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## How Hanoi Can Still Get Supplies

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By J. J. Brown

Chronicle Foreign Service

### Singapore

President Nixon's move to cut off supplies to North Vietnam is unlikely to have a major impact on the ability of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front to carry on fighting in South Vietnam.

While the naval blockage most likely will succeed in halting supplies from coming in through Haiphong port, its main impact will be to

force the funneling of supplies down the roads and rails from China.

To succeed in blocking military supplies from reaching Hanoi, the United States will still have to rely on air interdiction—but this time over terrain as rough as any the United States has faced in Indochina.

The border between North Vietnam and China runs for over 100 miles and the terrain is very mountainous and forested. Since 1965 a number of road networks have been constructed and today three major roads service North Vietnam from China. The two countries are also linked by one railroad.

### TRAIL

None of these arteries of communications is within the range limits of naval gunfire and therefore all of the interdiction will have to be attempted by air just as the United States has been trying to do over the Ho Chi Minh Trail since 1965.

Unlike the Ho Chi Minh trail, however, the highway system from China is modern with concrete and asphalt cover over most of the surfaces. Anti-air defenses in North Vietnam are also much more extensive and sophisticated.

While anti-aircraft missiles are rarely used along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, the entire area coming down from China is covered by anti-aircraft missiles and 100 millimeter radar-controlled anti-aircraft artillery pieces. In addition, Chinese troops and laborers help maintain the road and provide for its defense.

A 20-mile zone extends from the Chinese border into North Vietnam where, in the past, air strikes have been prohibited by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on order of the President to insure that no overflights are made over the Chinese border by mistake.

### STORAGE

On the Chinese side of the border vast trans-shipment and storage areas house the supplies awaiting the convoys, and trucks by the hundred move up and down this area like ants.

The President cannot, of course, bomb inside China without provoking a major response.

The North Vietnamese prepared for a naval blockade in 1966 by building up a

supply network from China and preparing its defense. Major interdiction of supplies at this time will be next to impossible.

While it is possible that supplies from the sea may be stopped, what happens in the south is not likely to be affected greatly. The Soviet T-54 tank, for example, is produced in both the Soviet Union and China. The Chinese can, and most likely will, provide tank treads and engine spare parts and new tanks if necessary. In general they can supply 90 percent of what the North Vietnamese need. The rest can probably be done without.

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