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III. THE WAR AGAINST THE NORTH AND THE ROLE OF CHINA

A. The War Against the North

General Assessment. The Bureau was consistently sound in judging Hanoi's determination and capacity to persist in pursuit of its objectives in the South. All too frequently, this fundamental aspect of the war failed to receive adequate attention among policy makers in the early years and was later underestimated when measured against the US bombing program and its punishing impact. INR's consistent judgment that Hanoi was determined to persist on a hard-line course contributed to increased realism in estimates of the general situation by the Intelligence Community, and thus eventually had a major impact elsewhere in Washington. The chief criticism that can be made of INR's handling of this problem concerns its feeling, generally shared in the Intelligence Community, that the North would act more prudently and less provocatively than it actually did.

In considering the direct physical effect of the bombing of the North on the course of the war, both INR and CIA held steadily, and under considerable pressure of criticism, to the view that it did not significantly damage the enemy's capacity for combat. This judgment certainly proved true insofar as interest focused on compelling the Communists to reduce or end hostilities on terms favorable to the allies. However, even though the bombing did not provide the key to victory, it did have greater effect than its more skeptical appraisers at first acknowledged. Its cumulative impact in the military and diplomatic

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fields was a factor that led eventually to some de-escalation in combat and to a start in negotiations, even though the enemy's concessions were very limited and not compromising to his core position.

The North's Determination. It is difficult to elaborate on the obvious once it has been proved to the satisfaction of all concerned, yet it must be pointed out that in the early years of the decade, INR stood out, often alone, in its grasp of the essential fact that the North Vietnamese were determined to pursue their objectives, no matter what obstacles they faced. The Bureau never departed from a judgment expressed by the Intelligence Community in 1961 that the North was able and willing to go on with the war even if US troops fought in the South and the US attacked the North. By the time these eventualities came to pass four years later, the rest of the Community had come to feel that the North might dissimulate or make some compromise on its position, but INR continued to hold to the original judgment on this vital point. It restated this position constantly, holding in 1962 that the North would not back down before a bombing threat and would, however reluctantly, accept Chinese intervention to redress the balance. The North's compulsion to gamble and to keep up its efforts in the South, INR judged, rested on what Hanoi viewed as a favorable situation there, on the North's ability to raise the level of Communist effort there, and on its judgment that the US would not intervene massively. Further, INR observed, Hanoi probably thought that if the US did intervene it would

be ineffective, considering how bad the political situation in the South was, and how difficult if not impossible it would be for the US to cope with the Communist style of unconventional warfare.

In sum, with direct bearing on key policy issues, INR judged that action against the North would not compel Hanoi to call off the insurgency or cease its support of the Viet Cong. The basic assumption underlying this issue, though not frequently articulated, was that Hanoi determined its policy far more by its reading of the situation in the South than by concern over the effects of direct US action against the North, although this prospect admittedly was a factor that the North Vietnamese took into account.

If there are any faults to find in this INR position, they exist at secondary levels concerned with the style and emphasis in Hanoi's execution of its determined policy rather than in the basic analyses. One

point of criticism lay in the Bureau's overestimation of Hanoi's confidence in the existing pattern of insurgent activities, from which INR derived the judgment that Hanoi's way of intensifying its effort in the South would be to heighten the tempo of what it was already doing. This view was to impede thinking in terms of unexpected departures by the North from existing forms of activity when Hanoi judged that these actions were not bringing adequate results. The Bureau did note one type of change in patterns available to Hanoi, indicated by the Communists' threat to intensify the war and launch spectacular attacks in

retaliation for US military actions. This repeated emphasis on retaliation as the force that would motivate the Communists to change patterns of action or to launch all-out attacks is a second point of criticism. This approach placed the Bureau in the position of seeming to imply that, if not driven to retaliate, the Communists would be satisfied to continue on whatever course of action they were then following. Yet at times the Bureau took a different, and in retrospect more realistic, view. For example, throughout much of 1964 it argued that the North was willing to risk some retaliation from the US as the consequence for pressing its attack more intensely in the South; again in mid-1965, it agreed with the entire Community that Hanoi was willing to suffer considerable punishment as the price for so doing. In each case INR departed from the argument that only US escalation in combat would bring about a marked change in or intensification of Communist action in the South.

The Deployment of NVA Units. It could be argued that there were several reasons why Hanoi might intensify the war; for example, to seize a favorable opportunity, to retaliate, or to deter or counter an increase in US combat involvement in the South. However, the prevailing impression derived from INR studies up to 1965 when the US embarked on full air and ground involvement is that the North was determined to persist in the campaign to win the South but to avoid clear-cut acts of provocation that could trigger US attacks. The key operational issue was the thesis that

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heightened support for Viet Cong efforts, in terms of augmented infiltration plus better and heavier weapons, and a more aggressive campaign of increased countryside attacks and urban terror would do the job. The Intelligence Community as a whole repeatedly rejected the notion that Hanoi, if unprovoked, would on its own initiative deploy NVA regular units to the South, for the two reasons that the war was progressing satisfactorily for Hanoi under existing patterns and that this act would be so brazenly provocative as certainly to bring on retaliation by the US. INR, to its credit, did argue, as a dissenting minority in 1964, that Northern regular units would be sent South if the US began bombing the North, because the deterrent effect inherent in the threat to bomb would dissipate once the air attacks began.

Since the Bureau came so close to an accurate portrayal of Northern motives and behavior patterns, it is tempting to ask why it did not take the last step and argue that Hanoi would not hesitate to deploy its own regulars if it concluded that they could finish the job and so attain the North's most cherished objective. Since the Bureau was on record to the effect that Hanoi was willing to suffer retaliation for an intensified war effort, INR must have been restrained from foreseeing Hanoi's action by the other consideration--that events were developing satisfactorily under the existing modes of action. The Bureau may then have misread Hanoi's analysis of the situation at the end of 1963, and have assumed that the Politburo felt a much greater optimism and sense of achievement than it actually did. Paradoxically, upon the fall of Diem and the

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ensuing turmoil, Hanoi may have felt that the job could now be completed speedily but that the type of forces then in the South would not accomplish this task. This combination of anxiety and opportunity, at the same time that the supply of Southern returnees dried up, probably led Hanoi to make the momentous decision to send its own regulars into the war.

In early 1964, when this step was probably taken, the Bureau did report that the North had reached a crucial decision to follow a hard-line policy, would probably intensify its military pressures, and make a greater contribution to the war effort in both men and material. However, INR added, it would not do so on a vast scale, which would be both unnecessary and unwise in Hanoi's view. At this point, in March 1964, the Intelligence Community judged that Hanoi would not make a significant commitment of major NVA units to the war, almost precisely at the time that the preparations to commit forces were in fact begun. The Bureau even noted at that time that Hanoi was making defensive preparations and undertaking closer ties to China, but it did not link these actions to a decision to send Northern units to the South and to the likelihood that Hanoi would expect US retaliatory action as a result. Rather, the Bureau adhered to its argument that Hanoi would intensify the existing pattern in the South, i.e., with action short of open provocation, and that its defense preparations in the North reflected a genuine expectation that the US would initiate air attacks simply as a result of Viet Cong gains

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in the South. With these defensive preparations, INR reasoned, Hanoi was also seeking to demonstrate that the prospect of US air attack (presumably avoidable by this lower level of action and the deterrent threat of NVA deployment) would not compel Hanoi to alter these plans for the South.

It was the crowning irony of the war that the heated arguments of early 1965 about beginning the bombing never included the issue of retaliating for incursions of NVA units--at just the time when incursions were beginning to occur in force. In defense of intelligence work, it must be said that analysts faced one of the most difficult of all intelligence problems--the discerning from ambiguous and inevitably inadequate evidence that the enemy has made a radically new decision. Thus, though new NVA units were noted in south central Laos, it was assumed that the deployments were preparation for the usual dry-season offensive to improve the Communist position in that country. In the end, then, neither the US capacity to bomb nor the North Vietnamese ability to deploy forces achieved deterrent effect. Instead, the two parties made independent and parallel decisions, which they developed and executed almost simultaneously, but which they took independently of each other's escalatory action.

Once the regular NVA units were known to be in the South, the Bureau attained a high degree of accuracy in estimating their political purpose and approximate strength. In 1965, MACV estimated that the Communists meant to establish a government in the Central Highlands and that this

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objective was one reason for the upsurge in Communist infiltration and the despatch of NVA forces. The Bureau challenged this view as well as other appraisals that similarly pointed toward the creation of a rival territorial state, objecting that they were not in keeping with the enemy's flexible strategy of combat or with Hanoi's method of handling the delicate task of preserving full political control over the Communist effort in the South while maintaining the appearance that the movement there was truly autonomous. On the question of the strength and role of enemy forces, at first, in mid-1965, INR gave relatively little weight to the impact of the NVA formations, as part of its calculation of that time that ARVN could sustain the stalemate. It held that NVA elements would need a great deal of time to organize logistics to sustain any projected large-scale operation, and so it failed to appreciate the immediate and devastating impact that encounters with NVA forces had on ARVN units. However, once the war again became stalemated at a new and higher degree of intensity, the Bureau was ahead of the others in recognizing that the enemy would at times use his large formations to supplement and sustain lower-level activities and not simply to supplant more traditional guerrilla actions. Finally, by 1967 the Bureau took the lead in the Intelligence Community in stressing the extent to which the enemy's overall structure of forces, especially its NVA Order of Battle, had grown. It produced late that year timely and accurate reports demonstrating that the enemy's main force had grown to levels far above those conventionally reported by the military and accepted until then by senior Department officers as a valid depiction of enemy strength.



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The Tonkin Gulf and the Question of Prudence. Inherent in the reasoning that Hanoi would not despatch its own forces is the argument that it was committed to a policy of maximum caution consonant with its ambitions to take the South. This attribution to Hanoi of a high degree of prudence in the execution of its plans prevailed throughout the Intelligence Community. It accounted for the widespread belief that Hanoi would be careful in allocating help to the South, lest a substantial increase appear too provocative. The most spectacular illustration of this issue was the Tonkin Gulf affair of mid-1964 in which the North Vietnamese engaged American destroyers on the high seas off the Northern shore, following some relatively minor maritime operations by the GVN against Northern coastal installations. It could be argued that the pairing of GVN actions and US patrols on two consecutive occasions may have led Hanoi to fear a major thrust was in the making; more generally, there were other minor GVN incursions against the North and Hanoi may have been determined to retaliate for this string of harassments. However, when one considers how little damage was done to the North, how very likely it was that Hanoi realized the destroyer patrols portended no immediate serious assault, and what political costs might flow from opening the path for direct US action against the North, the Northern naval attacks made little sense in terms of the Bureau's traditional view of Hanoi's motivation. It is only when one places much lower value on Hanoi's commitment to prudence and greater emphasis on its claim to sole moral right in the war that the action becomes understandable.

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The interpretation which INR put forward after the fact was sound-- that Hanoi was determined not to be faced down by the threat implicit in the Allies' maritime actions and in the President's warning, nor to give the appearance of being cowed by US pressure. Moreover, the Bureau correctly judged Hanoi's temper after the air strikes that followed as well as the Communist reactions to them, anticipating that North Vietnam would be determined to persist, would appeal for and receive help from abroad, and would launch retaliatory action in the South. The Bureau also played a major role in halting further patrol operations proposed by the Pentagon in the fall; it argued from the sound ground that the intelligence required could be obtained by other means that did not run the risk of triggering another incident and again raising the question of reprisals.

The Decision to Bomb the North. The Bureau set a remarkable record for accuracy on this major issue both before and after the decision to attack the North. INR consistently argued that the bombing would not have a significantly favorable impact on the war in the South, in that it would not reduce Hanoi's commitment to the war, physically impair its military support, or compel Hanoi to negotiate a de-escalation or make other substantive concessions in order to get the bombing stopped. The course of events bore out these pessimistic views expressed by INR during the 1964-early 1965 debate, and they also validated the Bureau's stand, frequently taken alone once the bombing began, that intensification of the program would not affect Hanoi's position as the US desired.

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During 1965-67, the Bureau stood by its belief that the bombing would not drive the North to the negotiating table--nor would the offer of a halt if couched in terms of reciprocity. Along with CIA, it held steadily to the position that the North could withstand the physical effect of the assault without undue strain. However, it did modify its view in 1967-68 and reported that the cumulative effects were having a more harmful impact than seemed apparent in the first years of the program.

On occasion in 1964 INR did go along with the majority view in the Community that Hanoi, to stop the attacks, might respond to bombing with diplomatic moves like invoking the Geneva machinery, but without making a significant concession. Most of the time, however, the Bureau vigorously opposed the judgment that Hanoi would make any accommodation, real or feigned, to get the bombing stopped; from October 1964 on, it held to the view that Hanoi would react aggressively and unyieldingly. It was not until June 1965 that the majority, its stand disproven by events, moved temporarily toward INR's position. Nonetheless, three months later, CIA and DIA again took the view that an increase in air strikes and an extension to additional targets would move Hanoi toward de-escalating Communist attacks, and toward more conciliatory diplomatic gestures--though without meaningful concessions. Once more INR proved correct in its dissenting opinion that Hanoi would not bend even to this extent but would pursue its war effort more vigorously than ever. To this end, the Bureau predicted, Hanoi would step up its infiltration, as indeed it did.

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The course of events thus validated the INR position, though the increase in infiltration was undoubtedly more a response to needs and opportunities in the South than a retaliation for the augmentation of the bombing.

The correctness of the INR position is all the more striking when one considers the persuasive arguments that could be marshalled in Hanoi for following the scenario favored by the majority in our Intelligence Community--that the GVN was so weak that it could readily have been subverted under a de-escalation or cease-fire; that the North could make a good case at a conference and, in any event, possibly deter a renewal of the bombing while its power in the South remained intact; and that a halt in the war might well have led the US public to oppose any renewed intensification of the bombing. In fact the theme that Hanoi might move for a rapid de-escalation was raised as a dangerous North Vietnamese ploy by other American analysts on later occasions, as in the fall of 1968 by Embassy Saigon. As in 1965, INR correctly held that this ploy was out of tune with Hanoi's views of its strategy in the war, of the proper course of negotiations, and of the interrelationship between the two.

To INR the compelling arguments lay in North Vietnam's willpower and determination, in Hanoi's view that it held a strong diplomatic position and had within reach a prize whose value far outweighed the damage to be suffered from air attacks. Further, INR reasoned, Hanoi believed that to concede even a bit meant to invite more demands, increased attacks, and lower communist morale in the South. INR clearly had the better perspective on Hanoi's motivation in decision-making, and the Bureau's

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unprecedented dissent from an entire SNIE in September 1965, on the grounds that the North's position was uncompromising and intransigent, made a major contribution to estimative intelligence regarding North Vietnamese patterns of behavior.

The Military Effects of Bombing. Both the Bureau and CIA held fast during 1965-67 to the argument that no bombing, however intense, if it remained below the level required to smash the country's economic or physical integrity, would appreciably inhibit the Communist effort in the South. This effort, both agencies accurately predicted, could not only be supported at existing levels but even be raised substantially, despite the air assaults. On one particular occasion, the Bureau and the Army jointly dissented from a SNIE of June 1965, in which the majority held that a continuing curtailment of POL and other supplies would lead the North to consider negotiations because it would be unable to sustain an increase in its own troops and in large-scale Viet Cong operations. The dissenters correctly predicted that the enemy's LOC's, even if constrained, could support a considerably higher level of warfare in the South than then prevailed. By the end of 1965, the Intelligence Community came round to estimating that the enemy could double his forces in the South and still supply this larger army sufficiently to enable it to carry on a manifold increase in operations, despite a heavy assault on infiltration routes. In retrospect, this judgment was more correct than misleading, though the bombing did restrict the enemy's capacity for sustained

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intensive operations somewhat more than this analysis implied. It was a reflection of the Bureau's views on large-scale bombing that, when asked to comment on targeting, from 1966 onward, it stressed its preference for concentrating on infiltration routes rather than targets related to the economy and capable of causing civilian damages.

The Political Effect of the Bombing. The entire Intelligence Community agreed in 1964-65 that a bombing attack that failed to bring adequate results would have a deleterious effect on the morale of allied and friendly states in Asia. This judgment contrasted sharply with some policy makers' opinion that even an unsuccessful campaign would demonstrate our willingness to make an effort and so increase confidence in the US among Asian countries at one remove from the front line. By showing that the US had done all it could and had challenged the principle of sanctuary, Washington planners hoped further to strengthen the resolve of these target states to stand firm. From the perspective of 1969 it is still difficult to judge which view was more accurate. Certainly the Intelligence Community had strong ground for the fear it expressed in the draft of an Estimate but dropped from the final version, that the worst possible effect on world public opinion--including morale in important segments of Asia--would ensue if the US conducted extensive actions against the North but failed to establish a viable regime in Saigon. On the other hand, the bombing did whittle away enemy strength in the South to some extent even if it could not stop the flow of men, and it did discredit the notion of sanctuary. It also ultimately played a role in the horse-trading that

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got negotiations started despite Hanoi's early adamant stand, well reported by INR in 1965-67, against any semblance of reciprocity.

Regarding Northern morale, INR argued not only that the population's morale would hold up but that the attacks would afford the regime a better opportunity to exercise control and mobilize a truly national effort. These anticipations were born out and were, interestingly enough, further substantiated by the many difficulties which the North encountered in control and morale once the bombing stopped; popular commitment waned, especially as the Northerners saw the fighting in the South continue after "their war," as they thought of it, had ended.

More generally, the costs to the economy were relatively minimal and, with foreign aid, the North was quite able to sustain the war in the South. Still the cost of the effort mounted, dietary problems grew, and in particular a manpower shortage, partly responsible for the low level of rice production, may have caused greater strain than the Bureau anticipated. INR did, however, note these problems in 1967-68 and in fact was in the forefront of those who criticized certain manpower studies which asserted that the North had no shortage problems at all. Finally, as Northern insistence on a bombing halt came to the fore of exchanges over negotiation in 1967, the Bureau noted that cumulatively the bombing was taking a toll, though it did not affect the enemy's combat performance, and so could be a factor in Hanoi's decision to modify its negotiating position.

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Hanoi's View of China. The Bureau along with other members of the Intelligence Community played a salutary role in erasing or at least reducing a variety of misconceptions about Hanoi's relationship with China. Among them was the impression that North Vietnam was more or less a puppet of the Chinese at least insofar as Peking could call the tune for continuing a war policy. Another theory, which INR sought to refute, was that fear of Chinese domination would deter the North Vietnamese from seeking as much assistance from Peking as would be necessary to sustain their war effort. INR held, correctly as it turned out, that observers in general exaggerated Hanoi's fear of Chinese domination; in the Bureau's estimation, Hanoi would not hesitate to admit a strong Chinese military presence to the country if it should be needed to meet an intensified American war effort.

The Bureau also felt that the North Vietnamese, however ideologically and materially indebted to China in a general sense, would develop their own doctrine of combat and follow their own judgment on how to deal with the Americans. That is, the Bureau held throughout that Peking's influence in Hanoi was strictly limited, could be seen in the way the North Vietnamese adhered to their Soviet connection, refused to be swayed by China's implicit criticism of their strategy, and showed themselves willing to negotiate for a halt in the bombing. Although the Bureau recognized that proximity to China set some limits to Hanoi's freedom of action, it put primary emphasis on the overwhelming desire of the North Vietnamese to maintain their ability to do what they considered best for



North Vietnam in the light of their own assessment of the changing war-time situation. INR did also hold the view, which there is no way of validating, that in the end if US attacks became so intense that the North Vietnamese regime could not survive without massive Chinese involvement, it would, rather than yield, accept this regardless of the restriction on its own freedom of action which the move would imply.

To a great degree, the Bureau noted, Hanoi could play off the Russians and Chinese to its own advantage, but INR was also aware that the struggle between the two giants caused considerable concern in Hanoi. In fact, the Bureau was probably correct in estimating that the intensification of the Sino-Soviet split and the transportation difficulties that flowed from the excesses of the Cultural Revolution contributed to Hanoi's shift of position on negotiations during 1967-68.

#### B. The Role of China

General Assessment. The Bureau consistently highlighted the problem of China's role in the war in discussions of future US action, thus prudently gaining for the issue of Peking's involvement as a combatant more attention than it might otherwise have received. It was also consistently accurate in evaluating the nature, timing, and relatively high reliability of the material assistance that the Chinese would give to Hanoi in support of the war effort even though the North Vietnamese might be conducting the struggle not strictly in accordance with Maoist principles. The Bureau was also consistent in its belief that the Chinese would become as deeply involved as would be necessary to enable Hanoi to

sustain its war effort in the South and to avert a collapse at home. Most significantly, it never altered its judgment that the Chinese would accept the risk of a direct conflict with the US that was clearly implied in this policy, though at what point and in what manner a wider war might evolve was admittedly more difficult to pin down.

Where the Bureau miscalculated was in its overestimation of Peking's preparedness and readiness to participate overtly and actively in the war. Although most members of the Intelligence Community held that some degree of Chinese air and ground intervention was likely at the upper stages of the bombing program, INR as a rule held that the intervention would probably come at an earlier stage in the bombing and would be of greater magnitude. As it turned out, neither INR nor the rest of the Community were right.

As the bombing program was extended without eliciting overt Chinese reaction, the Bureau modified its earlier judgment and, after mid-1966, estimated that attacks against targets in the upper range of the program would not provoke open Chinese involvement or a full dress air encounter. Noting, however, the extensive Chinese aid to the North in essential materiel and manpower, the Bureau continued to posit that China had the will to go all the way in sustaining the physical integrity of the North against a far more intensive bombing program--even if in so doing China had to put its own security on the line.

The Danger of Chinese Involvement. The Bureau played a major and constructive role in alerting policy makers to the danger of Chinese involvement in the war, doing so at a time when there was a general tendency to give to this momentous question much less attention than it deserved. Early in 1964 the Bureau was quick to pick up China's defiant propaganda responses when the US threatened to intensify the war, and it tracked the escalating verbal dual between the two powers, observing all the time that the threats, though suggestive, were somewhat vague. In so doing it began to depart, tentatively, from the standard Community position, held since 1961, that China would not confront the US unless North Vietnam was invaded and combat occurred within Northern frontiers. The question that actually had to be answered was what Chinese reaction would be, not to a ground assault, but to a moderately intensive and, as it turned out, gradually escalated aerial attack against the North. Here the Intelligence Community was also on record, in 1961 and 1962, to the effect that the Chinese (and in the first Estimate the Russians also) would commit their air power, albeit disguised as North Vietnamese planes.

The Estimate on Chinese Intervention 1964-65. INR continued to put forward the thesis that China would intervene in the war, especially in the air in response to US air attacks on the North, and that this intervention could develop rather suddenly into a wider military confrontation between China and the US. The Bureau reasoned from three basic premises. First, it thought that the threatening verbal position adopted

by Peking was not mere bluff but reflected at least a general undertaking to intervene in North Vietnam upon request. Secondly, it judged that China had strong political-ideological and security reasons for intervening to protect a country that was committed to a people's war and that lay so close to China's own vulnerable frontiers. Third, it saw considerable military evidence that China was actively developing the combat capability needed for effective intervention; this build-up included primarily extensive air reinforcements and preparations for air defense in South China, especially construction of airfields, and joint air defense planning with Hanoi.

In late 1964 and early 1965, before the US bombing program was approved, the Intelligence Community repeatedly agreed on estimates that intensive application of the Rolling Thunder program to critical targets probably would precipitate a Chinese air response from bases in China. INR went further and held that even lesser attacks would bring about this action; it even judged, after the US began bombing, that the Communists would not negotiate until they had redressed the balance and that this purpose would probably be one motive of a likely Chinese air intervention. When the Community also agreed that ground forces would be despatched, INR differed in degree, arguing that the probability was stronger, the force would be larger, and the threshold of response to US action lower than the others thought. The Bureau considered that Peking was implying, in its repeated promises of aid during 1964-65, that it would directly involve its own forces and commit its prestige in a new

vigorous response to future escalation. INR especially emphasized this view when Peking issued the strong war warnings of late 1965 and early 1966.

In analyzing why this interpretation was wrong we should argue that the Chinese were more cautious than was assumed at the time and that they correctly estimated that the North, with Chinese help in repair and construction, could neutralize the effects of the Rolling Thunder program, thus obviating the need for them to intervene with combat forces. This view actually fits neatly into the Maoist doctrine that protracted war should be carried out by indigenous forces, with China, to its own security advantage, acting literally as a reliable rear that does not become directly involved unless absolutely necessary. In this context, the assistance rendered by Peking becomes of crucial importance and here INR proved repeatedly to be directly on target in estimating and reporting the extent of this Chinese activity. Thus in the wake of the Tonkin incident, it correctly predicted that China would transfer jets, ship anti-aircraft weapons, and send advisers. It was wrong only in believing that the Chinese would do these things overtly, to deter the US. Later INR and CIA repeatedly reported on the substantial Chinese forces of anti-aircraft, rail and road engineer, and other technical personnel, as well as on the substantial shipments through China of weapons and materiel from the USSR and from China directly. All of this effectively neutralized the strategic effects of the bombing and enabled Hanoi to stay on its chosen course.

The Bureau was also correct in its judgment that when the chips were down China would have to let Russian military aid come through because of the insistence of North Vietnam.

An additional explanation for the Bureau's mistake lies in its interpretation of intelligence on Chinese preparations for air defense and on growing Sino-Vietnamese coordination in this field, as evidence that China was committed to engage US aircraft over North Vietnam. Actually this activity appears in retrospect to have been a contingency preparation, and one which also fitted in with a high priority, longer-range program of developing airfields all along the periphery of China.

The Continued Chinese Commitment. China's demonstrated caution as Rolling Thunder moved into high gear, and the onset of the Cultural Revolution, sharply reduced the prospect of an immediate confrontation between China and the US, as the Bureau noted after the middle of 1966. But INR adhered to the position it had held since the start of the decade that China would intervene, even at frightful risk to itself, if the North were threatened with invasion or the regime faced the danger of being destroyed. Hence there was consistency in the Bureau's position on that key issue throughout the period under consideration. Specifically, when a bombing program far more ambitious than Rolling Thunder was discussed in the spring of 1967, the Bureau held that the Chinese, committed to keeping the North viable and capable of prosecuting the war, would intervene to the extent necessary to fulfill these commitments. Since China would directly confront a vastly intensified US effort to bring

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North Vietnam to heel, INR rated quite high the chances that the confrontation would gradually slip into a Sino-American conflict. If conditions for the North were less trying but still somewhat strained, the Bureau predicted that China might broaden its help to the North, as for example with more sophisticated weapons or by making airfields within China available for North Vietnamese planes to use as direct operational bases. As events developed the Chinese did not extend even these more limited forms of advanced and riskier assistance. And with the President's decision in 1967-68 to level off and then to de-escalate the war, the ultimate premise in the INR position was not put to the test.

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