

KEY TEXTS FROM

Following are texts of key documents accompanying the Pentagon's study of the Vietnam war, covering the opening of the sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam in the first half of 1965. Except where excerpting is indicated, the documents are printed verbatim, with only unmistakable typographical errors corrected.

Letter From Rostow Favoring Commitment of Troops by U.S.

Personal letter from Walt W. Rostow, chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, to Secretary McNamara, Nov. 16, 1964, "Military Dispositions and Political Signals."

New York Times

PENTAGON'S VIETNAM

19

STUDY

Following on our conversation of last night I am concerned that too much thought is being given to the actual damage we do in the North, not enough thought to the signal we wish to send.

The signal consists of three parts:

- a) damage to the North is now to be inflicted because they are violating the 1954 and 1962 accords;
- b) we are ready and able to go much further than our initial act of damage;
- c) we are ready and able to meet any level of escalation they might mount in response, if they are so minded.

Four points follow.

1. I am convinced that we should not go forward into the next stage without a US ground force commitment of some kind:

a. The withdrawal of those ground forces could be a critically important part of our diplomatic bargaining position. Ground forces can sit during a conference more easily than we can maintain a series of mounting air and naval pressures.

b. We must make clear that counter escalation by the Communists will run directly into US strength on the ground; and, therefore the possibility of radically extending their position on the ground at the cost of air and naval damage alone, is ruled out.

c. There is a marginal possibility that in attacking the airfield they were thinking two moves ahead; namely, they might be planning a pre-emptive ground force response to an expected US retaliation for the Bien Hoa attack.

2. The first critical military action against North Vietnam should be designed merely to install the principle that they will, from the present forward, be vulnerable to retaliatory attack in the north for continued violations for the 1954 and 1962 Accords. In other words, we would signal a shift from the principle involved in the Tonkin Gulf re-

sponse. This means that the initial use of force in the north should be as limited and as unsanguinary as possible. It is the installation of the principle that we are initially interested in, not tit for tat.

3. But our force dispositions to accompany an initial retaliatory move against the north should send three further signals lucidly:

a. that we are putting in place a capacity subsequently to step up direct and naval pressure on the north, if that should be required;

b. that we are prepared to face down any form of escalation North Vietnam might mount on the ground; and

c. that we are putting forces into place to exact retaliation directly against Communist China, if Peiping should join in an escalatory response from Hanoi. The latter could take the form of increased aircraft on Formosa plus, perhaps, a carrier force sitting off China distinguished from the force in the South China Sea.

4. The launching of this track, almost certainly, will require the President to explain to our own people and to the world our intentions and objectives. This will also be perhaps the most persuasive form of communication with Ho and Mao. In addition, I am inclined to think the most direct communication we can mount (perhaps via Vientiane and Warsaw) is desirable, as opposed to the use of cut-outs. They should feel they now confront an LBJ who has made up his mind. Contrary to an anxiety expressed at an earlier stage, I believe it quite possible to communicate the limits as well as the seriousness of our intentions without raising seriously the fear in Hanoi that we intend at our initiative to land immediately in the Red River Delta, in China, or seek any other objective than the re-installation of the 1954 and 1962 Accords.