

W FILE / H. ST
SUBJ.
DATE 8/72 / SUB-CAT.
CON.



AMERICAN REPORT

August 4, 1972

"With this experience in mind," State warned ominously, "there is little reason to believe that new bombing will accomplish what previous bombings failed to do, *unless it is conducted with much greater intensity and readiness to defy criticism and risk of escalation.*" (Emphasis added.)

Even a "successful" interdiction of war-essential imports would not deter North Viet Nam from its present course for two years, according to State's "educated estimate."

Listening to the Military

Although J.C.S. [Joint Chiefs of Staff] believed an almost total interdiction campaign against North Viet Nam possible, O.S.D. [Office of the Secretary of Defense] doubted the U.S. ability to close off overland supply routes through bombing. Noting that "the road network from China has seven to 10 principal arteries and numerous bypasses," O.S.D. pointed out, "we currently fly approximately 7,000 sorties per month against two primary roads in Laos without preventing throughput truck traffic." An air interdiction campaign, warned O.S.D., would entail "high risks of civilian casualties."

Now that an attempted U.S. blockade of North Viet Nam is a fact, the above quotes should help confirm what other aspects of Nixon's policy in Indochina show clearly: this President's most trusted advice on Viet Nam comes from the military chain of command, the group which the Pentagon Papers show consistently offered the most incorrect advice on Indochina over the last 12 years.

The extent to which Nixon has embraced his military advisors in the current crisis may be seen in the following paragraph from N.S.S.M.-1:

Three and one-half years later, Nixon has escalated the war just as the J.C.S. wanted. This massive escalation is an open admission that the entire Nixon strategy in Indochina has collapsed.

Vietnamization did not prepare R.V.N.A.F. [Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces] to handle their own military battles—just as N.S.S.M.-1 warned.

Under the dictatorial grasp of General Thieu, the Saigon Government did not win extended popular support—just as N.S.S.M.-1 warned.

The current desperate attempt to forestall an American defeat by punishing North Viet Nam with impunity shows how accurate most of the advice in N.S.S.M.-1 really was; it also shows the utter folly of Nixon's strategy in Indochina.

Kissinger invented the National Security Study Memorandum, or N.S.S.M., as a method of gathering opinions and information that would reflect more honest evaluation and less bureaucratic jockeying for power.

Unlike most study requests, the N.S.S.M. consisted of a set of questions carefully devised by Kissinger's National Security Council staff with further specifications concerning which executive agency (or agencies) were to respond and what the boundaries of the study were to be. Moreover, the N.S.S.M. was designed to subvert the bureaucratic hierarchy by sending parallel study requests to different agencies and offices within agencies.

Answers to N.S.S.M. questions would thus supposedly return to Kissinger's staff uncoordinated, full of opposing views and nuances that would inevitably have been lost if the information had traveled through the usual chain of command. Every faction within the bureaucracy would have a chance to make its case; the widest range of options for any given decision would remain explicitly available to the President.

The questions used in N.S.S.M.-1 were derived from those originally included in a study on American options in Viet Nam done for President-elect Nixon in December, 1968. Analysts from the Defense Department's Office of International Security Affairs and the private think tank used so often by

Similarly, the four-year bombing campaign over North-Viet Nam yielded practically no military or diplomatic benefit for American forces.

The J.C.S. considers that, should a decision be made to resume full-scale hostilities with a view to achieving the objective postulated [forcing N.L.F./N.V.A. losses to outrun recruitment/infiltration gains], authorities should be granted: (1) for closure of ports in N.V.N. by mining; (2) for unrestricted air warfare against all targets of military and/or economic significance in N.V.N. to within several miles of the Chinese border; (3) extension of normal naval surface operations to within 15 miles of the Chinese border; and (4) expanded current and overt operations, as required, in Laos, Cambodia, and the demilitarized zone (DMZ), supported by air power.

the Government, the Rand Corporation, had included with the options paper some 20 questions designed to expose specific areas of controversy or uncertainty.

Under Kissinger's direction, the questions were separated from the options paper and expanded for submission to the State Department, the military chain of command, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the American embassy in Saigon. Answers were returned over a period of several weeks in January

and February, 1969; Morton Halperin of the National Security Council Staff coordinated the N.S.S.M. assembly.

The summary preceding the actual N.S.S.M.-1 responses, while bureaucratically hedged, reflected a lack of optimism about U.S. military/political prospects in Viet Nam.

Two groups emerge in the N.S.S.M.-1 answers, said the summary. Group A, including the Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam (MACV), the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (J.C.S.), and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, "takes a hopeful view of current and future prospects."

Group B, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense (O.S.D.), the C.I.A., and usually the State Department, "is decidedly more skeptical about the present and pessimistic about the future."

The optimists tended to be military officers responsible for the current military situation, and the Saigon Embassy which (as usual in the context of a war) was overwhelmed and over-influenced by the military. The pessimists tended to be the civilian analysts and intelligence agencies. While a balanced document, the weight of the summary falls with Group B.

A Useful Guide

The qualities of N.S.S.M.-1 lie in its relative thoroughness and the built-in uncoordination of information. Not only do we get a comprehensive view of the military and political situation of Indochina, but we also see how each Government agency chose to report the situation to the President.

N.S.S.M.-1 is a useful tool in helping to locate responsibility and influence within the Executive's decision-making apparatus, and also for measuring Nixon's policy in Indochina, for analyzing what was done out of military necessity and what was done for domestic political expediency.

One other important aspect of N.S.S.M.-1 is the way it elucidates areas which are not points of controversy but, in reality, points of total ignorance. For example, question four asks "How much do we know, in general, of intraparty disputes and personalities" of the North Vietnamese political leadership. The respondents, while all admitting that little is known, proceed to outline the "known facts"—many of which are contradictory.

The Defense Department calls Truong Chinh leader of the "pro-Chinese" faction, favoring "an aggressive approach to both foreign and domestic policy."

Yet on the next page, he is classified "neutral, open to persuasion."

While the State Department says Chinh favored protracted war, the Saigon Embassy points out Chinh favored a conventional war in South Viet Nam "despite China's call for protracted warfare."

If the bulk of American military operations in Viet Nam in the last 12 years have been attempts to coerce or maneuver North Vietnamese leaders towards "favorable" negotiations; it is perhaps not surprising that we utterly failed. We simply had little idea of what in fact would influence them.



While giving a far more thorough picture of the war than most Government documents, N.S.S.M.-1 retained several serious weaknesses endemic to Executive policy-making. Nothing in N.S.S.M.-1 attempted to broach the larger questions of American goals and policy in Indochina.

What are the U.S. interests in Viet Nam that necessitate fighting a major war? What would happen if the U.S. unilaterally withdrew? Can this war be won at all, either militarily or politically? And what is victory?

Any of these questions would have been logical ones to ask at a time when American war policy was clearly collapsing.

Kissinger's requests were demands for strategy input rather than policy evaluation; they accentuated responses that contained objective, "hard" data

While respondents to N.S.S.M.-1 differed as to the degree of danger involved, none of the cautiously worded answers predicted quickly succeeding communist takeovers throughout Southeast Asia.

Only Numbers Count

N.S.S.M.-1 also reveals, as did the Pentagon Papers, the total reification integral to the prosecution of this war. *There are no people in Indochina*, one gathers from this document, only numbers to be added and multiplied. (The exception, of course, is the social elite of South Viet Nam, whose political allegiances are discussed at some length.)

Every conceivable factor affecting the war's prosecution, important or not, was quantified in "the concretization of the non-fact." C.I.A. and

[The Department of] Defense mentioned in passing that 52,000 North Vietnamese civilians were killed by three years of U.S. air strikes.

while discouraging broader, more subjective analysis.

To be sure, this was part of the reform, forcing the agencies to keep their analyses closely tied to verifiable evidence. The value of this emphasis can be seen by comparing the responses of the C.I.A.—which carefully built judgements on a foundation of explicitly cited data—with the vague, rhetorical, and often unsubstantiated replies of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

Basic Assumptions

Moreover, some Kissinger staff assistants consciously tried to circumvent bureaucratic limits of debate by formulating questions in such a way that answers would indicate larger policy failures under the guise of supplying "objective" information.

Still, N.S.S.M.-1 was not and *could not* be a forum for a straightforward policy debate.

The goals of America in Viet Nam—an anticommunist South open to U.S. influence and Western capital penetration, a symbol of defeat for other liberation movements around the world—never wavered. N.S.S.M.-1 simply indicated the need for a new strategy to achieve those goals.

The exception to the above assertion is question 2 in the memorandum relating to the "impact of various outcomes in Viet Nam within Southeast Asia." Prompting this question was a recent National Intelligence Estimate on Viet Nam (N.I.E. 50-68), prepared jointly by all the intelligence agencies, which downplayed the probability of all Southeast Asia becoming communist simply because the N.L.F. and North Vietnamese won a favorable settlement in South Viet Nam.

Although the question focused on ascertaining evidence for competing views, it allowed agencies to voice a direct opinion on the domino theory long used as a justification of the U.S. war.

Defense disputed as to whether the ARC LIGHT B-52 raids achieved a kill ratio of .74 per sortie or .43 per sortie, with J.C.S. estimating 2.5 per sortie.

Although charts showing the number of "enemy K.I.A." (killed in action) appear everywhere—particularly in the Defense Department responses—no one questioned the reliability of such figures by pointing out that many of these "enemy" were in fact civilians unable to escape America's indiscriminate technological fury.

The summary revealed differences over pacification progress by pointing out, "the first interpretation implies that it will take 8.3 years to pacify the 4.15 million contested and Viet Cong population of December 1968; the second view implies pacification success in 13.4 years."

Evidently, some agencies were incapable of discriminating between significant figures and numbers which had no connection with reality; this inability severely distorted the level of debate needed to adequately explore the larger policy failures of the war.

Severe Problems

Improvements in the South Vietnamese armed forces appeared to be largely confined to increases in size and firepower. State quoted a recent Defense Department study showing the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) 58 percent as effective as U.S. forces, up 10 percent from the 1967 index. The measure of performance, however, was the number of "enemy" killed; thus "there was admittedly some question as to the validity of this improvement."

While the military chain of command maintained that "R.V.N.A.F. is making fairly rapid strides in improvement and effectiveness," O.S.D. claimed, "R.V.N.A.F. is making only limited progress due

primary to recent impact of their resources, to the combat activity, and to a perception that U.S. forces may withdraw."

Moreover, all agencies admitted that R.V.N.A.F. had severe problems with discipline, desertion, and leadership. Almost 120,000 men deserted in 1968; the armed forces lost to desertions the equivalent of one ARVN division per month.

The promotion system for officers is so tied up with politics, warned O.S.D., that unless it changes, increasing R.V.N.A.F. effectiveness "may well be limited," and the State Department found "little prospect that in the near future" such reforms would take place.

"Looting and other misconduct" had, in Defense's opinion, "undermined the confidence of the people in the R.V.N.A.F." Efforts to change such conduct "have not been productive."

In assessing the South Vietnamese potential to fend for itself in the future, there was a clear consensus. The summary stated:

"All agencies agree that R.V.N.A.F. could not, either now or even when fully modernized, handle both the V.C. and a sizeable level of N.V.A. forces without U.S. combat support in the form of air, helicopters, artillery, logistics, and some ground forces."

U.S. Support Required

The military chain of command believed that by the end of the modernization "phase II" program in 1972, R.V.N.A.F. could handle insurgency "if the Viet Cong are not reinforced and supported by the North Vietnamese Army." (At that time, some 105,000-125,000 N.V.A. combat forces were fighting in the South, with no likely prospects of being pushed out.)

The State Department's I.N.R. [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] went further, to say that even if all North Vietnamese forces were withdrawn, including Northern "fillers" fighting in N.L.F. units, "we do not believe that the R.V.N.A.F. will be able to eradicate the Viet Cong political-military apparatus or reduce significantly the level of insurgency."

In the air war, all N.S.S.M.-1 respondents agreed on the value of tactical B-52 strikes, with the Defense Department reporting that "field commanders are lavish in their praise" for them. When the B-52 raids were not used in close coordination with ground maneuvers, however, their value dropped off sharply.

State and C.I.A. concluded that the air campaign over Laos had completely failed to keep needed North Vietnamese supplies from being delivered to their forces in the South. Noting that the truck routes through Laos were used at only 10 to 15 percent of their capacity, the C.I.A. concluded:

"Such a low level of use, and the experience of four years of observing the effects of bombing, make it clear that the capacity of these routes cannot be reduced by bombing to a level that imposes a meaningful restraint on the enemy's ability to resupply his forces in South Viet Nam."

U.S. Bombing

The Defense Department estimated that N.V.A./N.L.F. troops in the South required only 10 to 15 truckloads of supplies per day, while as many as 6,000 trucks a month had been observed on the Laotian infiltration routes. Admitted Defense:

"It appears that the enemy can continue to push sufficient supplies through Laos to South Viet Nam in spite of relatively heavy losses inflicted by air attacks."

Similarly, the four-year bombing campaign over North Viet Nam yielded practically no military or

economic infrastructure, transportation networks, and normal civilian life were severely disrupted, the C.I.A. reported:

"Hanoi was able to cope effectively with each of these strains, so that the air war did not seriously affect the flow of men and supplies to Communist forces in Laos and South Viet Nam. Nor did it significantly erode North Viet Nam's military defense capability or Hanoi's determination to persist in the war."

Indeed, Defense believed "the bombing actually may have hardened the attitude of the people and rallied them behind the Government's programs."

Aid Outweighs Losses

Although the air strikes destroyed an estimated \$770 million worth of military and civilian goods and facilities, some three billion dollars worth of aid from communist countries, particularly China and the U.S.S.R., more than compensated for the destruction.

At the same time, the U.S. lost almost 1,100 aircraft to the sophisticated North Vietnamese air defense system. The bombing of the North proved to be a costly venture that had little effect on the war's progress.

In a discussion of "enemy" morale, Defense mentioned in passing that 52,000 North Vietnamese civilians were killed by three years of U.S. air strikes. No other agency even bothered to comment on the subject.

Evaluating the pacification program stirred clear disagreements, yet the evidence seems to support the State Department/O.S.D. position that the Saigon Regime had made little progress in winning political support among the people.

State and O.S.D. began by criticizing the Defense Department's Systems Analysis Division's measure of progress in pacification, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), as having inherent biases which inflated the percentage of hamlets listed under Saigon control.

Few Gains Since 1965

For example, the December 1968 HES report listed 76.3 percent of the population in the category of "relatively secure." N.L.F. forces controlled 12.3 percent, with 11.4 percent of the population "contested" by both sides.

State, however, noted that included as "relatively secure" were "C-rated" hamlets which were "subject to V.C. harassment and where the infrastructure has been identified and curtailed but is still operative."

If C-rated hamlets were placed in the contested category, the figures would shift dramatically: less than half of the population—46.7 percent—would be classified as "relatively secure," while 41 percent would become "contested." These figures differed little from those of 1965.

O.S.D. went even further by concluding, "the portions of the S.V.N. [South Viet Nam] rural population which was aligned with the V.C. and aligned with the G.V.N. [Government of (South) Viet Nam]—is approximately the same today as it was in 1962."

While Saigon controlled some five million people, the N.L.F. controlled some 2.6 million in 1962 and 2.2 million in 1968. Of the remaining population, 2 to 3 million abandoned the countryside for the cities, while "5 to 7 million have wandered back and forth from G.V.N. influence to V.C. influence, dependent upon who was placing the greatest pressure upon them to conform at any given moment."

C.I.A., State, and O.S.D. agreed that much of the net gain in "secure" population resulted not from newly-pacified hamlets, but rather from peasants

The Kissinger Papers



TOP SECRET

fleeing rural combat zones to the more easily controlled cities.

Both State and C.I.A. pointed out that recent pacification gains due to the Accelerated Pacification Campaign were probably paper gains made possible by a low level of N.L.F./N.V.A. activity. These agencies warned that increased insurgent activity could dramatically show how fragile these gains were.

Little Progress Projected

Defense said that while the Saigon Government maintained some 38,000 members of its political infrastructure at the village and hamlet level, the N.L.F. had 70,000 at this level and 80 to 100 thousand total.

One half of the villages in South Viet Nam had N.L.F. "Liberation Committees," or shadow governments, by November, 1968. While State's East Asian Division estimated that one-half of the rural population was still subject to "significant V.C. presence and influence," State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research believed this proportion to be closer to two-thirds.

Although J.C.S., CINCPAC, and MACV maintained that the N.L.F. forces "are considerably weakened" and that "pacification progress should accelerate in 1969," neither the evidence nor the other agency estimates supported these claims.

If the American war effort appeared to be stalled, the information in N.S.S.M.-1 offered little reason to believe future progress could be made with the present strategy. The predicted unreliability of the R.V.N.A.F., stagnation in the pacification program, and U.S. inability to control the level of N.L.F./N.V.A. casualties made any major disengagement from Viet Nam impossible under the present policy of total support for the Saigon regime.

The Bankruptcy of U.S. Policy

The military offered the hope that some U.S. troops could be withdrawn during the year [1969] due to progress in the field. The Commander, U.S. MACV estimated that if R.V.N.A.F. continued to increase its effectiveness, one U.S. division of 43,000 men could be withdrawn in mid-1969; "in addition, reduction of other U.S. forces should be possible in the near future."

No further timetable was hinted at, although Defense assured its examiners that U.S. force levels were continually under review. Such hopeful signs paled before the gloomy prognosis of R.V.N.A.F. capabilities cited earlier.

In the C.I.A.'s opinion, "it is difficult to see how the U.S. can largely disengage over the next few years without jeopardizing [recent progress]."

The State Department offered an even clearer statement on the bankruptcy of the U.S. strategy in Indochina up to 1969:

"To many, 'victory' has meant the outright defeat of communist forces (both Viet Cong and N.V.A.) or at least such heavy attrition of them that no alternative remained but their total and permanent withdrawal.... There is now growing realization that victory in these terms is unattainable and that the inexorable trend is toward some compromise settlement of hostilities and some kind of political competition thereafter."

Theodore M. Lieverman is a research associate at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C.