THE VIETNAM WAR FILES

UNCOVERING THE SECRET HISTORY OF NIXON-ERA STRATEGY

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{6.21} CIA Intelligence Memorandum, August 21, 1972, enclosed in Memorandum, David Young to Haldeman, September 18, 1972

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
11 August 1972
INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM
IMPACT OF THE U.S. BOMBING AND MINING PROGRAM
ON NORTH VIETNAM

Summary and Conclusions

We have examined all available data regarding the present and potential effect of the U.S. interdiction program in order to assess its probable overall impact on North Vietnam’s economic, logistics, and manpower situation as of early August 1972, 1 October 1972, and 1 January 1973. This examination and analysis has produced the following general conclusions.

a. The data available support only the most tenuous estimate of the volume of overland imports now being received by North Vietnam. Our estimate—based on extremely limited information—is that such imports have totaled on the order of 3,000 metric tons per day during June and July 1972. This is less than one-half the daily rate of North Vietnam’s combined sea and overland imports in 1971. It is, however, more than the daily level of imports (2,700 metric tons...), which we estimate that Hanoi must receive to meet its minimum economic needs and to provide sufficient supplies for its military forces in the South to continue the war with periodic high levels of activity.

b. Given no significant increase in the impact of the U.S. interdiction program, it seems likely that North Vietnam can sustain this level of resupply. Over the coming months, as North Vietnam continues to work out countermeasures to the U.S. program (including the completion of multiple pipelines from China), it is likely that Hanoi will be able to increase its imports above the 3,000-ton-per-day level.

c. Therefore, the evidence available suggests that over the next few months a lack of supplies alone—with the possible exception of important items such as tanks and heavy artillery pieces—will not materially diminish the capabilities of enemy main force combat units, at least in northern South Vietnam. Near the DMZ and in general in GVN MR 1, the enemy’s ammunition and weapons requirements for this period, including requirements for occasional (not sustained) peaks of offensive activity, can probably be met out of current stocks, augmented by imports included in the 3,000-ton-per-day level cited above. Similarly,
inside North Vietnam, current equipment and ammunition stocks, with some import augmentation, will probably be sufficient to sustain North Vietnam's air defense activities at about current levels over the period considered. (An exception may be surface-to-air missiles, whose rate of fire has perceptibly diminished since late May.)

d. In the areas of South Vietnam to the south of MR 1, we do not have sufficient information to judge whether the enemy's level of stocks is adequate—this late in the rainy season and after the enemy's high rates of expenditure from April through June—to carry out new rounds of heavy offensive action. In these areas from now at least until October, when the next dry season begins, the enemy will have to depend largely on stocks brought in during the last dry season.

e. The Communists' combat losses in the South (especially among their experienced cadres), the pounding they have taken on the ground and from the air and the degradation of morale, in at least some line units, will play a more important part than supply stock levels in determining the fighting effectiveness of Communist forces. This is true now and—assuming no increase in the impact of the interdiction program—it will also be true on 1 October 1972 and 1 January 1973.

f. Hanoi has had to divert large amounts of manpower to repair bomb damage and to keep its transportation network in operation. Despite the disruption of daily life and other difficulties this has caused, North Vietnam has sufficient able-bodied manpower to keep essential activities functioning both now and for the duration of the period dealt with in this memorandum.

g. Petroleum and food are the only two resources we can specifically identify for which potentially critical shortages might emerge in the North Vietnamese economy between now and early 1973. Petroleum stocks at present are probably at their lowest point of the war. If the North Vietnamese failed to achieve a sustained flow of supplies (either through the new pipelines or by using tank cars and truck transports), severe shortages would probably develop at least by 1 October. On food, if the forthcoming autumn crop should fail—that is, fall to the 1971 level or below—and if Hanoi should be unable to import enough rice to counterbalance such a failure, serious food shortages could develop by 1 January 1973.

h. While the combination of reduced imports and continued bombing of North Vietnam's economy and transportation system is unlikely to cripple Hanoi's ability to provide the logistic support necessary to its military
forces, the economy itself will face increasingly difficult problems in the months ahead. Most of North Vietnam's fledgling modern industry, rebuilt since the 1965-68 bombing campaign, has now been destroyed again. Consumers have had to tighten their belts and may have to do so again by early 1973. The damage to North Vietnam's transportation network has further disrupted economic activity. In the coming months, problems will almost certainly arise—shortages of spare parts, certain types of industrial raw materials, etc.—which we cannot now identify but which, cumulatively, may become increasingly troublesome to the regime. Such stresses will certainly have an adverse impact on the morale of the North Vietnamese people, but the general population is sufficiently patient and resilient—and overall discipline reinforced by Party control sufficiently effective—to minimize the likelihood of morale considerations exerting a major influence on Hanoi's political decisions during the next several months.

On balance, our view is that barring major agricultural failure or greater disruption to the logistic system than the United States has been able to impose in the past three months, the bombing and mining program probably will not, of itself, pose unmanageable difficulties to the North Vietnamese regime—either now or through early 1973. It should be recognized, however, that this memorandum neither considers nor passes judgment on the question of whether a combination of pressures brought to bear by other factors in addition to the U.S. interdiction program might create unmanageable difficulties for the regime in Hanoi and induce that regime to change its present policies.

THE JULY 19-SEPTEMBER 26, 1972 ROUND OF SECRET NEGOTIATIONS AND BACKSTAGE STRATEGIZING BY THE NORTH VIETNAMESE

On June 11, Washington proposed the resumption of plenary and private talks. By June 26, both sides had agreed to resume the Kléber sessions on July 13 and the private sessions on July 19.

Political Bureau members understood by midsummer that the situation on the battlefield, which was the most important factor in their calculations, had improved but was not likely to continue improving dramatically. At the same time, domestic factors in the United States presented them with an opportunity to achieve a diplomatic solution before the American presidential election. Therefore, they should now shift their strategy to diplomacy, while preparing for a prolonged struggle after a cease-fire agreement (doc. 6.22).
Appendix:
Documents with Source Data

GRAND POLICY GOALS AND INITIAL STRATEGY OPTIONS


2.3 Journal/Diary entry, October 9, 1969, Journals and Diaries of Harry Robbins Haldeman (JDRH), NPMP.

2.4 Memorandum of Conversation, Richard Nixon, Robert Thompson, and Henry Kissinger, October 17, 1969, folder: MemCon—The President, Sir Robert Thompson, et al., October 17, 1969, box 1023, Presidential/HAK MemCons, National Security Council Files (NSCF), NPMP.

2.5 Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, September 18, 1971, subj: Vietnam, box 873, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSCF, NPMP.

2.6 Memorandum of Conversation, National Security Council Meeting, May 8, 1972, box 988, Haig Memcons [January–December 1972], Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, NSCF, NPMP.

2.7 Journal/Diary notes on Nixon's remarks to Cabinet Meeting, September 24, 1971, JDRH, NPMP. See also Journal/Diary entries, July 31, August 16, and September 13, 1971, JDRH, NPMP.

2.8 "Vietnam Policy Alternatives" [ca. December 27, 1968], folder: 10: Vietnam—RAND, box 3, HAK Administrative and Staff Files (HAKAFSP)—Transition, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files (HAKOF), NPMP.

INITIAL PLANS AND MAD SCHEMES


3.5 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Kissinger and Elliot Richardson, April 16, 1973, folder: Telecons April 1973, box 190, Elliot L. Richardson Papers, Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress (MDLC).


3.8 Personal notes, Thomas L. Hughes's on Peter Lisagor's story in the *Chicago Sun-Times*.


3.13 Telegram, Department of State to AmEmbassy Moscow, February 17, 1969, subj: Summary of Conversation [drafted by Malcolm Toon], Nixon and Dobrynin (Kissinger and Toon present), folder: USSR vol. 1, box 709, Country Files—Europe, NSC, NPMP.


3.16 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and de Gaulle, March 1, 1969, ibid.

3.17 Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, April 15, 1969, subj: Memcon with Dobrynin, April 14, 1969, folder: Dobrynin/Kissinger 1969 [part 1], box 489, President's Trip
Files, NSCR, NPMP. The set of documents from which this excerpt is taken contains additional memcons and telecons in which Kissinger uses the linkage strategy against Dobrynin.


3.19 National Security Study Memorandum 1 (January 21, 1969) and Revised Summary of Responses to NSSM 1 (March 22, 1969), NSC, NPMP.

3.20 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and Nguyen Van Thieu, July 30, 1969, folder: MemCons—The President and President Thieu, July 30, 1969, box 1023, Presidential/HAK MemoCons, NSCR, NPMP.

3.21 "Vietnamizing the War," National Security Study Memorandum 36, April 10, 1969, NSC, NPMP.

3.22 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and Thieu, July 30, 1969, folder: MemCons—The President and President Thieu, July 30, 1969, box 1023, Presidential/HAK MemoCons, NSCR, NPMP.


3.24 Diary entry, April 19, 1969, JDRH, NPMP.


**BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN OPTIONS**

4.1 Diary entry, July 7, 1969, JDRH, NPMP.

4.2 Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, July 7, 1969, subj: Sequoia NSC Meeting on Vietnam, folder: Vietnam Papers, box 338, Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969–77, Policy Planning Council (S/PC), Policy Planning Staff (S/P), GRDOS, RG59, NARA.


4.5 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and Thieu, July 30, 1969, folder: MemCons—The President and President Thieu, July 30, 1969, box 1023, Presidential/HAK MemoCons, NSCR, NPMP.

4.6 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and Nicolae Ceaușescu, August 3, 1969.
folder: MemCons—The President and President Ceausescu, August 2–August 3, 1969, box 1033, Presidential/HAK MemCons, NSCF, NPMP.

4.7 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Xuan Thuy, August 4, 1969, folder: Mister “S,” vol. 1 (1 of 2), box 106, Country Files—Far East—Vietnam Negotiations, HAKOF, NPMP.


4.10 Journal/Diary entry, September 27, 1969, JDHRH, NPMP.

4.11 Briefing Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, October 1, 1969, subj: Conversation with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, folder: Dobrynin/Kissinger 1969 [part 1], box 489, President’s Trip Files, NSCF, NPMP.

4.12 Memorandum, Haig to Kissinger, September 9, 1969, subj: Items to Discuss with the President, box 334, Subject Files, NSCF, NPMP.


4.17 Journal/Diary entries, October 3, 8, and 9, 1969, JDHRH, NPMP.

4.18 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Nixon and Kissinger, September 27, 1969, folder: Dobrynin/Kissinger 1969 [part 1], box 489, President’s Trip Files, NSCF, NPMP.

4.20 Journal/Diary entry, October 17, 1969, JDHRH.
4.22 Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, October 18, 1969, subj: Your Meeting with Ambassador Dobrynin, Monday, October 20, 1969, folder: Dobrynin/Kissinger 1969 [part 1], box 489, President's Trip Files, NSC, NPM.
4.23 Briefing Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, October 18, 1969, subj: Your Meeting with Ambassador Dobrynin, Monday, October 20, 1969, ibid.
4.24 Memorandum, Haig to Kissinger, October 22, 1969, subj: Your Meeting with the Vice President, folder: Haig Chron October 16–October 31, 1969 [of 2], box 959, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, NSC, NPM.
4.25 Memorandum, Haig to Kissinger, October 9, 1969, subj: Items to Discuss with the President, folder: Items to Discuss with the President, 8/13/69–12/30/69, box 334, Subject Files, NSC, NPM.
4.26 Memorandum, Haig to Kissinger, October 14, 1969, subj: Significant Military Actions, folder: Haig Chron October 1–October 15, 1969 [of 2], box 958, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, NSC, NPM.
4.27 Memorandum, Robert Pursley to Haig, October 8, 1969, subj: Significant Military Actions, attachment to Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, October 9, 1969, subj: Military Alerts, folder: Schedule of Significant Military Exercises, vol. 1, box 352, Subject Files, NSC, NPM.

TOWARD A DECENT, HEALTHY INTERVAL

5.1 Journal/Diary entry, October 9, 1969, JDHRH, NPM.
5.2 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon, Thompson, and Kissinger, October 17, 1969, folder: MemCon—The President, Sir Robert Thompson, et al., October 17, 1969, box 1023, Presidential/HAK MemCons, NSC, NPM.
5.3 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Dobrynin, January 20, 1970, folder 8: T. Lake Chron—January 1970, box 1046, Staff Files—Lake Chron, NSC, NPM.
5.6 Journal/Diary entries, April 23, 24, and 27, 1970, JDHRH, NPM.
5.7 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Thuy, September 7, 1970, folder: Sensitive Camp David—Vol. V, box 833, Vietnam Negotiations, for the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSC, NPM.

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but references to his own comments to Dobrynin in the memo he sent to Nixon—while not inconsistent with Shcherbakov’s report—are cryptic. Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, December 22, 1970, subj: Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, folder: Dobrynin/Kissinger 1970, vol. 3, box 490, President’s Trip Files, NSC, NPMP.

5.9 Journal/Diary entries, November 20 and December 18 and 21, 1970, and February 3, 1971, JDHHK, NPMP.


5.11 Oval Office Conversation no. 466-12, Nixon and Kissinger, after 4:00 P.M., March 11, 1973, White House Tapes, NPMP (transcribed by the author).


5.14 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon, Laird, John Connally, David Packard, Thomas Moorer, Kissinger, and Haig, beginning at 4:00 P.M., March 26, 1973, folder: Beginning March 21, 1973, box 84: Memoranda for the President, WHSP: President’s Office File, NPMP.


5.25 Excerpt from the Indochina section of the briefing book for Kissinger’s July 1971 trip, POLO I [part I], box 850, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSC, NPMP.

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5.26 Cover Memorandum, Lord to Kissinger, July 29, 1971, subj: Memcon of Your Conversations with Zhou Enlai, July 9, 1971, folder: China—HAK Memcons July 1971, box 1033, For the President's Files—China/Vietnam Negotiations, NSCR, NPMIP.

5.27 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Zhou, July 9, 1971, folder: China—HAK Memcons July 1971, box 1033, For the President's Files—China/Vietnam Negotiations, NSCR, NPMIP.

5.28 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Zhou, July 10, 1971, folder: China—HAK Memcons July 1971, box 1033, For the President's Files—China/Vietnam Negotiations, NSCR, NPMIP.

5.29 Oval Office Conversation no. 574-3, Nixon and Kissinger (Haldeman present), 9:52-10:03 a.m., September 17, 1971, White House Tapes, NPMIP (transcribed by the author). Haldeman's journal entry for this date paraphrases this conversation.


5.31 Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, September 18, 1971, folder: Vietnam Elections, box 872, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSCR, NPMIP.

GOING OUT WITH A BANG AND AN ARMISTICE


6.2 Notes, February 15 and 18, 1972, folder: China Notes, box 7, WHSF: President's Personal File 1969-74, NPMIP.

6.3 Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and Zhou, February 24, 1972, folder: Beginning February 20, 1972, box 87, Memoranda for the President, WHSF: President's Office File, NPMIP.

6.4 Memorandum, Nixon to Kissinger, March 11, 1972, box 230, WHSF/SMOF: Haldeman, NPMIP.


6.6 Memorandum, Nixon to Kissinger, April 20, 1972, folder: Apr. 1972 Kissinger Trip to Moscow, box 74, WHSF: President's Personal File, NPMIP.

6.7 Message WTE 016, Kissinger to Haig, April 24, 1972, folder: Secret Moscow Trip Apr. 1972 TOHAK/HAKTO FILE, box 21, HAK Trip Files, HAKOR, NPMIP. This memo, with Nixon's marginal marks, can also be found in folder: Apr. 1972 Kissinger Trip to Moscow, box 74, WHSF: PPE, NPMIP.

6.8 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Leonid Brezhnev, 11:35 a.m.-12:45 p.m., April 24, 1972, folder: HAK Moscow Trip—April 1972 MemCons, box 72, Country Files—Europe—U.S.S.R., HAKOR, NPMIP. The accompanying memorandum of the conversation between Kissinger and Gromyko from 11:50 to 3:00 p.m. reveals a similarly cordial meeting.


6.14 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Gromyko, May 27, 1972, folder 3: Mr. Kissinger's Conversations in Moscow, May 1972, box 73, country files—Europe—USSR, HAKOB, NPMP.


6.17 Memorandum of Conversation, Zhou and Tho, July 12, 1972, in 77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1979, ed. Odd Arne Westad et al., Working Paper No. 22, Cold War International History Project (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 182–184. This excerpt from 77 Conversations was taken from the record of a longer memcon prepared by Chinese archivists for official Chinese archives; Chinese authorities, however, did not permit the editors of 77 Conversations to specify the filing location of the original memcon.


6.21 CIA Intelligence Memorandum, August 11, 1972, enclosed in Memorandum, David Young to Haldeman, September 18, 1972, subj: Followup Analysis of Rather/Szulc Stories Assessing Mining and Bombing of North Vietnam, box 191, WHSE/SMP: Haldeman, NPMP.


6.23 Analysis, Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy to Political Bureau, Hanoi [between August...


6.25 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Tho, September 15, 1972, folder: Camp David—Memcons Sensitive, May–Oct. 1972 [3 of 5], box 864, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSC, NPM.


6.27 Cable, Situation Room to Col. Brown for Haig, September 30, 1972, subj: Responses to Questions, folder: Sensitive Camp David—Vol. XIX, box 856, Vietnam Negotiations, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSC, NPM.


6.29 Journal/Diary entry, October 12, 1972, JDHRH, NPM.


6.31 Cable, Haig to Kissinger (TOHAK 84), October 22, 1972, Key Cables Initiated by General Haig, folder: NSC Top Secret, box 180, WHSF/SMOP: Haldeman, NPM.

6.32 Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Tho, November 24, 1972, folder: Sensitive Camp David—Vol. XXI Minutes of Meetings, Nov. 20–Nov. 25, 1972, box 858, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSC, NPM.

6.33 Cable, Nixon to Kissinger, November 24, 1972, folder: HAK Paris Trip 18–25 Nov. 1972 TOHAK [2 of 2], box 26, HAK Trip Files, HAKOR, NPM.


6.35 Cable, Kissinger to Nixon (via Haig), December 13, 1972, folder: HAK Paris Trip 9–13 Dec. 1972 HAKTO & Memos to the Pres., etc. [2 of 2], box 27, HAK Trip Files, HAKOR, NPM.


6.37 Journal/Diary entry, December 15, 1972, JDHRH, NPM.

6.38 Journal/Diary entry, December 18, 1972, JDHRH, NPM.


Telephone...[Christmas 1969–1970] to Watergate Special, Name/Subject File 1969–74, WHSF: President’s Personal File, NPM.

6.41 Memorandum of Conversation, Dong and Ilya Shcherbakov, December 23, 1972, fond 5, opis’ 66, delo 782, 11.1–6, SCCD, Moscow.


TALES OF THE FALL

7.1 Cable, Haig to Kissinger (prepared by Negroponte), October 4, 1972, subj: Some Thoughts on Where We Stand on Negotiations, folder: Sensitive Camp David—Vol. XIX, box 856, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, NSCR, NPM.

7.2 Memorandum, Dwight Chapin to Haldeman, January 18, 1973, folder: Vietnam, box 178, Alpha Subject Files, WHSF/SMOP: Haldeman, NPM.


7.6 Memorandum, W. R. Smyser to Kissinger, July 15, 1975, subj: The Situation in Asia, folder: Southeast Asia (3), box 1, Country File, Ambassador Kinnler’s Study...Area, National Security Advisor: Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, 1974–1977, GRFL.