

McNaughton's November Draft On Vietnam Aims and Choices

Second draft of a paper, "Action for South Vietnam," by Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton, Nov. 6, 1964.

1. U.S. aims:

- (a) To protect US reputation as a counter-subversion guarantor.
- (b) To avoid domino effect especially in Southeast Asia.
- (c) To keep South Vietnamese territory from Red hands.
- (d) to emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods.

2. Present situation:

The situation in South Vietnam is deteriorating. Unless new actions are taken, the new government will probably be unstable and ineffectual, and the VC will probably continue to extend their hold over the population and territory. It can be expected that, soon (6 months? two years?), (a) government officials at all levels will adjust their behavior to an eventual VC take-over, (b) defections of significant military forces will take place, (c) whole integrated regions of the country will be totally denied to the GVN, (d) neutral and/or left-wing elements will enter the government, (e) a popular front regime will emerge which will invite the US out, and (f) fundamental concessions to the VC and accommodations to the DRV will put South Vietnam behind the Curtain.

3. Urgency:

"Bien Hoa" having passed, no urgent decision is required regarding military action against the DRV, but (a) such a decision, related to the general deteriorating situation in South Vietnam,

should be made soon, and (b) in the event of another VC or DRV "spectacular," a decision (for at least a reprisal) would be urgently needed.

4. Inside South Vietnam:

Progress inside SVN is important, but it is unlikely despite our best ideas and efforts (and progress, if made, will take at least several months). Nevertheless, whatever other actions might be taken, great efforts should be made within South Vietnam: (a) to strengthen the government, its bureaucracy, and its civil-military coordination and planning, (b) to dampen ethnic, religious, urban and civil-military strife by a broad and positive GVN program designed (with US Team help) to enlist the support of important groups, and (c) to press the pacification program in the countryside.

5. Action against DRV:

Action against North Vietnam is to some extent a substitute for strengthening the government in South Vietnam. That is, a less active VC (on orders from DRV) can be matched by a less efficient GVN. We therefore should consider squeezing North Vietnam.

6. Options open to us:

We have three options open to us (all envision reprisals in the DRV for DRV/VC "spectaculars" against GVN as well as US assets in South Vietnam.)

OPTION A. Continue present policies. Maximum assistance within SVN and

limited external actions in Laos and by the GVN covertly against North Vietnam. The aim of any reprisal actions would be to deter and punish large VC actions in the South, but not to a degree that would create strong international negotiating pressures. Basic to this option is the continued rejection of negotiating in the hope that the situation will improve.

OPTION B. Fast full squeeze. Present policies plus a systematic program of military pressures against the north, meshing at some point with negotiation, but with pressure actions to be continued at a fairly rapid pace and without interruption until we achieve our central present objectives.

OPTION C. Progressive squeeze-and-talk. Present policies plus an orchestration of communications with Hanoi and a crescendo of additional military moves against infiltration targets, first in Laos and then in the DRV, and then against other targets in North Vietnam. The scenario would be designed to give the US the option at any point to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not. The decision in these regards would be made from time to time in view of all relevant factors.

7. Analysis of OPTION A
(To be provided)

8. Analysis of OPTION B
(To be provided)

9. Analysis of OPTION C
(a) Military actions. Present policy, in addition to providing for reprisals in DRV for DRV actions against the US, envisions (1) 34A Airrops and Marops, (2) deSoto patrols, for intelligence purposes, (3) South Vietnamese shallow ground actions in Laos when practicable, and (4) T28 strikes against infiltration-associated targets in Laos. Additional actions should be:

PHASE ONE (in addition to reprisals in DRV for VC "spectaculars" in South Vietnam): (5) US strikes against infiltration-associated targets in Laos.

PHASE TWO (in addition to reprisals in DRV against broader range of VC actions): (6) Low-level reconnaissance in southern DRV, (7) US/VNAF strikes against infiltration-associated targets in southern DRV.

PHASE THREE: Either continue only the above actions or add one or more of the following, making timely deployment of US forces: (8) Aerial mining of DRV ports, (9) Naval quarantine of DRV, and (10) US/VNAF, in "crescendo," strike additional targets on "94 target list."

South Vietnamese forces should play a role in any action taken against the DRV.

(b) Political actions. Establish immediately a channel for bilateral US-DRV communication. This could be in Warsaw or via Seaborn in Hanoi. Hanoi should be told that we do not seek to destroy North Vietnam or to acquire a colony or base, but that North Vietnam must:

(1) Stop training and sending personnel to wage war in SVN and Laos.

(2) Stop sending arms and supplies to SVN and Laos.

(3) Stop directing and controlling military actions in SVN and Laos.

(4) Order the VC and PL to stop their insurgencies and military actions.

(5) Remove VM forces and cadres from SVN and Laos.

(6) Stop propaganda broadcasts to South Vietnam.

[(7) See that VC and PL stop attacks and incidents in SVN and Laos?]

[(8) See that VC and PL cease resistance to government forces?]

[(9) See that VC and PL turn in weapons and relinquish bases?]

[(10) See that VC and PL surrender for amnesty of expatriation?]

US demands should be accompanied by offers (1) to arrange a rice-barter deal between two halves of Vietnam and (2) to withdraw US forces from South Vietnam for so long as the terms are complied with.

We should not seek wider negotiations—in the UN, in Geneva, etc.—but we should evaluate and pass on each negotiating opportunity as it is pressed on us.

(c) Information actions. The start of military actions against the DRV will have to be accompanied by a convincing world-wide public information program. (The information problem will be easier if the first US action against the DRV is related in time and kind to a DRV or VC outrage or "spectacular", preferably against SVN as well as US assets.)

(d) VS/DRV/Chicom-USSR reactions. (To be elaborated later.) The DRV and China will probably not invade South Vietnam, Laos or Burma, nor is it likely that they will conduct air strikes on these countries. The USSR will almost certainly confine herself to political actions. If the DRV or China strike or invade South Vietnam, US forces will be sufficient to handle the problem.

(e) GVN Reactions. Military action against the DRV could be counter-productive in South Vietnam because (1) the VC could step up its activities, (2) the South Vietnamese could panic, (3) they could resent our striking their "brothers", and (4) they could tire of waiting for results. Should South Vietnam disintegrate completely beneath us, we should try to hold it together long enough to permit us to try to evacuate our forces and to convince the world to accept the uniqueness (and congenial impossibility) of the South Vietnamese case.

(f) Allied and neutral reactions. (To be elaborated later.) (1) Even if OPTION C failed, it would, by demonstrating US willingness to go to the mat, tend to bolster allied confidence in the US as an ally. (2) US military action against the DRV will probably prompt military actions elsewhere in the world—e.g., Indonesia against Malaysia or Timor, or Turkey against Cyprus.