simultaneously, it is necessary to keep in mind the considerable Allied military potential available in the Korea-Japan-Okinawa area.

c. In light of the above, it is clear

that the denial of these forces to Indochina could result in a schism between the United States and France unless they were employed elsewhere. However, it should be noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have plans, both approved and under consideration, which provide for the employment of these forces in combat operations outside Indochina. Nevertheless, it is desired to repeat that this particular report is responsive to the question of U.S. intervention in Indochina only.

## Assuming the Chinese Communists Intervene

### 3. Strategic Concept and Plan of Operation

Seek to create conditions through the destruction of effective Communist forces and their means for support in the Indochina action and by reducing Chinese Communist capability for further aggression, under which Associated States forces could assume responsibility for the defense of Indochina. In the light of this concept the major courses of action would be as follows:

a. Employing atomic weapons, whenever advantageous, as well as other weapons, *conduct offensive air operations against selected military targets in Indochina and against those military targets in China, Hainan, and other Communist-held offshore islands which are being used by the Communists in direct support of their operations,* or which threaten the security of U.S. and allied forces in the area.

b. Simultaneously, French Union Forces, augmented by U. S. naval, and air forces, would exploit by coordinated ground, naval, and air action such successes as may be gained as a result of the aforementioned air operations in order to destroy enemy forces in Indochina.

c. Conduct coordinated ground, naval, and air action to destroy enemy forces in Indochina.

d. In the light of circumstances prevailing at the time, and subject to an evaluation of the results of operations conducted under subparagraphs a and b above, be prepared to take further action against Communist China to reduce its war-making capability, such as:

(1) Destruction of additional selected

military targets. In connection with these additional targets, such action requires an enlarged but highly selective atomic offensive in addition to attacks employing other weapons systems.

(2) Blockade of the China coast. This might be instituted progressively from the outset.

(3) Seizure or neutralization of Hainan Island.

(4) Operations against the Chinese mainland by Chinese Nationalist forces. . . .

**Assuming Chinese Communists  
Do Not Intervene**

**9. Strategic Concept and Plan of  
Action**

Seek to create conditions by destroy-

ing effective Communist forces in Indochina, under which the Associated States Forces could assume responsibility for the defense of Indochina. In the light of this concept, the major courses of action which would be undertaken are as follows:

a. *Conduct air operations* in support of allied forces in *Indochina*. The employment of atomic weapons is contemplated in the event that such course appears militarily advantageous.

b. Simultaneously, French Union Forces augmented by such armed forces of the Philippines and Thailand as may be committed would, in coordination with U.S. naval and Air Force forces, conduct coordinated ground, naval and air action to destroy enemy forces in Indochina. . . .