

SOVIET REACTIONS AND U.S. COURSES OF ACTION

Summary

The Soviets have always found the possibility that we might interdict access to Haiphong and conduct sustained operations against adjacent shore facilities a disturbing prospect, simply because these actions would directly challenge their prestige and threaten their assets. To the extent that they have ever counseled moderation in Hanoi, their principal specific reason for doing so has been a fear of this type U.S. action. They have also been disturbed, though less so, by the possibility of a concentrated U.S. attack on DRV air-order-of-battle, confronting them with the burdens of rapid replacement; and by the possibility of a U.S. land invasion, which would place in question the very survival of a communist state.

Soviet reactions to U.S. operations against Haiphong are hard to predict because Soviet options in the area are unattractive. At one extreme there could be drastic responses up to and including direct U.S.-Soviet military confrontation both in the area as well as outside, such as in Berlin. At the other there could be almost total avoidance of confrontation combined with continued overland supply operations and airlifts of questionable effectiveness. The most likely reaction would be between these extremes: efforts to circumvent a quarantine via other ports and by lightering, possibly with Soviet flags, some attempt at mine sweeping, attempts to inhibit our operation by leaving ships in Haiphong, stepped up overland and air supply operations and direct involvement in air defense. Much of this we could not prevent. We would have to make decisions to attack Haiphong even if it meant damage to Soviet vessels and we should be prepared to attack lighters even if they had Soviet flags.

The Soviets would probably attempt to replace rapidly any losses we could inflict on DRV air-order-of-battle, but they would encounter formidable practical problems in doing so if we had succeeded in destroying a large number of aircraft and in keeping DRV airfields inoperable or under harassment. We would be able to do relatively little to prevent gradual Soviet reinforcement of DRV ground defense.

TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE

-2-

Moscow's main purpose following the onset of our operations would be to generate maximum domestic and foreign pressure to get us to cease and desist. To this end, apart from the type of practical measures suggested above, the Soviets would mount a major political campaign, including the disruption of most ongoing political negotiations. They would do this even at some cost to themselves. We would have to accept this; indeed our own readiness to make certain sacrifices in our relations with the USSR might enhance the weight of our measures in Vietnam. Domestic and international pressures running counter to the U.S. offensive military operations against NVN could be offset through governmental initiatives or tacitly ignored. The U.S. government's demonstration of indifference to such pressures might well constitute the strongest signal of all.

The chances that the Soviets would also exert real pressure to induce greater moderation on the part of the DRV are not great, especially if Moscow was convinced that the DRV leaders are prepared to persist on their present course. If, however, Moscow thought there was some ambivalence in Hanoi, it might engage in a mixture of pressures and inducements to tip the balance. The Soviets would argue that the DRV could in the long run achieve its goals in the south by diplomacy and political means.

POSSIBLE SOVIET REACTIONS

and

US COURSES OF ACTION

<u>In Area</u>	<u>Soviet</u>	<u>US</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1. <u>In Area</u>			
Leave ships in Haiphong Harbor.		Avoid deliberate damage but attack area consistent with requirement for effectiveness.	
Anchor vessels offshore and offload to lighters without or with Soviet flags.		Avoid damage to ships; attack lighters.	
Send ships to alternate ports..		Mine approaches.	Contingency plan required for Chinese ports.
Assist DPV in sweeping with Soviet personnel.		Reseed; if necessary attack sweepers.	
Send in Soviet sweepers		Reseed;	
Send in Soviet sweepers with escorts		Reseed;	
Attacks on US vessels with subs; surface vessels, DRV vessels with Soviet "volunteers". (All unlikely)		Return fire;	
Air attacks with Soviet pilots on US vessels. (Unlikely)		Return fire, hot pursuit.	
Replace DRV aircraft by rail or air-lift.		Attack airfields; armed recce to harass fields.	
Soviet "volunteers" in air defense system.		Attack as planned.	
Increased supply shipments by land and air.		Attack ground facilities as planned; keep airfields inoperable.	

2. Out of Area
SovietUSRemarks

Harrass access to Berlin

Use existing contingency plans

Requires allied participation

Prevent US access to BerlinBlockade Soviet military mission to US forces in Germany;
Block Soviet use of Panama Canal;
Act against Soviet trawlers;
Quarantine Cuba;Requires planning
Requires planning
Requires planning;OAS

Block all access to Berlin

Use Existing Contingency Plans as above

Requires allied agreement

Harrassment of US shipping

Respond in kind; escort

Harrass US 6th Fleet in Med.

Respond in kind; place force near approach to Turkish Straits

Break air agreement

Acquiesce

Attack US recce flights near Soviet borders.

Reduce flights, escort rest.

Increase military readiness; alert

Appropriate DEFCONs

Requires careful examination to avoid miscalculation and pre-emption.

3. Political (Illustrative)

Interrupt ongoing negotiations

Acquiesce

Act in UNGA

Respond in kind; if unavoidable accept adverse vote.

Act in UN Security Council.

Do likewise; if necessary, use veto.

Use Hot Line to exert pressure

Keep cool.

Discussion

1. Interdiction of access to Haiphong, the bombing of adjacent shore facilities, and any other measures threatening sea communications with the DRV probably have always been the single most disturbing development for the Soviets to contemplate in connection with the Vietnamese war. Also troublesome to them, but less acutely so, has been the threat of a major US campaign against DRV air capabilities or US land operations against the DRV homeland.
 2. Attacks on the approaches to and the shore facilities in Haiphong engage Soviet interests in several related ways. They pose a direct physical threat to Soviet ships and in that sense represent a direct challenge of the USSR in a situation where its available and direct military responses are scarce and where we have the capacity to put the burden of escalation on them. At the same time, the other major choice open to the USSR, while less risky vis-a-vis the US, is politically and psychologically unpalatable -- that is, to withdraw their shipping from Haiphong in order to avoid the risk of damage or loss and to honor the quarantine.
 3. Because US action against Haiphong would pose such serious problems for the USSR, we must allow for the possibility of drastic Soviet responses. On balance, such responses seem less likely than a more measured combination of military and political actions (see below), but our planning must prepare for the contingency of Soviet military actions against US shipping, naval and merchant, in Vietnamese waters either by submarines already in the area or readily within reach, or by DRV aircraft with Soviet pilots. We must likewise be prepared for retaliation and counter pressure in areas where the local advantage rests with the USSR, most notably around Berlin, possibly in the Sea of Japan, or at least by proxy in Korea. For these and other possible points of pressure, contingency plans already exist. The most pessimistic view of this kind of Soviet reaction would be that it could lead cumulatively to a major US-Soviet confrontation, up to and including the risk of general war.
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4. At the other extreme of the drastic response would be a Soviet decision to avoid damage to their shipping and to minimize the possibility of direct physical confrontation with the US. This would not

necessarily be accompanied, at least in a way discernable to us, by constructive and helpful political moves; on the contrary it might be masked by an extremely hostile political and propaganda posture. Under this contingency, the Soviets would promptly move their ships out of Haiphong and would abide by whatever quarantine or restrictions we had imposed on access to this and other ports. They would not attempt to run the minefields. The Cuban missile crisis provides a reasonable analogy for this type of Soviet response.

5. At the same time, even such a response might and probably would not be without problems for us. Whatever they do at sea, the Soviets would probably do what they could to speed and increase overland shipments through China (assuming the Chinese are permissive) and to attempt increased supply by air, including via China, via India-Burma-Laos (which they have attempted in the past) and perhaps directly from the Soviet Far East. Their Egyptian airlift in 1967 has given them some practice in this. Overland and air supply could not handle bulk items such as POL, cement, etc. and their airlift would be subject to the availability of landing fields in North Vietnam. It is possible that the Chinese would make available airfields for Soviet aircraft, though this has not been successfully worked out between the Soviets and the Chinese in the past and would in any case require further arrangements for onward overland transportation.

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6. Between a ragged or drastically escalatory response and total avoidance of a maritime confrontation lie a range of possible Soviet actions. Apart from attempts at an airlift and increased overland shipments, the Soviets might seek alternate means of sea access. Depending on the precise location of minefields, the Soviets might anchor ships further to sea and resort to lighters. They could place Soviet flags on these to deter attack. In addition, or alternatively, the Soviets could sail their ships to other ports although in the case of those in China this will require Chinese agreement (not a foregone conclusion) and cooperation for transshipment (even less a foregone conclusion).

7. Nor is it certain that the Soviets would remove all their shipping in Haiphong harbor. Even if it were possible for them to do so physically -- which, depending on how much warning they had

might be infeasible -- they might instead elect to keep one or more vessels in port even at the risk of loss or damage. Their calculation would be that this might deter or at least inhibit, and hence reduce the effectiveness of US air attacks on port facilities. Even if we were not deferred or inhibited, the Soviets might believe that they could subsequently turn injury to their property to political and psychological advantage against us. At the same time, should Soviet ships be sunk or damaged, it might be more difficult for the Soviets to refrain from tangible counteraction since their prestige will have been engaged. Thus, even if the Soviets had initially decided to do no more than leave a ship or two in port, they might subsequently, if this had failed to deter us, feel obliged to undertake more concrete actions against us.

8. We must squarely face the question of whether or not to risk damage to Soviet vessels in Haiphong. Reconnaissance might reveal whether we could avoid bombing in close proximity to such vessels and still accomplish our main objective of destroying the shore facilities, but we probably should make a decision that if effectiveness so requires, we will bomb even at the risk of damaging Soviet vessels.

9. The Soviets will almost certainly consider the feasibility and desirability of attempting to sweep the minefields. To do this with any degree of effectiveness requires substantial numbers of minesweepers which would take several weeks to get to the Gulf of Tonkin. Even if this were accomplished, the operation would be unattractive since we could reseed without engaging Soviet vessels. Moreover, these vessels cannot stay at sea indefinitely and by definition of our mine plan it would be difficult if not impossible for them to put into DRV ports, or to get out again without substantial losses. Thus, even if the Soviets should attempt such operations they should not seriously affect the quarantine. This being the case, we probably need take no special steps to prevent Soviet vessels from getting to the scene or to attack them once there.

10. To the extent that our attacks on DRV air order of battle are effective the Soviets will be under pressure to send in replacements. They acquired some experience in rapidly airlifting crated fighter aircraft to Egypt in 1967 with AN-12 transports. In the Vietnamese case they will, however, have to cope with more difficult conditions; longer distance, less certain overflight arrangements, more difficult weather conditions, uncertain condition of airfields in Vietnam following US strikes, possible conduct of operations --

landing, assembly, flight-testing -- at Vietnamese airfields under actual attack or threat or US armed reconnaissance. All of these factors, and other problems, would make a major Soviet effort to replace large numbers of fighter aircraft a formidable though not impossible undertaking. Our actions can affect the degree of difficulty in three ways: (1) the number of DRV aircraft we destroy in our strikes will determine the rough number of necessary Soviet replacements; (2) the damage inflicted to DRV airfields will determine the difficulty of subsequent Soviet operations; and (3) policy we follow in conducting armed reconnaissance against DRV airfields and other air defense targets will affect the efficiency of the replacement operation.

11. Although the pressures operating on the Soviets to undertake a replacement operation will be strong -- e.g., prestige, influence in the DRV and the Communist world, deterrence of the US -- the actual Soviet decision as whether to proceed will be strongly influenced by their judgment of its feasibility (which, as noted above, we can influence) and by a determination as to whether they want to utilize DRV dependence on them as leverage in getting the DRV to assume a more conciliatory posture toward the US. On balance, assuming reasonable feasibility, we must expect the Soviets to go through with the operation, rather than withholding it for purposes of political pressure. On the other hand, if we succeed in raising really substantial physical obstacles to a meaningful replacement operation, we have some chance of influencing the political behavior of the DRV (and the USSR) in a positive direction for we would then confront the DRV with the prospect of facing our next onslaught with a greatly degraded air-defense.

This plainly argues for:

- a. destroying the largest number of DRV aircraft possible;
- b. doing the greatest possible damage to DRV airfields; and
- c. attempting to keep those airfields inoperable, or at least hampering their return to operability, to the maximum extent possible.

12. Apart from the question of Soviet replacement of DRV air order of battle, Moscow will consider assisting the DRV air defense by increasing its passive capabilities. SAMs and AAA, and associated radar, can be shipped in overland, though this will take time and depends on Chinese cooperation. The Soviets could again airlift personnel to operate the system. There is little or nothing that we could do by military action to prevent such assistance, though we might hamper it by attacks on the rail system. If we succeeded in destroying the DRV air order of battle, in preventing its replacement, it seems questionable whether the Soviets could do enough to augment the air defense system to prevent us from launching subsequent air attacks against targets of our choosing.

13. In any event, our own decision-making must face the probability that in suppressing DRV air defense we are likely to encounter Soviet personnel and to spill Soviet blood. Here, as in other aspects of this whole operation, we need to make a clear decision that we will take this risk.

Political and Associated Actions

14. The crucial judgment that must be made is whether the Soviets, whatever they may or may not do to assist the DRV in overcoming or mitigating the physical effects of our actions, will somehow exert effective pressure on the DRV to change its course in directions we seek. This is a tough judgment for the Soviets and we cannot make predictions with much assurance.

15. One important factor in the Soviet decision will obviously be their assessment of our determination and ability to carry through the course on which we will have embarked. They will want to test this by first exerting maximum pressure on us by punishing us for our actions, and by deterring us from continuing operations.

16. For this reason, we should expect a major Soviet political pressure campaign. Even if we succeed in initially disconcerting the Soviets by the surprise and vigor of our action, their automatic reflexes in this sort of situation are well developed and it will not take them long to set in motion their propaganda, psychological and political machinery.

17. They will wish to give maximum support to the arguments and emotions of the domestic opposition in the US as well as to our opponents, critics and detractors and to the skeptics abroad. Their best instrument for doing so will be to raise the spectre of US-Soviet confrontation and the ghost of a return to the cold war. For this reason, apart from the screams of the propaganda media and possible action in the UNGA, which will still be in session, we can look for Soviet withdrawal from ongoing negotiations and bilateral arrangements with us, even if by so doing they have to make certain sacrifices of their own.

18. Whatever may or may not be the real Soviet attitude toward and expectation of SALT, we should expect them to block those talks and other ongoing arms control discussions, if only because we did so last August when they invaded Czechoslovakia. This is no place to go into the complex Soviet motivation in this whole field, except to say that SALT may not occupy nearly as crucial a role in Soviet thinking as in ours and therefore its sacrifice or postponement will not cause them excessive pain. Since we ourselves have established the principle of interconnections, we should recognize that SALT in the presence of major US military action in Vietnam with potential for direct US-Soviet confrontation would be incongruous. Our willingness to forego it may indeed serve to impress the Soviets with our determination.

19. Similarly, we can expect the Soviets to withdraw from the Middle East negotiations, although, since the Soviets themselves have tended to use these to dampen down the prospects of a Fourth Round, this may not be an easy step for them. In this situation, Israeli military strength is an asset for us since it will tend to deter Soviet efforts to open up a second front against us with their Arab proxies. Prospects for rapid progress in the Middle East negotiations are at best meager and our own interest in the kind of "settlement" likely to emerge from them is in any case equivocal; there is no need to let Soviet withdrawal from the talks and even a more belicose Soviet posture inhibit what we do in Vietnam.

20. As regards Berlin, we should also expect Soviet withdrawal from current sparring over the resumption of the long-interrupted negotiations. This is no loss for us, though it might tend to stimulate adverse German and UK reactions to our Vietnam operations. More

serious of course is the possibility of a Soviet-GDR counter-blockade of Berlin. We have never had nor do we now have any assured way of preventing the Soviets from such action. Ultimately, our deterrent has always rested on our ability to convince the Soviets that we will not let West Berlin starve or fall even if it means escalation to nuclear war. Our drastic action in Vietnam may help us to maintain the presumption that we would act "irrationally" in defense of Berlin. Still, Berlin is Moscow's most advantageous pressure point against us and in the postulated situation the Soviets may calculate that our allies will be so ambivalent in their support of us that a Berlin crisis would in fact exert genuine pressure on us to desist in Vietnam. We must steel ourselves to this possibility, maintaining a readiness to undertake prompt responses to any Soviet/GDR encroachments.

21. We should expect the near-total disruption of our bilateral relations with the Soviets, from air agreement to cultural exchange. While some in the US will consider this too high a price to pay and the Soviets will play on such sentiment, this probably will be the least of our problems. Our own responses to such Soviet disruptions should be crisp and direct so as not to give the Soviets the slightest reason to assume that their actions will divert us from our course.

22. The Soviets undoubtedly will also push the East Europeans to sever contacts with us. They may call a Warsaw Pact meeting to proclaim their anathema of us and even the Romanians might in these circumstances find it necessary to toe the line. It will be argued that we are handing the Soviets a potent instrument for reasserting discipline in the Bloc; there is some merit to the point but in our scale of priorities at the time it can hardly weigh heavily in our mind. Moreover, Moscow's historical problem in Eastern Europe will not disappear even if solidarity is temporarily restored.

23. In sum, the Soviets will turn on the heat in the immediate aftermath of our actions even at some pain and sacrifice to themselves. And we will almost certainly confront substantial setbacks to objectives we have sought in our dealings with the USSR. Moreover, we must expect the Soviets to succeed in generating or reinforcing major political opposition, domestic and foreign, to us. However, unless our domestic problem gets out of hand (which it will do only marginally through Soviet doing), the real damage that Moscow can do to our political interests will almost certainly not match or exceed the benefits that would accrue from success in our Vietnam operation (which should be defined as favorable DRV action as a result of the

effectiveness of our military operations). The problem is that the adverse results of Soviet action against us are likely to appear much sooner than the successful results of our Vietnam operation. This means that we must always maintain the conviction that in view of the benefits we expect from achieving our goal in Vietnam we can and must tolerate the worst the Soviets can do to us.

24. Our ability to maintain and credibly convey this conviction will be crucial if we are to have any hope that the Soviets will exert leverage on the DRV. To do so will not be easy because our political system and our body politic simply may not let us. But even if we succeeded, the chances that the Soviets will exert genuine and effective pressure on Hanoi or otherwise play a role useful to us cannot be rated as better than even.

25. The greatest leverage they have is in their material supplies, and this gets down to the basic question of how Hanoi will react if faced -- either because of the effectiveness of our interdiction operations or because of deliberate Soviet cessation of such shipments as could still get through, or because of both -- with a drastic reduction or an end of Soviet material support. Hanoi's own decision is likely to be to carry on as best it can alone or with Chinese support (which could make up for some though not all the types and quantities of material now coming from Russia). If this is also the Soviet judgment, Moscow may simply not be prepared to pay the political price -- in Hanoi, in international communism and in great power prestige -- of being seen to welch on an ally and play the "American game." The argument in the Kremlin on this may be hot and heavy but it is hard to see how those who would "betray an ally" could in the end win out. If this conclusion is correct, the Soviets are likely to pursue the type of middle-range actions in physical support of the DRV discussed earlier, i. e., as much replenishment as feasible while avoiding gross risks of direct military engagement with us.

26. If on the other hand, the Soviets concluded that Hanoi was prepared to move, or that there was enough political sentiment in the DRV's political leadership to move, Moscow might through some mixture or pressure and inducement seek to tip the balance. The pressure would be in the form of footdragging in replenishment (the physical obstacles being what they are, there will be plenty of alibis for slowdowns and shortfalls); the inducement would be in the form of

some role as a political intermediary. The attractiveness of this course, if Hanoi were willing or half-willing, lies in the fact that the Communists after all need make only relatively small concessions to ensure diplomatic movement in Paris and can fairly easily regulate the intensity of the fighting in the South.

27. We are not seeking victory but compromise; compromise, moreover, on terms which many in Hanoi might see as ultimately leading to their achievement of their goals in the South, anyway. Certainly the Soviets could argue, as they may have at times in the past, that American objectives have become so modest over time and the objective trend is in any case running so heavily toward US disengagement, that Hanoi can afford to pursue its goals by political means. In a nutshell, while we almost certainly cannot expect Moscow to pressure or argue Hanoi into surrender, there are circumstances in which Moscow could see its way clear to try to persuade Hanoi that it can achieve what it wants by patience, diplomacy and political action. Only history -- our own conduct and the course of events in the South -- will tell whether the Soviets had given Hanoi sound advice and an accurate prognosis.

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