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THE AIR FORCE IN VIETNAM
The Administration Emphasizes Air Power

1969

by

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OFFICE OF AIR FORCE HISTORY

November 1971

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FOREWORD

This study is the thirteenth in a series of historical reports on the war in Southeast Asia prepared by the Office of Air Force History since 1965. The previous works include: USAF Plans and Operations: The Air Campaign Against North Vietnam, 1966; The Air Force in Vietnam: The Search for Military Alternatives; and The Air Force in Southeast Asia: Toward a Bombing Halt, 1968.

In this report the author has focused on policy changes introduced by the Nixon administration during 1969 in regard to the Vietnamese war, particularly as they affected the role of air power. Repeatedly expressing determination to end the war as early as possible on the basis of self-determination of the South Vietnamese people, President Nixon decided--after negotiations with the Communists in Paris proved fruitless--to unilaterally withdraw U.S. forces while simultaneously strengthening Saigon's forces to take up the slack.

The first reduction in U.S. military strength in South Vietnam took place during the summer of 1969 when 25,000 troops were withdrawn. However, a particular phenomenon of the year was that air power was not materially reduced. The main theme of this history is that, in his effort to "wind down" the war via Vietnamization while maintaining pressure on North Vietnam to negotiate, the President made new and greater use of the U.S. air arm.



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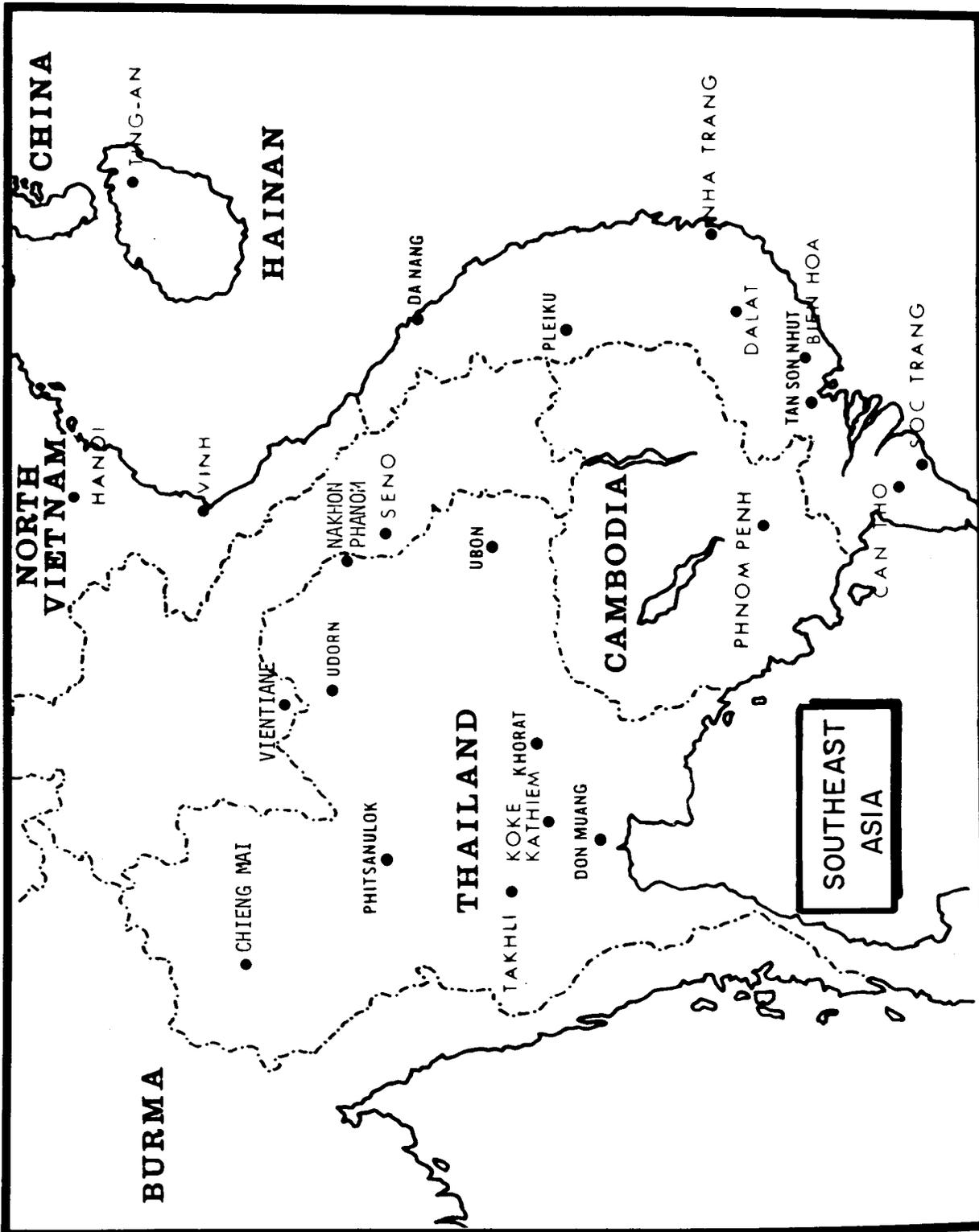
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I. THE WAR IN VIETNAM UNDER A NEW ADMINISTRATION

(U) Pending firming up of the views of President Richard M. Nixon and his new administration, U.S. operations in South-east Asia (SEA) in early 1969 continued under the influence of strong pressures for withdrawal generated during the last months of the Johnson administration and the presidential campaign. Thus, the 1 November 1968 cessation of bombing of North Vietnam (NVN) remained in effect, while plans for withdrawing U.S. forces (termed T-Day plans), initiated in 1968, were further debated and refined. Actions to improve and modernize the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), also begun in 1968, were continued and accelerated. Meanwhile, the fighting in South Vietnam went on but at a reduced tempo.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) Faced with strong economic and political pressures to end the war, cut government spending, and "reorder the nation's priorities," President Nixon established as a major goal of his administration the reduction of federal expenditures. Directly related to the money problem was a second major objective, the achievement of a lower profile in U.S. operations overseas, particularly in Asia--i. e., a reduction in the American role of world policeman. This aim, under study early in the new administration,¹ was publicly announced by the President on 25 July during a stop on Guam,* becoming most commonly known as the "Nixon doctrine."

(~~TOP SECRET~~) These two overall objectives were embodied in what was to become the basic Nixon policy on the Vietnam war, "Vietnamization,"⁺ whereby U.S. forces were to be gradually withdrawn and their tasks assumed by strengthened and improved South Vietnamese forces. This policy, which required preparation of timetables for withdrawing U.S. troops and training the South,

*Mr. Nixon was on the first leg of a round-the-world diplomatic visit which took him to eight countries--the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, South Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Romania, and Great Britain.

+See Chapters IV and V.

Vietnamese, was announced on 10 April. Some two months later, following a conference on Midway Island with President Nguyen Van Thieu of the Republic of Vietnam, President Nixon on 8 June announced the withdrawal of the first 25,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam. Although President Johnson had endorsed a similar Vietnamization program and the Nixon plan was hence one of "continuity," the latter would soon reach such dimensions as to constitute a basic change in U.S. policy.

President Nixon Reviews Policy

(~~TOP SECRET~~) The new administration had not arrived at these new objectives precipitately. Even before taking office, it had begun a sweeping review of the situation in Vietnam. This was evident in the fact that on 21 January, the day after inauguration, three major policy papers were presented to the National Security Council (NSC), two of them directly related to Vietnam, the other indirectly so. The first of these was an NSC paper,¹ "Vietnam Policy Alternatives," prepared by the President's national security adviser, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger.² It initiated a discussion of the strategy alternatives on Vietnam, requesting analysis of the two basic approaches: continued pressure on Hanoi, with threats of escalation or actual escalation; reduced U.S. presence which, by being more sustainable, could be another form of pressure. The second policy paper on Vietnam, NSSM*1, consisted of 29 detailed questions on tactics and problems of the war, covering such critical topics as the effectiveness of air operations in Southeast Asia, the success of the pacification program, and the ability of North Vietnam to continue the war.³ These questions were addressed to the government agencies primarily concerned in the war, including those in the Department of Defense and State, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) In the third major policy paper issued on 21 January,⁴ President Nixon initiated a far-reaching review of the entire U.S. military posture, taking into account various budget levels and strategies, their security, and foreign policy implications. During the next several months this review would engender strenuous debate. It was to end in perhaps the most significant

*National Security Study Memorandum

Presidential decision of 1969, which adopted a new U.S. overall military strategy.⁵ Instead of being prepared, as in the past, to cope simultaneously with two major and one minor war, the Department of Defense (DOD) was now required to address one major and two minor wars at the same time. This decision was related to domestic concern over U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but was primarily dictated by budget considerations and the resulting Nixon doctrine of a "lower profile" in U.S. commitments overseas.

A Divergence of Views

(TS-C-1) A major feature of the early 1969 policy reassessments was the clear dichotomy of views as to future developments in Vietnam. One group of officials assumed that the 1968 trend of winding down the war would continue towards some form of termination. A second group felt that the war was far from over and might even intensify, that it was going favorably and that the United States should pursue its advantage rather than throw it away by lowering its sights. The former often cited budget constraints and saw this as a compelling reason for cutting back. The second group, which included the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and most military leaders, felt it was essential to keep up the pressure on North Vietnam in order to achieve the U.S. objective of an independent South Vietnam.

(TS-C-1) This difference in views was reflected in the debates on major policy matters throughout 1969, notably those aired in Dr. Kissinger's "29 questions" on Vietnam and later in NSSM 36 on "Vietnamization." The NSC summary of responses to the 29 questions noted that the reportees fell into two groups, with "generally consistent views and membership." The first usually included the JCS, the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), and the U.S. Embassy, Saigon. In general they took a hopeful view of current and future prospects in Vietnam. The second group usually included the CIA, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD)--particularly the Assistant Secretary for Systems Analysis (SA)--and to a lesser extent the State Department, and was decidedly more skeptical about the current situation in Vietnam and pessimistic about the future.⁶ At one point the report described the divergencies of the two groups as a gap in views between "the policy makers, the analysts, and the intelligence

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community on the one hand, and the civilian and military operators on the other."⁷

(~~TS-C-1~~) One illustration of this gap appeared in the widely differing reactions to the first major policy paper of the Nixon administration, the 21 January National Security Council paper on "Vietnam Policy Alternatives," also prepared by Dr. Kissinger. The Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs (OSD/ISA) and the Director of the Joint Staff, assenting to the contents of a talking paper for the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, JCS,⁸ described the Security Council view as too "tactical." In their view, it dealt with the Vietnam problem without regard for larger U.S. national interests and worldwide objectives, and failed to give adequate attention to the impact of Vietnam policies on future American policies regarding East-West relations, protection of other nations and the problem of China. They criticized the insufficient attention paid to establishing a politically viable government in South Vietnam and to determining which military strategy would be most likely to encourage this. By contrast, the Plans and Policy Directorate of the Joint Chiefs and the Air Force⁹ seemed to find the alternatives not "tactical" enough. The JCS objected that the Security Council did not take into account currently accepted goals in Southeast Asia and the fact that U.S. casualties would increase if American forces were reduced without enemy deescalation. They would have the United States adhere firmly to the objective of assured Government of South Vietnam (GVN) control over all South Vietnam (SVN).

(~~TS-C-1~~) The Air Force was very concerned because Dr. Kissinger seemed to accept the current situation in Vietnam as "normal." It argued strongly against the logic of fighting North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam, while subjecting North Vietnam to no pressure. Suspension of the bombing attacks was to have been a quid pro quo for prompt, productive talks. Failing this response, the pressure on Hanoi imposed by bombing should remain an essential part of U.S. strategy. As the Air Force saw it, the Kissinger analysis assumed any renewal of bombing of the North constituted escalation and that current operations (without bombing) could destroy or force withdrawal of enemy forces in 1 to 2 years--something the JCS had never said could be done. It took strong issue with the second Kissinger alternative, which would change the U.S. objective of assuring GVN control of all South Vietnam to a mutual U.S./NVA withdrawal instead--the President's advisor suggesting that Saigon's defeat by the Viet Cong would be acceptable

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since the main goal of repelling external aggression would have been achieved. The Air Force strongly questioned how Washington could justify the tremendous investment of 30,000 lives and \$100 billion by merely fulfilling the letter of a formal commitment. It also doubted that Dr. Kissinger's proposed alternative strategy--reducing U.S. pressure--would be more effective against Hanoi because it would be more sustainable. Instead, it insisted there was no proof--despite the great opposition to the war--that the U.S. public would not sustain existing force levels. Further, it cited President Nixon's inaugural address statement, "We will be as strong as we need to be for as long as we need."

(~~TOP SECRET~~) This divergence in views came out in more specific terms in the NSC 14 March summary of replies to Dr. Kissinger's 29 questions on Vietnam. There were strong differences of opinion on all the questions dealing with air effectiveness in SEA.* In addition, there was emphatic disagreement on the extent and type of RVNAF improvements. All agreed that, while Saigon's armed forces were getting larger, the South Vietnamese could not in the foreseeable future handle both North Vietnam and the Viet Cong (VC) without U.S. combat support. The military community gave much greater weight to RVNAF statistical improvements--which CIA thought an unreliable indicator--while OSD and CIA highlighted the remaining obstacles: severe motivation, leadership, and desertion problems. OSD doubted that expansion and equipment programs were enough to make an effective force.¹⁰

(~~TOP SECRET~~) The two groups also differed profoundly on the degree of Saigon's control of the population. According to MACV, the GVN controlled 75 percent of the population and JCS said it would control 90 percent in 1969. OSD and CIA argued, however, that at least 50 percent of the rural population was subject to significant VC presence and influence, and the State Department went even further, estimating that two-thirds of the people were subject to VC influence. Further, OSD argued that urban migration rather than pacification had brought more people under South Vietnam's control--a finding not noted by MACV or Embassy Saigon. Finally, CIA and State assigned much higher figures to the enemy Order of Battle than MACV.¹¹

*See Chapter II.

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(TS [redacted]) If the various agencies were of two minds about the war, the administration itself continued to address the imperatives facing it on arrival: cutting the budget and allaying domestic concern about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Despite the internal wrangling, it continued to pursue the alternative of a reduced, more sustainable, U.S. presence in Vietnam, specifically with its 10 April request for a detailed plan for Vietnamizing the war,* asking for timetables for transferring combat responsibility to SVN.

(TS [redacted]) At the same time, however, the administration also kept the negotiations option open. It circulated study memos on negotiating strategy¹² as well as on Vietnamization, and continued to solicit JCS suggestions for "keeping the pressure on" North Vietnam as a means of leverage at the negotiating table. Concerning the latter, the JCS in early 1969 requested permission to attack enemy forces operating in the demilitarized zone; suggested a temporary resumption of bombing North Vietnam; renewed previous requests for authority to use artillery and air strikes against the enemy in Cambodia; and recommended certain deceptive military moves in a psychological warfare campaign. Cautioning against a defensive strategy that would turn U.S. forces into targets and demoralize the RVNAF, the JCS urged retaining the offensive-- by destroying the sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia for example-- as a way to reduce U.S. casualties and facilitate withdrawals.¹³ At that time, however, the new administration would act on none of these requests; instead, it asked that the violence level be kept down or that offensive operations "be held in abeyance."¹⁴ On the other hand, when asked if he would resume bombing North Vietnam in reply to enemy rocket attacks in South Vietnam, in late February, President Nixon said:

I believe that it is far more effective in international policy to use deeds rather than words threatening deeds... the United States has a number of options that we could exercise to respond... I will not indicate in advance... that we are going to start bombing the North or anything else...¹⁵ It will be my policy as President to issue a warning only once... Anything in the future that is done will be done. There will be no additional warning.¹⁶

*NSSM 36. See Chapters IV and V.

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(~~TOP SECRET~~) In pursuing both options simultaneously, the administration sought to maintain the credibility of both--emphasizing negotiations as far as North Vietnam was concerned, and Vietnamization as far as the U.S. public was concerned. This was evident in a 2 April conversation between Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and the South Vietnamese Ambassador in Washington at the time of former President Eisenhower's funeral.¹⁷ Secretary Laird, asking how the South Vietnamese liked the term Vietnamization, was told they enthusiastically endorsed it and wanted to take over the burden of the war. Mr. Laird cautioned them against overstressing this point in view of objectives in Paris, where the administration wanted to emphasize mutual withdrawal, even while preparing for the eventual complete takeover by Saigon of its own defenses.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) A Presidential directive of 1 April¹⁸ also reflected the above policy. President Nixon stipulated there would be no U.S. deescalation, except as an outgrowth of mutual troop withdrawals, and stressed the importance of getting Hanoi to comply with that condition. In a subsequent section of the paper, he directed further studies on phased withdrawal under conditions of (a) mutual withdrawal, or (b) Vietnamization of the war. This dual policy led to many charges in the press that the President was giving up his peace aims, and led one of the VC negotiators in Paris to compare Nixon's policy to "chasing two rabbits." It was in fact not a question of either/or, but of both.

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II. THE DEBATE OVER AIR POWER

(~~TOP SECRET~~) Air power was to play a central role in the pursuit of both Presidential options for ending the war. Thus, in support of the negotiating option, air would be one of the most important coercive tools in applying pressure on North Vietnam. Under the Vietnamization option, while U.S. ground forces were to be increasingly replaced by the South Vietnamese, the U.S. air role was not only to be maintained but enhanced.* This continued strong air role, however, was not immediately apparent at the beginning of 1969. The election year impulses for completely winding down the war were still strong in some quarters, and cuts in air strength were rather widely anticipated. Other military and civilian officials, not foreseeing an early termination of the war, wanted air power undiminished as one of the most important weapons against the enemy. It was not surprising then that arguments over the continuing role of air should be one of the central issues in the internal debates just noted.

Views of the Lame Duck Administration

(~~TOP SECRET~~) Soon after President Johnson halted the bombing of North Vietnam, a difference of opinion arose between military leaders and certain civilian defense planners, notably those in Systems Analysis, OSD. The former, concerned that North Vietnam would use the bombing halt to improve its position, urged compensatory bombing elsewhere in order to offset this lessening of pressure on Hanoi. They recommended and were authorized a great step-up in bombing of enemy supply lines in Laos and within South Vietnam.¹ They also renewed their earlier requests to quarantine Cambodia. Systems Analysis officials, however, were mainly concerned with budget cut requirements and how the bombing halt could service that end. In their view, stopping all bombing sorties over North Vietnam was a golden opportunity to cut expenses by reducing the requirement for aircraft and munitions.

*See Chapters IV and V.

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(TS Op 1) In a 7 November 1968 memo, Alain C. Enthoven, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, suggested three Southeast Asia air reduction options to Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford in connection with submission of the fiscal year 1970 DOD budget. The first, merely reallocating the NVN sorties, half to Laos and half to SVN, was expected to save \$170 million and about 60 fighter aircraft. The second, withdrawing 54 USAF Thai-based F-105's and 40 U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) A-4's and closing one SEA air base would save about \$400 million and about 83 fighters annually. The third option, redeploying most of the aircraft previously involved in bombing North Vietnam* and closing three SEA air bases would save \$1,200 million and 166 fighter aircraft annually.²

(TS Op 1) Mr. Enthoven argued that jet aircraft were inefficient truck killers,⁺ unable to fly slowly or carry heavy payloads. They lacked high maneuverability and long loiter time, and since special truck killing munitions were in short supply, they would have to use highly inefficient iron bombs. During the monsoon season most jet sorties would necessarily have to be Sky Spot strikes,[‡] relatively useless against moving targets. Mr. Enthoven further believed the jets would be even less effective in South Vietnam than in Laos because interdiction was more difficult due to the nature of the enemy's logistic system there, with his supplies broken up into small packets and almost delivered by hand.

(TS Op 1) The Air Staff disagreed with these Systems Analysis views,³ as did the JCS, who thought budget constraints should not be allowed to stand in the way of responding to an increased threat. The Joint Chiefs stated that all currently available air resources were required to support SVN requirements and to interdict enemy infiltration, particularly in Laos where there was an increasingly

*108 Thai-based F-105's and 72 Thai-and 36 SVN-based Air Force F-4's, 15 Marine F-4's, and 20 Marine A-4's.

⁺He estimated the cost per truck kill at \$250,000.

[‡]Ground directed bombing system in SEA, using mobile special purpose ground based radar guidance for greater bombing accuracy.

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hostile air environment.⁴ Reflecting CINCPAC and CINCPACAF views, the JCS emphasized that an in-place capability to resume offensive bombing operations in NVN rapidly was an essential element of U.S. strategy, and diversion of such assets could be interpreted as a lack of American resolve and a change in U. S. objectives. It could also mislead the nation about progress in the Paris talks. The interdiction role for jets, moreover, was not confined to truck killing, but included the destruction of many other point and perishable area targets. Hence, the JCS stated, it was inaccurate to associate every sortie flown with truck kills or to utilize truck kill statistics to derive a cost-per-truck kill factor. Finally, the recent substantial increase noted in the enemy's anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) capability meant U.S. air forces would increasingly face a "high threat area" where survivability counted. In this connection, CINCPAC had suggested that, in the face of increased AAA activity, the effectiveness of all slow-moving, prop-driven aircraft, including Gunship II and A-1's, might be so degraded that they would eventually be forced out of Laos.

The Air Debate Under the New Administration

(~~TS-C-1~~) The debate over air effectiveness continued throughout 1969, and was sharpened by the Nixon administration's efforts to cut costs, reduce U.S. involvement, and "Vietnamize" the war. In the widespread policy review undertaken by the new Administration, (Dr. Kissinger's "29 Questions"), the effectiveness of air operations in SEA was a major topic. Specifically, the National Security Council requested data on the overall effectiveness of the B-52 attacks, the Laotian interdiction campaign, and the actual strains the bombing put on the enemy in terms of economic disruption and logistic "throughput" to the south.

(~~TS-C-1~~) In their response to the "29 Questions," the JCS, CINCPAC, MACV, and the Embassy in Saigon assigned much greater effectiveness to the bombing operations than did OSD, CIA, and some elements of the State Department.⁵ The latter group was not convinced that the bombing campaign, either before or after the November halt, had reduced the enemy's transport of supplies to the point that he could not continue his operations. They agreed that enemy traffic on the roads had been disrupted, but pointed out that he used less than 15 percent of available road capacity; that he was constantly expanding that capacity through new roads and passes;

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and that U.S. air strikes only delayed his traffic. They disagreed with the MACV and JCS view that materiel destroyed by air on the roads could not be replaced and hence was denied to the enemy in SVN. They believed his needs (10-15 trucks of supplies a day) were so small and his supply materiel so great, that he could get through all he needed despite the bombing. Concerning the JCS and MACV finding that after the bombing halt the enemy had greatly increased his flow of supplies into Laos, OSD and CIA said this traffic pattern was the result of normal seasonal weather changes, not of the bombing, citing as evidence similar patterns in 1967.⁶

(TS Op 1) While there was general agreement that the main enemy supply channels into northern SVN were the Laos Panhandle and the demilitarized zone (DMZ), there was disagreement on supply channels to southern South Vietnam. The JCS, CINCPAC, MACV, and Embassy Saigon considered Cambodia, especially Sihanoukville, an important enemy supply channel. The CIA disagreed strongly.⁷ The former believed a vigorous interdiction campaign against land and sea supply routes in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia could choke off Soviet and Chinese supplies and force Hanoi to give up the struggle. OSD and CIA saw North Vietnam continuing the struggle and they cited the overland routes from China as alone being able to provide Hanoi enough material to carry on, even against unlimited bombing.

(TS Op 1) There also were sharp differences over casualty estimates from B-52 bombing strikes.⁸ The JCS estimated approximately 41,000--OSD as few as 9,000--enemy killed in 1968 by B-52 strikes. All agencies did agree on the effectiveness of B-52 strikes against known troop concentrations in the close air support role and also on the difficulty of making sound analyses of B-52 effectiveness.* The JCS said it was very difficult to assess B-52 effectiveness accurately because of the remote and often inaccessible areas struck, poor aerial observation conditions, and the fact that the enemy always removed their dead immediately. They noted two studies they had conducted on the subject, citing the conclusions of the second one (completed November 1968) that the important expression of effectiveness was the subjective judgment of how well B-52 strikes fulfilled the commander's objectives. In view of the detailed favorable

*SAC itself recognized the difficulty of evaluating effectiveness. See SAC Historical Study 115, The Search for B-52 Effectiveness 1965-1968 (TS/AFEO) Office of the Historian, Hq SAC, 16 Dec 69.

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reporting by COMUSMACV and his field commanders, and the continuing analysis performed within their own organization, the JCS⁹ considered the current overall estimate of B-52 effectiveness valid.

(S-C-1) In this debate, the main protagonist of cutbacks in air power was again in Systems Analysis. Dr. Ivan Selin, the new acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, tied his 5 February reply to Dr. Kissinger's 29 questions directly to the budget issue and to the fact that SEA air and ground operational costs had not declined as had been assumed in fiscal year 1970 budgetary planning of the Johnson Administration. Rather than request additional funds from Congress, he suggested among other things, the withdrawal of nine tactical squadrons from SEA. This would reduce sorties and ordnance consumption to about the levels assumed in the fiscal year 1970 budget, and provide added savings of about \$300 million. He suggested such a reduction could be made without significantly reducing combat effectiveness. In his view, the current air campaign in Laos--involving a large number of jet sorties--had had a small payoff in terms of enemy materiel destroyed or in disruption of his logistics system. Dr. Selin's reasons were the same as those of his predecessor, that is, that "jet aircraft are poorly suited for this type of mission because they lack the maneuverability and loiter time required to find and destroy fleeting targets." He added that a cut in tactical air sorties in South Vietnam could be made with only a minor impact since only some 20 percent of the strikes had been flown in support of ground forces in contact with the enemy.

(S-C-1) In taking this position, Dr. Selin essentially restated views often expressed previously by Systems Analysis, that air power's primary function in the Vietnam war was close air support and that interdiction was ineffective and not a valid function. The Air Force disagreed with these views and sought to counter them. In February 1969, for example, a Systems Analysis report on this subject--stating the U.S. bombing campaign had had no observable effect on enemy forces and fighting in Vietnam--led Gen. John P. McConnell, the Air Force Chief of Staff, to ask the JCS to express its objections to Dr. Selin's position. Among numerous Air Force studies affirming the importance of the interdiction role was one completed by the Assistant Chief of Staff, Studies and Analysis, in December 1968. It indicated, among other things, that if even only one-eleventh of the supplies interdicted in SVN and Laos were ordnance, then air interdiction was operating at a better average return than ground forces plus close air support. It also pointed to

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the fact that ground operations weren't "using up" very much enemy ammunition because the enemy was avoiding contact. In forwarding this study to the Secretary of Defense on 29 January 1969, Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown* stated:

The lack of precise data does not allow one to make an unqualified statement and that strike aircraft performing interdiction in Route Packages 1, 2, 3, and Laos were operating at a better return than forces (ground and air) in SVN. Likewise, and most importantly, neither can the converse be unqualifiedly stated. On balance, the data strongly suggest that, at the margin, the strike aircraft produced a better return.¹⁰

(S Op 8) This interdiction/close air support argument was to continue throughout 1969 and beyond. The subject was very much at the heart of the great air efforts in Commando Hunt.⁺ In addition to the extensive airing of interdiction effectiveness in National Security Study Memorandums 1 and 36, it continued to be the subject of numerous evaluations and analyses. Later in 1969, in October, Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard requested another such evaluation in connection with the bombing in Laos. Scheduled for completion by 20 November, it did not appear until the spring of 1970.

The Air Force Position

(S Op 9) In the face of the developments of late 1968 and the new administration's commitment to cutting the defense budget, the services were resigned to some reductions in Southeast Asia forces. The reaction to actual cutback proposals varied throughout the Air Force, however. The initial Air Force position was to oppose any reduction until the matter received more study by the JCS. This was the sense of a 9 February Air Force "point paper"¹¹ which challenged Systems Analysis' assumption that air and ground operational activity would decline in fiscal year 1970, since it ignored

*Dr. Brown, a member of the Johnson administration continued in office during the first 4 weeks of the Nixon administration. He was succeeded as Air Force Secretary by Dr. Robert C. Seaman, Jr., on 15 February 1969.

⁺See Chapter III.

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evidence of continuing enemy effort. The Air Force insisted that any force withdrawal or decrease in the sortie rate, before an acceptable quid pro quo had been negotiated, would give the enemy a psychological, political, and military advantage that could adversely affect the U.S. negotiating position in Paris. It disputed the suggestion that cutting nine tactical air squadrons would not significantly reduce combat effectiveness. Hanoi's main problem, it said, was logistics and air strikes were the main inhibiting factor. The cutoff in bombing operations against the north, by easing this problem for Hanoi, required more not less attack sorties.

(S Op 3) The Air Force also challenged the criticism of its jet operations. It cited specific statistics on jet truck kills in December 1968, and pointed to the recent opening of a new bypass and work on a new road by the enemy, forced upon him to get around the interdicted areas of Mu Gia Pass and Ban Karai Pass. The Air Force stated that if budget constraints dictated reduction of forces in Southeast Asia, then the question would have to be asked: what residual force mix could inflict maximum costs on the enemy? Its answer was to endorse Secretary Brown's suggestion of 11 February to Mr. Packard that air interdiction would produce a better return than ground and air forces in South Vietnam. In other words, a reduction in SEA activity in 1969 could probably be accomplished only by maintaining a high air activity.¹²

(S Op 3) At an Air Staff Board meeting on 12 February, where Dr. Selin's 5 February memo was discussed, however, Lt. Gen. Duward L. Crow, USAF Comptroller, and Maj. Gen. George S. Boylan, Jr., Director of Aerospace Programs, proposed that an Air Force position on 1969 reductions in SEA be developed for possible future application. An ad hoc working group, chaired by the Directorate of Plans, with representatives from the Directorates of Operations, Programs, and Budget, set to work to formulate Air Force alternative positions. "Because the entire problem was raised by a budget issue," the group concentrated on addressing this factor. It was assumed that reductions in military units in SEA during fiscal year 1970 would be directed. Four alternative positions were developed and forwarded by Maj. Gen. Richard H. Ellis, Director of Plans, to PACAF and Seventh Air Force for comment. He explained that none of the positions were presented as recommendations for action but as a basis for an Air Force decision should a "Directed Force Reduction" occur. The four alternatives were:

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1. Cancel the planned deployment of four F-4 squadrons (to replace the four Air National Guard (ANG) F-100C squadrons scheduled to return from SEA to demobilized status in April and May 1969) and turn one air base over to the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF).
2. Phase out two F-100D squadrons in the second and fourth quarters of fiscal year 1970, as planned, without replacing them with four A-37 squadrons. Procurement of A-37's would be canceled in fiscal year 1970, with a buy of only 50 in fiscal year 1969 instead of the previously planned 113.
3. Withdraw the 33d, 44th, 351st, and 354th Tactical Fighter Squadrons (F-105) from Thailand to Kadena in the second quarter of the fiscal year, and relocate existing EB-66 aircraft to U-Tapao, Korat, and Kadena. One Thai air base (Takhli) would be placed in Continuity of Operations Plan (COP) status.
4. Cut B-52 sorties to 1,440 per month, with the reduction to be absorbed by Guam-based units.

(~~TOP SECRET~~ 3) In their comments on the above, Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) and Seventh Air Force strongly opposed any reduction.¹³ They recognized that the air interdiction campaign in Laos had not forced the enemy to cease the war, but they also posed the question: "What level of combat activity might the enemy sustain if the air interdiction campaign were suspended?" They pointed out that the Rolling Thunder campaign in 1967 had severely hurt NVN, and noted by comparison how easily the enemy had rebuilt his economy and improved logistic efforts southward in the wake of the U.S. bombing restrictions of March and November 1968. They insisted that truck killing was only part of the interdiction effort. Impeding traffic flow, backing up supplies, and destroying them was more important, and to do this, the Rolling Thunder jet force of F-105's and F-4's was vital. They argued that while the A-1 was efficient in the truck-killing role it could not be used against the entire length of the enemy's lines of communication (LOC's). Changing the jet force structure solely because of its deficiency in the truck-killing role could result in an operationally restricted force incapable of prosecuting the air campaign over all of Southeast Asia. Both commands were especially concerned about being able to respond to any directive to resume the bombing of North Vietnam. They also were

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apprehensive that F-4 or F-105 force reductions "would seriously degrade the credibility of our greatest leverage for negotiations, i. e., the capability to resume attacks on the heart of NVN." Gen. George S. Brown, Seventh Air Force Commander--commenting on Dr. Selin's charge that only 20 percent of tactical air sorties were in support of ground forces in contact with the enemy--noted that about 50 percent of the in-country tactical air effort was currently operating in Laos, where Gen. Creighton Abrams, COMUSMACV, had agreed "it can be most gainfully employed."¹⁴

(~~TOP SECRET~~) General McConnell, however, after discussions with Secretaries Laird and Packard, concluded that the Air Force would probably have to reduce tactical fighter squadrons in South Vietnam. Based on this anticipated requirement, the Air Staff decided that a withdrawal of two tactical fighter squadrons was acceptable and could be justified.¹⁵ As a result, on 18 March 1969 General McConnell directed the Air Staff to prepare a memo, proposing to the JCS a replacement of the four ANG F-100 squadrons by F-4's on a two-for-four instead of four-for-four basis. On 21 March this proposal was forwarded to Tactical Air Command, PACAF, and Seventh Air Force for comment.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) PACAF and Seventh Air Force continued to oppose any reductions. In objecting to the Chief of Staff's proposal, both stressed the increased requirement for out-country (Laos) sorties. General Brown said he agreed less tactical air effort was needed in-country, but that "such a conclusion is not shared by the Army or the Marines, and in fact less tactical air support will result in either increased casualties or slow-down in reaching ground objectives." Unlike Gen. William W. Momyer,^{*} his predecessor as Seventh Air Force Commander, General Brown felt that with the shift in the monsoon and the resultant bad weather in Laos more tactical air effort, not less, would be required to impede the enemy's movement. Most of the bombing would be MSQ,⁺ airborne radar, or LORAN;⁺ therefore, the decreased accuracy must be compensated for by added weight of effort." He disagreed with the Systems Analysis view that

^{*}For Momyer's view, see next page.

⁺MSQ: mobile special purpose ground based radar guidance bombing system; LORAN: long-range navigation.

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a single factor--payload--should be the principal determinant in force structure decisions, insisting presence was equally important. He said he would be the first to admit that many of the preplanned sorties in South Vietnam resulted in strikes against not very lucrative targets, but that it was this very sortie capability that enabled Seventh Air Force to divert to support troops when they needed it. As he expressed it: "Presence of tac air has resulted in the enemy breaking contact on innumerable occasions. As a result, ground commanders are sortie oriented. I am sure they would not well receive our assurances that we will be around less often but will bring more ordnance when we arrive."¹⁶

(~~TS Sp 1~~) General Momyer,¹⁷ Commander of TAC supported the Chief of Staff's suggestion. He thought that a resumption of bombing in the North was unlikely, and noted that enemy action in South Vietnam would slow down with the onset of the southwest monsoon season. Thai-based forces could absorb any added burden in SVN, since their use against LOC's was restricted, even with radar and MSQ bombing. With more air refueling available during the southwest monsoon--because of the reduced effort against LOC's in Laos--fewer aircraft could cover a greater area in response to immediate requests. Finally, he suggested that with less than 45 contacts with the enemy per day throughout South Vietnam, Seventh Air Force could reduce the number of sorties scheduled on pre-allocated missions without having a significant effect on the war effort. As things then stood, General Momyer said, the Seventh Air Force was making available about 70 percent of its daily sorties for the in-country effort on a weekly allocation, with the ground forces having no corresponding operations demanding such support. He recognized the "inherent service problem," that is, that if the Air Force reduced forces, the Marines would "continue to pump in 258 sorties a day in I Corps regardless of whether they have targets or not," and this could make it appear the Air Force was not giving the Army adequate support. In spite of this possibility, General Momyer thought the time had come to propose a reduction. If the situation should change, TAC could deploy needed F-4 squadrons to the theater.

(~~TS Sp 1~~) After reflecting on these comments, General McConnell on 24 March proposed that the JCS consider a two-for-four reduction. In background and talking papers he cited numerous points as rationale for his view. Since the F-4 squadrons were not yet deployed, the Air Force could achieve an orderly and logical reduction. OSD

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responses to the "29 Questions on Vietnam", had argued that withdrawals of some tactical air personnel "would not have significant effect on U.S. combat capabilities or effectiveness;" the Air Force, by voluntarily withdrawing two tactical fighter squadrons from South Vietnam, would reduce pressures from OSD and be able to pick the units and determine the time of drawdown. The reduction could be publicized or not, as the political situation dictated. Program 6* force levels would consequently be reduced by approximately 700 spaces. The withdrawals would save \$85.5 million in operations and munitions expenditures and, if this posture were maintained through the second quarter of fiscal year 1972, would decrease combat attrition by 23 F-4 aircraft. Personnel problems would be eased by the decrease in requirements for tactical replacement training unit (RTU) output, specialized maintenance training, and involuntary second tours.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) The Chief of Staff further pointed out that the four ANG squadrons had been initially deployed to South Vietnam to counter the Tet 1968 offensive. The 1969 offensive, however, had proved relatively ineffective, and enemy ground activity remained at a low ebb. Since the balance of military capabilities had improved in the Allies' favor, consideration could be given to accepting some degradation of tactical air capability, especially since the F-4 squadrons could deploy rapidly to SEA if necessary. While noting he was not recommending use of comparative effectiveness as a rationale for reducing theater air assets, General McConnell gave a detailed account

*Program 6, the new SEA Deployment Program issued by OSD on 4 April 1968, called for deploying to SVN four ANG F-100 squadrons and one Marine squadron in May and June; deferring deployment of one USAF F-4 squadron to Thailand (from February to June); deferring redeployment from Thailand to the United States of one USAF A-1 squadron and a Navy SP-2E unit; extending the B-52 sortie rate of 1,800 per month from 15 February through June 1968, then dropping it to 1,400 a month; replacing the 82d Airborne Division brigade and the Marine RLT 27, hurriedly sent to VN in February, with two new Army brigades; scheduling conversion of 12,545 military to civilian spaces in SVN to preclude overrun of the new 549,500 U. S. manpower ceiling; increasing RVNAF maneuver, artillery, and engineer battalions.

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of the advantages of the F-4 (over the F-100's) in terms of delivery capability, strafing, ordnance-carrying capability, range, and versatility.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) General McConnell's proposal was not favorably received by the JCS. Just a month before, they had directed the Air Force to replace the four ANG F-100 squadrons with F-4's on a one-for-one basis,¹⁸ and the Air Force had been preparing to replace two squadrons in April and two in May. When General McConnell submitted his 24 March reduction proposal--following discussions with Secretaries Laird and Packard--the Joint Chiefs objected to it. Secretary Laird, however, in a 9 April memo to the Chairman of the JCS said he understood "we are planning" to reduce two Air Force tactical fighter squadrons in South Vietnam and asked whether it might not be more appropriate to withdraw two squadrons from Thailand instead.¹⁹ Based on recommendations solicited from the Air Staff, CINCPAC, and CINCPACAF, the JCS on 18 April advised Secretary Laird that a reduction of air assets in SEA was not militarily sound. However, if a reduction had to be made--for other than military reasons--they believed the cut should be made in South Vietnam rather than Thailand. On 8 May Secretary Laird directed the JCS to deploy two squadrons from the Continental United States (CONUS) to replace the four ANG F-100 squadrons in SEA. The other two F-4 squadrons (previously scheduled for deployment to South Vietnam in May 1969) were to be put in a standdown status till after 1 July when they might or might not be sent.²⁰

The JCS Position and the Arc Light^{*} Sortie Issue

(~~TOP SECRET~~) Throughout the debate over air power in the first half of 1969 the JCS had been among the firmest opponents of any reduction in SEA tactical air strength. Their arguments particularly cited the enemy's continued aggressiveness despite the November agreements stopping the bombing of North Vietnam. They circulated a CINCPAC letter and booklet of 16 January, which provided photographic evidence of how Hanoi had been improving its transportation and POL facilities since the bombing halt. In this context, a background paper prepared for a JCS meeting with Secretary Laird on 3 February reported "a deliberate shift in the weight of the air effort" since the bombing halt: the bulk of the sorties previously flown against the North had been redirected to interdiction of the enemy's

*B-52 Operations in SEA.

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personnel and logistic bases in South Vietnam and Laos. This new pattern of air operations in SEA, it was maintained, "is in direct support of the current COMUSMACV strategy of disrupting the enemy's offensive plans and precluding the essential buildup of personnel and supplies necessary to support major unit operations."²¹

(S) The JCS in its 4 February response to the "29 Questions" gave a detailed, highly favorable estimate of air interdiction effectiveness, both in choking off enemy supplies and preventing planned enemy activities. MACV, whose replies to the "Questions" were incorporated in the JCS reply, was particularly eloquent in praising the B-52 role, noting not only its preemptive and interdiction functions, but its inhibiting effect on all enemy movement, labor recruitment, and procurement and concealment of supplies. The way that field commanders had integrated B-52 firepower into their overall fire support plans for ground tactical operations--causing great destruction to the enemy and little comparable harm to friendly personnel--was cited in praise of the SAC bombers.

(S) The JCS also had consistently opposed all proposals to cut back the B-52 sortie rate. In November 1968, when Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul M. Nitze had asked for recommendations on a variable (1,400-1,800 a month) B-52 sortie rate, the JCS advised retaining the current 1,800-a-month rate.²² On 9 December, Mr. Nitze, citing budgetary and logistic planning reasons, approved the variable rate effective 1 January 1969 as contained in his November memo. On 19 December SAC submitted a plan to implement such a variable rate as a way to save optional and maintenance dollars and optimize force posture by permitting the return to CONUS of some aircraft and crews during the 6 months when the lower (1,400 sorties a month) rate was in effect. When the JCS submitted the SAC plan to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, both objected, stating that any reduction in the rate would be militarily inadvisable.*

*When SAC again in October 1969 recommended return to the CONUS of aircraft, crews, and support personnel in excess of current Arc Light requirements--in an effort to reduce degradation of Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) forces--the Chief of Staff advised Gen. Bruce K. Holloway, CINCSAC, that he agreed with this recommendation, but that the "highest authority" had directed continuing these deployments to sustain current sortie capabilities, which precluded pursuing the subject for the time being. [Msg (TS) AFSSO to CINCSAC 0722542 Oct 69.]

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(S) On 18 February the JCS forwarded to Secretary Laird more recent CINCPAC and MACV messages (of 25 and 26 January respectively) indicating their very strong praise of and demand for B-52 sorties and urging a continuation of the 1,800 a month rate. There was no immediate OSD response, although on 1 April Secretary Laird told a Congressional committee that the sortie rate would be reduced to 1,600 per month for fiscal year 1970. On 26 April the JCS again strongly urged the Defense Chief to continue the old sortie rate. They again cited the opinions of field commanders in South Vietnam, who were unanimous in their view that B-52's were making a major contribution to the achievement of U.S. objectives in SEA and an important factor in preventing effective enemy offensives. Judging by target nominations received by COMUSMACV from field commanders, the JCS said it would take more than five times the number of B-52 sorties currently available to strike the targets nominated each day.²³

(S) In a further move to get the Secretary's approval of the 1,800-sortie rate, the JCS considered budget reductions in tactical air operations as a way to permit continuance of this rate. By cutting out two ANG F-100 squadrons (replacing them by F-4's on a one-for-two basis) redeploing one Marine F-4 squadron from South Vietnam to Japan, and reducing to two the number of U.S. Navy carriers on Yankee Station, an estimated savings of \$193.7 million could accrue.* This would exceed the estimated \$103.6 million to be gained by reducing the Arc Light sorties from 1,800 to 1,600. On 16 May the JCS recommended these changes as a way of maintaining the 1,800 per month B-52 sortie rate.²⁴

(S) Secretary Laird replied that the 1,800-sortie rate would require about \$100 million in added fiscal year 1969 and 1970 funds. He left it up to the JCS to decide, by 27 June, whether to maintain the 1,800 rate (but with a \$100 million reduction from some other part of the tactical air effort), or to cut the Arc Light rate to 1,600 sorties a month and retain other tactical air operations at their currently planned level. He expressed the hope that, in view of the large number of sorties made available by the halt in bombing North Vietnam, such a reduction could be made without a significant impact on combat operations elsewhere.²⁵ After consulting with CINCPAC, the JCS chose to drop the B-52 rate to 1,600. The Air

*U.S. Navy forces in Gulf of Tonkin with strike responsibility in North Vietnam.

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Force supported this change, stating that the reduction would enable it to save some \$100 million by bringing home 12 B-52's and seven KC-135's and their crews. Continuing to maintain forces in place for some possible future task was deemed an uneconomical use of resources and would further impair effectiveness of the U.S. Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP).

(S Sp 1) Three months later, however, the Secretary of Defense decided to reduce the Arc Light program still further, to 1,400 sorties a month, as part of Project 703* budget reductions. He advised the President on 6 October that he believed this level of B-52 support to be more than adequate in light of existing combat levels. He added that OSD analyses showed the 1,400-sortie rate might not be justified, but that commanders in the field argued so strongly for this support that he was respecting their judgment.²⁶ The President approved this recommendation via a Kissinger memo to Secretary Laird, on 17 October. He directed, however, that support facilities for B-52 operations be kept at a level which would permit rapid restoration of higher sortie rates if required.

The NSSM 36 Debate

(S Sp 1) A major new debate over cutting back air power in SEA also arose in connection with NSSM 36, "Vietnamizing the War" (10 April). This National Security Study Memorandum required an interagency plan with specific timetables for turning over the war to the South Vietnamese.⁺ In firming up policy on this plan one of the most contested points concerned the extent of the continuing need for air power in the wake of the Vietnamization program. Considerable fuel was added to the debate following additional guidance from Secretary Laird on 21 May.²⁷ Expressing concern over lack of progress and apparent confusion in the planning exercise, he emphasized that the Vietnamization plan was not a separate matter from the plans to return U.S. units during 1969. He requested the military departments to consider balanced "slices" as well as predominantly combat units in their withdrawal plans, and to include out-of-country forces and tactical air forces "instead of assuming, as had been done, that

*A budget-cutting exercise which brought government-wide manpower and spending reductions, including a cut of approximately \$1 billion for each of the Services.

⁺See Chapter I.

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these would remain at current levels." He said he did not intend to "prejudge the situation," but pointed out there were already budget constraints on the air effort.

(TS Sp 1) Systems Analysis--concerned about budgetary problems--pointed out on 31 May that savings would be less than desired unless support units were withdrawn along with combat forces.²⁸ The JCS, however, argued that withdrawing balanced "slices" would rob the RVNAF of the combat and service support critically needed as it moved to assume more responsibility in the war. General Brown, Seventh Air Force Commander, in commenting on Systems Analysis' views, suggested that the initial redeployment package should be heavy in combat forces in order to leave support forces in place to assist in redeployments, provide increased support to VNAF, and to help pack and ship materiel and supplies associated with redeploying units.²⁹

(TS Sp 1) Concerning Secretary Laird's point about including out-of-country forces in the withdrawal plans, Systems Analysis suggested that USAF tactical air forces in Thailand could feasibly be reduced by ten fighter squadrons.³⁰ Both PACAF and Seventh Air Force were strongly opposed to this. General Brown stated that the Thai-based F-105's and F-4's were vital to the interdiction campaign in Laos to keep down the level of enemy activity in SVN and further the success of pacification there. They were also essential to the continued operation of AC-130, AC-47, A-1, and A-26 aircraft in the increasingly tougher AA defense environment. Rather than redeploying six fighter squadrons and two reconnaissance squadrons from Thailand and closing two Thai bases, General Brown recommended--if required to do so--closing Nha Trang and Tuy Hoa in South Vietnam and withdrawal of six SVN-based squadrons (after A-37B conversion), one SVN RF-4C squadron, and one Thailand EB-66 squadron. By so doing, operations would be degraded less, since the Thai-based forces were better located to support requirements, were less susceptible to enemy ground attack, and posed a greater threat to North Vietnam than did those in the South. Also, base congestion in South Vietnam, particularly in the wake of growing efforts to improve the South Vietnamese Air Force, would be decreased. Finally, General Brown cited the need to maintain maximum air power in Thailand as long as possible, a basic CINCPAC post-hostilities objective.³¹

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(~~TOP SECRET~~) JCS, CINCPAC, and MACV registered similar protests against proposals to reduce out-of-country/offshore forces. They saw the United States facing an interrelated enemy threat in Vietnam, Laos, and northeast Thailand, with those air forces essential in countering it. However, should such cuts be directed, despite the risks to operations in both SVN and Laos, they proposed an "illustrative redeployment alternative" for such forces.³² Later, when OSD/ISA on 11 September requested two additional Thailand redeployment packages of 6,000 each,³³ the JCS recommended against forwarding these proposals to the NSC.³⁴

(~~TOP SECRET~~) On the question of overall tactical air cutbacks, in late May the JCS pointed to the 18 percent reduction scheduled for 1969 (including replacement of the four ANG F-100 squadrons by only two F-4 squadrons and the reduction of attack carrier and B-52 sorties) and opposed any further reductions as dangerous.³⁵ They felt that a further phasedown, coupled with U.S. withdrawals, could be interpreted by the enemy as a general, unilateral U.S. withdrawal rather than a Vietnamization effort. The military commanders in SEA wholeheartedly supported the JCS view. General Brown recognized that domestic political and economic pressures made tactical air reductions attractive, but thought the point had not been reached where such a move made sense. The President's 8 June Midway announcement of U.S. ground force redeployments militated against any early cutback of such resources. Rather, tactical air support to the RVNAF would be a crucial element in countering enemy initiatives taken in response to U.S. force deployments. In particular, the limited number of tactical air squadrons in the VNAF modernization program for a time at least, made it imprudent to redeploy significant air assets from SEA.³⁶ The issue was also addressed by CINCPAC in a letter to the JCS on 25 July forwarding the U.S. Embassy/MACV plan on Vietnamizing the war. He went into great detail about the hazards of additional reductions in SEA tactical air capabilities beyond those already envisaged in the plan. U.S. ground strength reductions would only increase the need for fire support if enemy efforts continued. Effective interdiction efforts had to be maintained to prevent an in-country enemy buildup.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) Taking an opposite view, Dr. Selin's Systems Analysis staff favored reducing U.S. and VNAF fighter/attack squadrons from a current total of 66 to a residual program of 36, as compared with the MACV-recommended total of 55. It agreed

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with MACV on retaining five gunship squadrons in a residual force, but recommended only 10 reconnaissance/ECM squadrons as compared to the 14 proposed by MACV. Such a cutback, Systems Analysis argued, would permit redeployment of 17,000 more people, allow the closure or reduction of six air bases, and cost \$1.5 billion less than the MACV plan. The biggest point of difference was in the number of squadrons to be redeployed from Thailand, with Dr. Selin's staff proposing to redeploy all 10 squadrons, the JCS none. In addition to these squadron reductions, Systems Analysis also wished to reduce the overall number of sorties. While favoring an increase of 50 percent in U.S., and 310 percent in VNAF sorties for close air support of troops in contact in South Vietnam, they proposed a 50 percent reduction in all other air strikes in SVN except those on enemy troops in the open. In Laos, they recommended cutting the number of all sorties by more than half--from 13,500 to 6,000 sorties a month.³⁷

(~~TOP SECRET~~) The systems analysts based these proposals on the contention that close air support of ground troops was more effective than air interdiction, but that currently more than nine out of 10 attack sorties in South Vietnam were directed against fixed targets in known or suspected areas of enemy activity--often in dense jungle or enemy held territory--whose effectiveness was largely unknown. They insisted the air interdiction campaign in Laos had not reduced infiltration of men and supplies enough to really hurt the enemy, and that the operation had been extremely costly to the United States--more than \$2.4 billion a year at current levels. They recommended reducing sorties against LOC's truck parks, and storage areas, while increasing gunship sorties and suppression strikes against AAA defenses.³⁸

(~~TOP SECRET~~) In sum, the analysts in OSD appeared to be prescribing tactics and strategy for conducting the air war in Southeast Asia: de-emphasize interdiction and stress close air support for troops in contact; cut jet forces in favor of gunships, and pull jet forces out of Thailand completely. The Air Force, the JCS, and the field commanders strongly disputed the analysts' views, holding that interdiction was a valid role which helped prevent an enemy buildup in South Vietnam and was to be judged not solely on what enemy supplies got through but on how much more might have gotten through without it. Preplanned sorties, they conceded, were not always attacking the most lucrative targets, but the presence of tactical air and the fact it was available made it a very important support to ground commanders. Gunship efficiency in the truck-

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killing role did not justify changing the whole force structure in their favor when what was needed was a force capable of prosecuting the air campaign over all Southeast Asia. Jet force reductions would degrade the credibility of the greatest leverage the United States had for getting negotiations, and removing them from Thailand would be contrary to a basic U.S. post-hostilities objective.

(~~TS - Sp 3~~) In the final Vietnamization report to Secretary Laird in late August, the JCS stated that they did not believe the OSD concepts would meet the VNAF combat support needs for a successful program. They said the OSD evaluation of air interdiction was a repetition of views advanced earlier, but adjudged unsound by themselves, the services, and combat commanders in the field. Withdrawing out-of-country/offshore forces would incur serious risks of increased enemy infiltration and decreased support when the RVNAF needed it most. The Defense Chief, apparently accepting the JCS recommendation that OSD's "theoretically derived concepts" might jeopardize successful Vietnamization of the war, agreed to forward the final report on NSSM 36 to the National Security Council without OSD's dissenting views.³⁹

(~~TS - Sp 3~~) The debate was not over, it is true, as evident in Deputy Secretary Packard's 25 October 1969 request for a joint JCS/ISA/SA evaluation of interdiction operations in Laos. But for the time being, the long arguments on the effectiveness of SEA air assets and whether or not they should be cut, had ended in favor of the advocates of continued air strength. The arguments had been over specific points like interdiction versus close air support or jet versus gunships, but the basic question was whether to keep or cut back the main U.S. tool--its air strike forces--that could exert influence on North Vietnam. It was on this basis that the arguments of the JCS and the field commanders had carried the day: The North Vietnamese threat--in the interrelated South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia areas--was still there, and with ongoing U. S. ground withdrawals might well increase. It was not wise to withdraw the only U.S. weapon that might keep the enemy from escalating the war or that might still persuade him to negotiate its end. Thus, while a few cutbacks were made in air power in the latter part of the year, as noted (one B-57 squadron, two Special Operations squadrons, and two F-4 squadrons not sent as replacements), 1969 saw USAF capabilities in SEA effectively preserved--and used.

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III. AIR POWER IN SUPPORT OF U.S. POLICY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

(S-C-1) While the policies affecting air power were being debated, its growing importance was being demonstrated daily in Southeast Asia. With cutbacks projected for U.S. ground forces and, above all, with the emphasis on reducing casualties, U.S. officials increasingly substituted air power to harass and preempt hostile activity in order to minimize ground contacts. The constant pressure maintained by U.S. forces, especially air, following on the crushing enemy losses inflicted in the 1968 Tet offensive and at Khe Sanh, prevented him from mounting any significant assaults and seriously hampered his vital resupply efforts. As a result, the military situation in 1969 was relatively quiet compared to the crisis-ridden events of 1968. Further, and most significantly, Hanoi did not profit as much as expected from the U.S. bombing halt of November 1968. For, the policy decisions in the first half of 1969 to retain air resources in the theater meant that aircraft previously committed over North Vietnam--far from being withdrawn as some had anticipated--were available for operations against the enemy elsewhere. They were "diverted to an intensified interdiction campaign in Laos (Commando Hunt) and additional air support to in-country operations."¹

Interdiction Out-of-Country

(S-C-1) After the 1 November halt of the attacks on North Vietnam, all the U.S. out-of-country air interdiction strikes previously directed at Route Package 1, across the Annam Mountain range, were redirected to the Laotian panhandle against the flow of men and supplies trying to get through to South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh trail.* This new interdiction effort had increased importance in 1969 for two reasons. First, as noted earlier, Hanoi had used the bombing halt to repair damage to transportation networks and industrial sites and was consequently free to move men and materiel down to the demilitarized zone without fear of aerial attack.³ As a result, the dry season of late 1968 and early 1969 saw an increased amount of enemy materiel passing into and through Laos. Another Tet-type offensive seemed in the offing, and not only the Joint Chiefs but the U.S. Ambassador to Laos expressed

*See Figure 2.

INTERDICTION CAMPAIGN IN LAOS

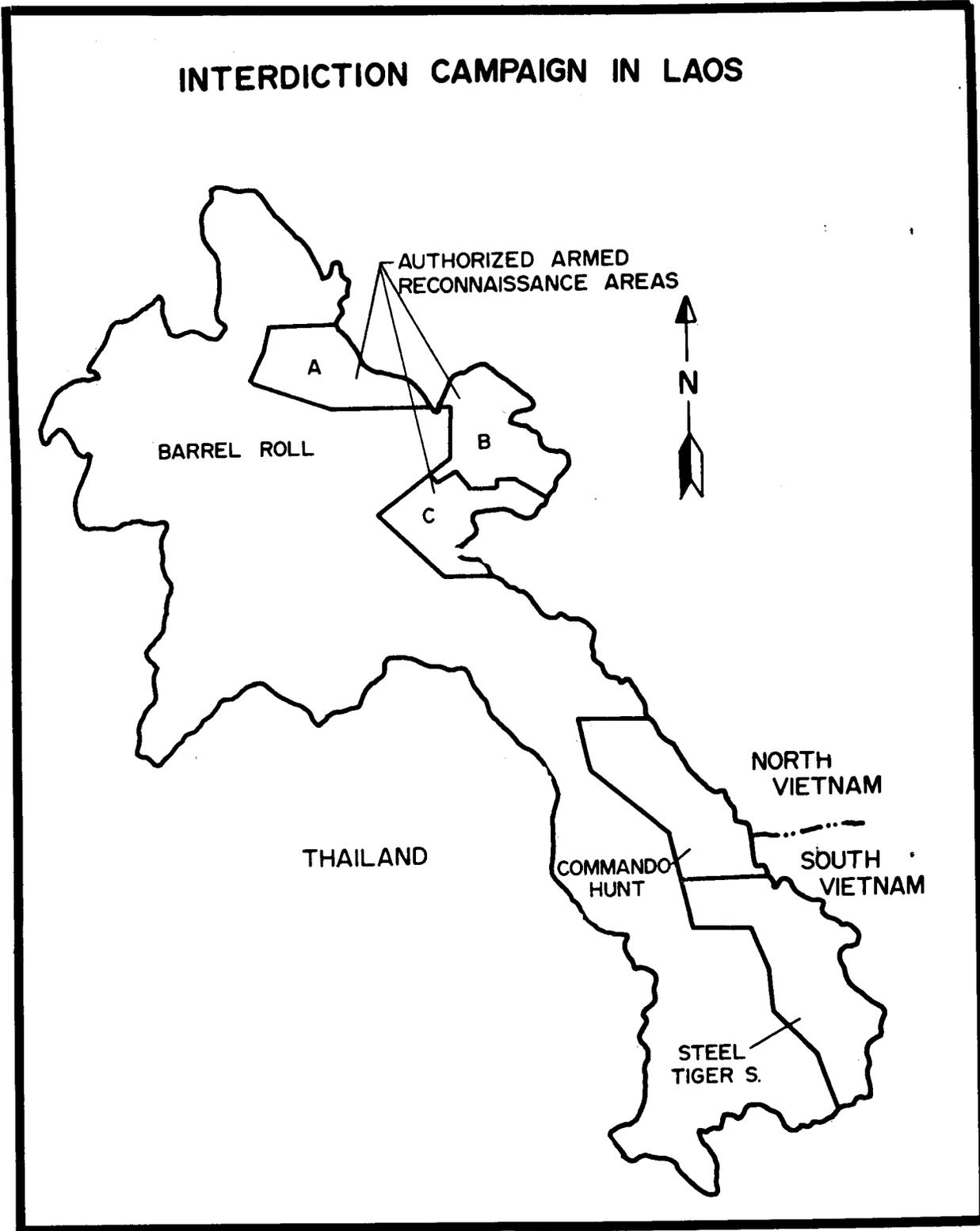


Figure 2

Source: Hq USMACV, Command Hist, 1969, I p V-204.

fear of "trouble ahead" due to this great southward logistical movement.⁴ Secondly, U.S. officials saw air interdiction operations as essential to insure success of the pacification program, a key factor in Vietnamization. General Brown expressed this view in a message to all Seventh Air Force units on 10 January 1969:

The accelerated pacification program could well be the final phase of the conflict in South Vietnam...

The current air interdiction campaign in Laos could go down as one of the most significant actions of the war, and I emphasize that the North Vietnamese logistic flow through southern Laos must be reduced to a point where it cannot support offensive military actions by the communists in South Vietnam. Should the campaign fail to reach that object, the result will be renewed military action by the communists in South Vietnam, with the objective of defeating the accelerated pacification program which is of such importance.⁵

(S) Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford, as early as July 1968, had directed the Air Force to plan for an intensive interdiction campaign in Laos for the 1968-69 northeast monsoon season.⁶ On 18 July the Chief of Staff gave CINCPACAF responsibility for developing such a plan. With some modifications by COMUSMACV, this plan, Commando Hunt, became the focus of U.S. out-of-country air interdiction efforts after the November bombing halt. It was a concentrated day-night campaign, with maximum disruption and/or destruction of the enemy's lines of communication its primary objective.⁷ It covered some 1,700 square miles of southern Laos. A joint Air Force, Navy, and Marine effort, it utilized somewhat less than 20 percent of the MACV tactical air resources and about 38 percent of the B-52 sorties.*⁸ General Brown of Seventh Air Force was responsible for control of operations. The campaign officially got under way on 15 November 1968 and continued through April 1969. Subsequently, it was extended from May through October 1969 (Commando Hunt II) and from November 1969 through April 1970 (Commando Hunt III).⁹

*See Figure 3.

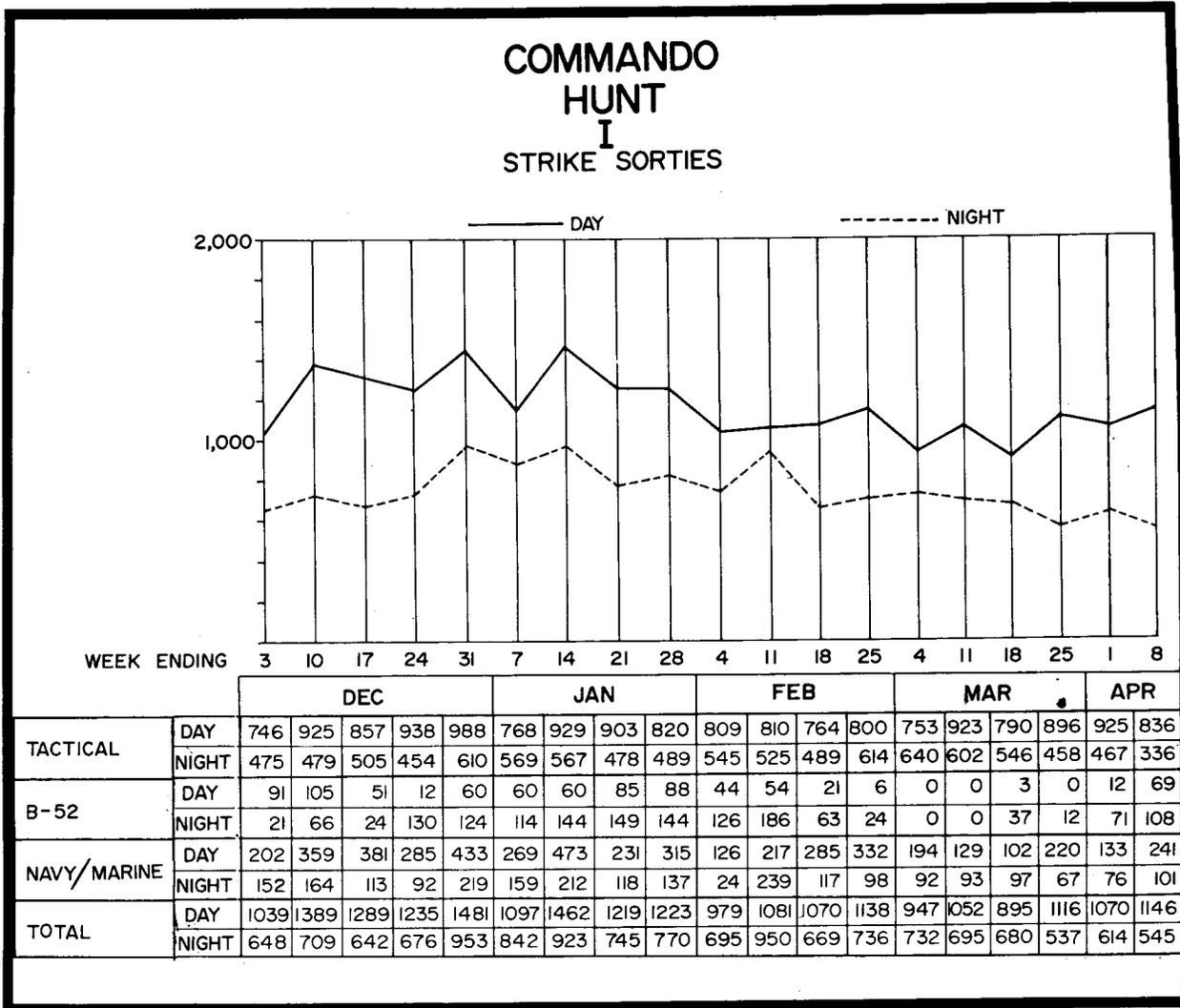


Figure 3

Source: Hq USMACV, Command Hist, 1969, I p V-216.

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~~(S-C)~~ The first 4 months of 1969 were especially crucial for this ambitious effort. The harshly primitive, rugged terrain in Laos presented tremendous problems to the U.S. pilots, while the enemy was able to exploit it to his own great advantage.¹⁰ Indeed, there was a hint of grudging admiration for the enemy in a March 1969 Seventh Air Force Intelligence summary:

Although not liberally endowed with all the sophisticated equipment needed for a modern air defense structure, enemy forces in Laos have met this deficiency with ingenuity, improvisation, mobility, dedication, and deception. These ingredients, when resourcefully combined and applied, added to the additional advantage that it is we who must seek out the enemy, provide some protection for the Communist efforts to move materiel in Laos.¹¹

~~(S-C)~~ Through February 1969 the enemy seemed to be making progress despite U.S. efforts. The U.S. Ambassador to Laos, William H. Sullivan, reported to the State Department in February that "it would appear that the enemy has successfully maintained his logistical system through the height of the Commando Hunt interdiction campaign by systematically opening new routes and repairing old routes."¹² By the end of February and the beginning of March, however, Commando Hunt results began to improve due to the introduction of measures to provide greater flexibility in operations. Target priorities were made less rigid, new interdiction points were established, the rules of engagement were relaxed, and Special Arc Light Operating Areas (SALOA's) were authorized in which multiple strikes could be made without validating each new strike.¹³

~~(S-C)~~ Most sorties were directed against special interdiction points--such as narrow passes--(40 percent) and truck parks and storage areas (35 percent), in order to prevent the enemy from concentrating supplies at his most heavily defended positions. Moving trucks and antiaircraft artillery positions were targets of 15 and 10 percent of the sorties, respectively.¹⁴ The AC-123 and AC-130 versions of the Spooky gunships were introduced into the campaign during this period, providing a spectacular example of effectiveness in January when a single AC-130 destroyed 27 trucks

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on a single sortie.¹⁵ By the time Commando Hunt I ended in April, 67,094 tactical air and 3,811 B-52 sorties* had been flown against LOC's, truck parks, storage areas, moving trucks, and AAA positions in the Steel Tiger area[†]-nearly all in the Commando Hunt campaign.¹⁶

(~~SECRET~~) Under these varied pressures, the enemy lost more and more of his supplies. The Seventh Air Force report on Command Hunt I[‡] estimated that from January to April 1969, 47 percent of the foe's logistical input was destroyed in Laos, 29 percent was consumed in the system, 6 percent went into storage, and 18 percent got through to South Vietnam. The report concluded that the combined effects of the interdiction campaign and in-country combat operations forced the enemy to draw down his stocks and prevented him from accumulating enough resources to maintain or increase his earlier level of activity.¹⁷

(~~SECRET~~) Commando Hunt II, initiated at the beginning of the southwest monsoon in May, sought to take advantage of the destructive effects of the rains on the roads by preventing their repair, and thus creating vulnerable concentrations of enemy materiel. The intensified attacks, combined with the weather, severely reduced enemy logistical activity in southern Laos. North Vietnam thereupon resorted to stockpiling materiel in its border areas, apparently to prepare for a logistics surge in the next dry season. Committing more resources to the 1969-70 drive than in previous dry seasons, the enemy increased his truck inventory by 50 percent,¹⁸ and his communications network by an additional 650 kilometers of roads, 80 kilometers of pipeline, and 150 kilometers of waterways.¹⁹ By the end of December he also had twice as many AAA guns along the Laos line of communications as during the previous year.²⁰ In effect, when Commando Hunt III operations began on 1 November during the 1969-70 northeast monsoon season, the enemy "had a running start."²¹

*For a breakdown of sorties see Figure 3.

†See Figure 2.

‡The report was prepared by the Seventh Air Force staff with assistance from representatives of Hq USAF, Task Force Alpha, and The Rand Corporation.

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(S-CP-2) This situation was, of course, related to the fact that in 1969--as compared to the year before--there was no U.S. interdiction campaign in North Vietnam. The enemy, free of such pressure, could concentrate his activities across the border accordingly. As General Brown put it, "Now very simply, the enemy has a free ride to the NVN border."²² Another factor aided enemy efforts during the last half of 1969 when U.S. air activities began to come under budgetary constraints. A ceiling was put on Seventh Air Force strike sorties effective 1 September 1969, and the Navy task force in the Gulf of Tonkin was reduced from three to two carriers, further decreasing available sorties by 50 per day. In addition, enemy activity in northern Laos required diversion of many more sorties to Operation Barrel Roll during this period.* For the entire Commando Hunt III campaign, daily tactical air sorties averaged 295 as compared to 401 during Commando Hunt I--this in the face of the enemy's greatly expanded communications network.²³

(S-CP-2) General Brown pressed on with the campaign nonetheless, strongly emphasizing accurate target intelligence and unremitting pressure, with continual surveillance by both visual reconnaissance and sensor technology. According to the Seventh Air Force report on Commando Hunt III, more than 10,000 trucks were destroyed and damaged, with gunships, flying 8 percent of the sorties, receiving credit for 48 percent of the losses.²⁴ Despite the sharp increase in the number of enemy trucks, and the fact that his logistic effort during October-December was approximately 16 times that of the preceding July-September period, his delivery of war materiel to South Vietnam, according to Seventh Air Force, was only some 3.5 times greater.²⁵

(S-CP-2) Summing up in his preface to the Commando Hunt III report, General Brown stated that "trucks and supplies were destroyed, enemy resources were tied down, and enemy supply flow was reduced, all at increasing cost to the enemy." He added, perhaps with a touch of exasperation, that the report "demonstrates once again that there is no panacea target or weapon system," and gave the credit for results to "good intelligence and constant pressure on the entire resupply system." The report itself pointed out

*See pp 49-50.

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that the campaign had contributed significantly to the relatively low level of American and Allied casualties in South Vietnam, and that its cost had been clearly less than if Allied ground forces had attempted to eliminate an equivalent enemy capability on the battlefield.²⁶ The fact was that the effectiveness of air interdiction could not be simply and precisely judged and was a matter of considerable difference of opinion as was noted in Chapter II. Systems Analysis in OSD, for example, remained skeptical as did Dep/Dir Leonard Sullivan, Jr., of DDR&E, although the latter conceded that Commando Hunt's interdiction results were "better than last year's effort."²⁷ The Air Force again asked: "What level of combat activity might the enemy sustain if the air interdiction campaign were suspended?"²⁸ General Abrams agreed, saying: "Too often these programs are judged by what got through instead of on a realistic assessment of that which was headed for South Vietnam but did not get there."²⁹

(~~SECRET~~) A secondary goal of the Commando Hunt campaign had been to evaluate the Igloo White sensor system. This was an all-weather, full-time surveillance system consisting of acoustic and seismic sensors, relay aircraft, and an Infiltration Surveillance Center, under the operational control of a wing level organization known as Task Force Alpha. The initial Seventh Air Force Commando Hunt report, dated 20 May 1969, unequivocally endorsed Igloo White. The acquisition, definition, and nomination of targets--particularly the targeting of truck parks and storage areas--relied heavily on information obtained from the Igloo White sensors. Although the system's contribution was difficult to quantify, and the original expectation that it could track the movement of convoys from one point to another had not been realized, Seventh Air Force concluded that it had provided an important breakthrough in tactical intelligence data collection.³⁰

(~~SECRET~~) Another evaluation of Igloo White's contribution, undertaken by the Assistant Chief of Staff, Studies and Analysis, at the request of the Vice Chief of Staff--using operational data obtained from Seventh Air Force organizations--gave a somewhat equivocal picture. It pointed out that Igloo White "nominated" about twice as many truck convoys for attack as did the Forward Air Controllers (FAC's), but that the latter were unable to find more than a small percentage (14 percent during 1 January-31 March 1969) of them. This was probably due to the fact that the FAC's had to detect the convoy at the exact location specified, with little allowance for

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possible navigational error or for convoy movement while the aircraft were enroute to the target. Studies and Analysis believed this situation partially reflected the highly subjective nature of assigning credit for target location and felt that the Igloo White contribution was probably significantly greater than reflected in the data base.³¹

Interdiction In-Country*

(S) Interdiction of enemy troops and supplies within South Vietnam was an important corollary to the out-of-country effort. The more enemy supplies that could be kept from reaching likely target areas and stockpile zones, the more enemy assaults--and U.S. casualties--could be held down. Although directed at enemy's LOC, storage areas, and base camps, interdiction centered primarily on areas of heavy transit or storage, such as enemy routes into the central highlands from Laotian and Cambodian border areas, and his camps in the A Shau Valley and War Zone C, sites for any buildup of forces to strike Saigon.

(S) The in-country interdiction role was sometimes somewhat ambiguous and often so closely related to close air support of ground forces as to overlap that function. At times aircraft flying interdiction were called on to provide special, emergency support. Thus, in February and March 1969 when the enemy was threatening Saigon, a large number of Arc Light strikes was temporarily diverted from Commando Hunt operations and directed against War Zone C with very impressive results in reducing the threat of attack.³² Similarly, more than 2,300 tactical air sorties were sent into the A Shau Valley storage area and infiltration route between 9 December 1968 and 6 February 1969 to interdict enemy LOC's. When the enemy activity persisted, B-52's joined tactical air units in a large-scale Allied air-ground offensive, Dewey Canyon, to counter it. As friendly troops entered the area, the strike zone was necessarily compressed, and the tactical air role became primarily one of close ground support rather than interdiction.³³ The ground forces seized huge amounts of enemy stockpiles, backed up because the enemy

*For an allocation of attack sorties between in-country and out-country see Figure 4.

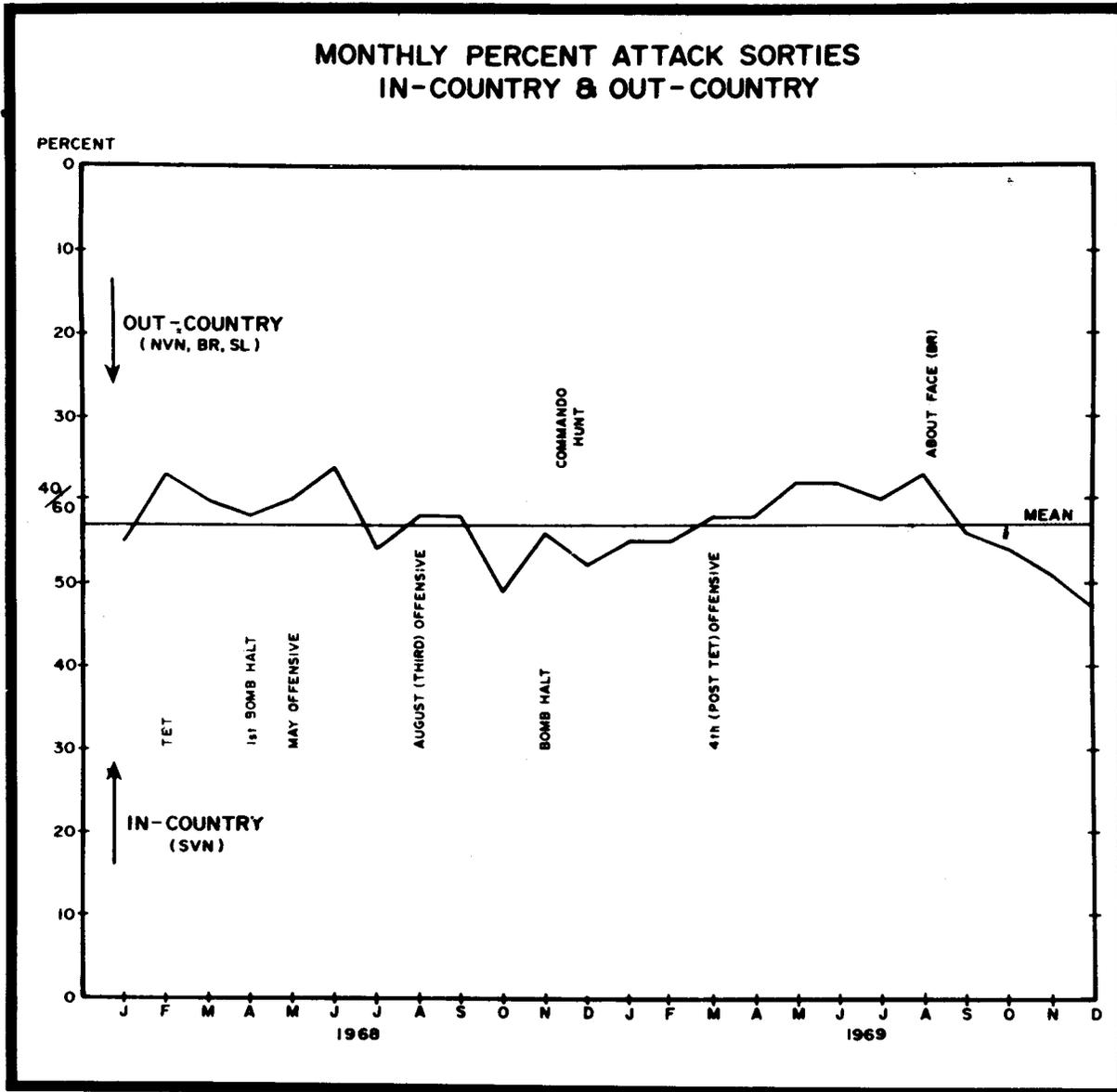


Figure 4

Source: CHECO Rprt (S) The Air War in Vietnam 1969

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had been unable to move them. Such losses of supplies in-country, plus the Commando Hunt campaign and the continuing, cumulative effect of years of bombing and artillery fire, were considered primary reasons for the lack of enemy aggressiveness during his post-Tet offensive.³⁵

Close Air Support for Ground Forces

(S. C. 1) The availability of the additional air resources formerly engaged over North Vietnam* also permitted a high degree of assistance to ground troops³⁶ during the greater part of 1969--again actively supporting the all-important Nixon policy of reducing U.S. casualties. The flexibility and mobility of this aid, refined to highest efficiency by 1969, was decisive. Commanders could shift vast quantities of men and supplies, deliver or extract troops and equipment from otherwise inaccessible areas, and bring fire-power to bear immediately in tactical situations. General Abrams could extend his ground force operations while at the same time guaranteeing them a reasonable measure of security.³⁷

(S. C. 1) Close air support was used both defensively--to protect ground positions--and offensively in various ways to assist friendly forces. For example, it was used to "prep" landing zones, as in Apache Snow, the multi-battalion helicopter/airborne operation of May-June 1969 conducted in A Shau Valley. The Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force, requested and was provided 94 preplanned sorties and 28 immediate sorties for landing zone preparation and air cover during the combat assault and subsequent contact with the enemy. He was unstinting in his praise of results:

The resounding success of the initial assaults... represented a notable accomplishment of all concerned. Particularly gratifying to me was the air support elements to meet our request... This surge in air support was basic to the scheme of maneuver and met our requirements in full... The control of the large number of tactical aircraft and helicopters in constricted air space was superb. The performance of the fighter pilots, ALO's, FAC's, and other controlling agencies was totally professional. There is no doubt in my mind that the precise application of air power was instrumental in throwing a determined enemy off balance and assuring the success of the combat assault.³⁸

*These included not only strike forces, but aircraft providing the latter with defense and other forms of support.

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(S) Air power was often used defensively in support of fire bases. The 25th Infantry Division, for example, maintained some 20 fire support bases (FSB), most of them exposed to the enemy in hostile areas. The outermost defense ring surrounding such bases was charged to air support under Seventh Air Force FAC control. On 7 June, following a mortar assault, the enemy tried to overrun one of the bases, FSB Crook, astride a major enemy LOC into Tay Ninh Province. Responding to the call for assistance, USAF fighters struck the enemy with high drag bombs and napalm while AC-119 and AC-47 gunships supported the action with flares and miniguns.³⁹ The enemy pulled back and a subsequent sweep of the area revealed 323 Communist troops killed--the loss attributed to air power--while friendly casualties were seven wounded. Subsequent interrogation of captured prisoners revealed that the enemy had expected to overrun the base with ease and had been surprised at the amount of firepower brought against them.⁴⁰

(S) Similarly, the enemy launched an intensive attack on the Ben Het Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camp between 8 May-2 July 1969. To help thwart it, FAC's flew 571 sorties, the AC-47's and AC-119's more than 100, tactical air 1,828, and the B-52 bombers 794, dropping some 19,553 tons of bombs. Assailing the enemy constantly, day or night, in any kind of weather, and with tremendous firepower, these operations broke up the determined enemy effort to seize the camp.⁴¹

(S) Offensive joint air-ground operations were particularly well coordinated and effective in destroying enemy resources in South Vietnam. During long-range reconnaissance missions, ground forces frequently located enemy caches and flushed out enemy soldiers, making them vulnerable to air strikes. For example, in the A Shau Valley campaigns of early 1969, American and South Vietnamese ground units, supported by air power, unearthed some 10 tons of enemy materiel a day. Commenting on the significance of such air-ground operations, General Brown said:

Tactical air and helicopter gunships are no absolute substitute for ground operations. The enemy today stays in his bunkers and he's hard to locate... Getting at [him] requires both an air and ground effort. The Army operations now are reconnaissance operations. If they make contact, they call on air. If it looks like the

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enemy is definitely there and dug in, they'll move in after the airstrike. The result has been [a] reduction in U.S. casualties which is of great importance. We are often accused of wasting airpower, particularly on suspected enemy locations. A lot of these suspected enemy targets that we're called upon to hit flush the enemy out, keep him off balance and let the Army go after him aggressively. 42

~~(S-CP-1)~~ The most impressive close air support role was the decisive effect of airpower in "spoiling operations"--i.e., in preventing large-scale enemy attacks, keeping him off balance, and damaging him intolerably before he could mass his forces effectively. For example, in August 1969 intelligence reported enemy troops concentrating in Binh Long, An Loc, and Loc Ninh provinces near the Cambodian border in III Corps. During the week prior to 11 August, B-52's struck numerous times, inflicting extensive damage on the enemy as he massed for attack. On 11-12 August, rapid and massive Allied ground forces countered a surge of Communist activity during which 1,274 enemy soldiers were reported killed. In support of this action, 410 tactical air sorties were flown during daylight hours, and 33 Spooky, 27 Shadow,* and 23 Skyspot missions were flown at night. 43

~~(S-CP-1)~~ Later, during the period 28 October through 15 December, the B-52's helped South Vietnamese forces to counter a major enemy threat in the Bu Prang and Duc Lap areas of Quang Duc province. The B-52's began striking at five enemy targets on 31 October. As the enemy attack intensified, so did requests for more B-52 strikes. Fifty-seven targets were hit during November and 24 more in the first 15 days of December. Following 18 strikes between 2 and 8 December, only light enemy contacts were reported as the enemy apparently refused or was unable to engage friendly forces. Between 31 October and 8 December, B-52's delivered more than 30 million pounds of bombs against enemy troop concentrations, staging areas, and fortifications. 44

*Call sign (S) used by AC-119G/K gunships.

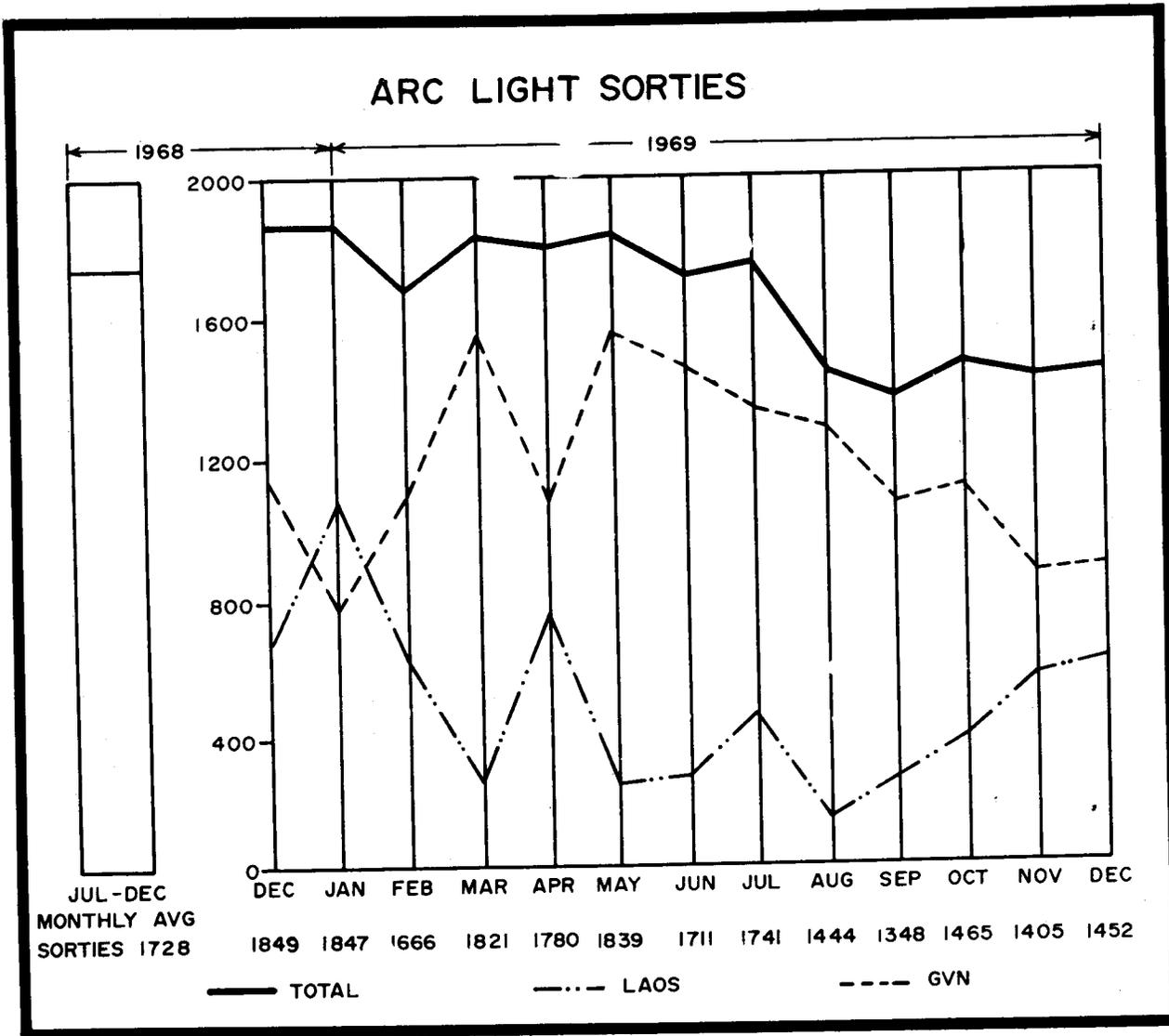


Figure 5

Source: Hq USMACV, Command Hist, 1969, I p V-222.

B-52 Support Ground Forces*

(C-3p-6) The unique combat role of the B-52's continued to increase in importance during 1969. Besides their use during Commando Hunt operations (38 percent of total B-52 sorties), they were increasingly called in to support ground troops, particularly in a "spoiling" role, as noted above. SAC commented on this development in a 1969 report:

Greater emphasis was placed on harassment and disruption of enemy operations than in previous years. Potential and actual enemy offensive forces were hammered in South Vietnam, particularly in the III Corps area around Saigon. The NVA/NC assault corridor running southeast from War Zone C and the Cambodian border to Saigon was struck repeatedly throughout the year and received more B-52 strikes than any other area. 45

(C-3p-7) This redirection in the use of B-52's had been at the specific request of General Abrams, who believed their close support role should have priority over interdiction operations "when the support of our ground forces is critical."⁴⁶ To insure their most effective utilization, General Abrams, had three general officers review target recommendations from all sources twice daily, consider available intelligence, and relate the requests to the enemy threat and the ground situation before presenting them to him for the selection of targets.⁴⁷ U.S. ground commanders, recognizing the value of the B-52 strikes, between 1 December 1968 and 31 March 1969, had submitted five times more target nominations than Arc Light resources could handle.⁴⁸ According to one report, commanders "were so concerned about getting more B-52 strikes in their area of operations that they often went to great lengths to request such support. At one point, for example, Maj. Gen. Charles A. Corcoran, First Field Force Commander, made a special trip to COMUSMACV during particularly heavy fighting in his area (October 1969) to make a personal plea for more Arc Light support."⁴⁹ Secretary Laird affirmed the importance of the B-52 role when he told SAC personnel during a visit to Guam in April that "as far as General Abrams is concerned and as far as the

*For a summary of Arc Light sorties flown in 1969 see Figure 5.

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enemy is concerned, the real pressure in this war is the B-52 strikes. They mean a great deal as far as bringing this thing in Vietnam to an end."⁵⁰ And a few days later, General McConnell, told Congress he believed the "use of strategic bombers in support of tactical situations will go down in history as one of the finest examples of the inherent flexibility of air power."⁵¹

(~~TS~~ ~~Op 1~~) The Arc Light force in its turn continually refined operational concepts and procedures to make itself more responsive to COMUSMACV's requests.⁵² Thus, as techniques were continually refined, the B-52's were able to achieve exceptional accuracy and, when necessary, bomb within extremely short distances of friendly troops. One such concept, Bugle Note, had been introduced during the siege at Khe Sanh and subsequently improved. Providing a more flexible response, it called for deploying a cell of three B-52's to a given pre-Initial Point (IP) every 1 1/2 hours, to be targeted from that point by mobile ground based radar. This made it possible to change targets as late as 1 1/2 hours prior to a cell's scheduled time over target, and to divert aircraft to alternate or secondary targets within the same Bugle Note area as late as minutes short of the planned time over target.⁵³ The most rapid previous response had been a 7-hour ground diversion capability from U-Tapao.⁵⁴

(~~TS~~ ~~Op 1~~) In 1969 SAC's Arc Light force adopted and refined a new technique called compression tactics.* The object was to disregard the normally scheduled B-52 cyclic time on target (TOT) and concentrate the maximum number of sorties against a single target in a minimum period of time. This improvisation achieved its first success on 27 February 1969, when 60 B-52's dropped their bombs in a 4-hour period. COMUSMACV commended SAC on the success of the operation, which was thereafter practiced with regularity. Thus, 60 B-52 sorties were flown on 8 and 17 March, 117 on 27 and 28 May, and 252 in five separate operations during June--all in Tay Ninh and Binh Long Provinces, where major enemy concentrations

*Compression tactics were used when there was a need for a large strike effort. In a matter of hours an entire day's quota of sorties could be concentrated on a single target. Use of compression tactics were normally limited to three days after which cyclic scheduling was resumed. [Hist (TS), SAC, FY 1970, vol I, p 17ln.]

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posed potential threats against various allied positions. Although TOT compressions increased the loss of total sorties, the commanders were satisfied that the significant results warranted the loss. During the remainder of 1969 the scheduling of compressed sorties became routine.⁵⁵

~~(TS Op 1)~~ The efficiency of B-52 operations in 1969 also benefited from additional facilities constructed during the latter part of 1968 at U-Tapao AB in Thailand. This permitted a rise in number of sorties flown from that base to 900 per month, half of the Arc Light commitment. The wing at U-Tapao was designated a B-52 main operating base, and the maintenance capability was increased to include phase inspections, jet engine basic maintenance, and corrosion control.⁵⁶ The improvements reduced the distance to targets in the south, enabling the Air Force to maintain the desired sortie rate with fewer aircraft.⁵⁷

~~(TS Op 1)~~ Summing up, flexibility and mobility were the characteristics of the Arc Light force most highly valued by General Abrams. The B-52's could hit the enemy every time he was found massing anywhere in South Vietnam. Because the big bombers could be quickly moved around without warning the enemy, they could often achieve results which would have required more friendly ground troops than were available--an ever more critical factor in view of increasing force withdrawals. Or they could deny the enemy a sanctuary in areas where allied troops could not penetrate. Because of them, there were literally no more safe havens for the enemy.

~~(TS Op 1)~~ One of the most important considerations favoring the B-52's was the fact that, when used in close air support operations, they could inflict great damage on the enemy while friendly forces suffered very few casualties. More and more, in 1968 and 1969 minimum U.S. casualties had become a major requirement for American military strategy in Southeast Asia--because of continuing domestic criticism of the war. In light of this, it was not strange that the B-52 strike force played a greater and greater role in General Abrams' strategy. Certainly the uniqueness of the B-52 contribution comes through very clearly in his statement that: "It [the B-52] is not like tactical air. It is not like naval gunfire. It is not like ground artillery. It is just capable of doing something that none of the rest can hack." He noted that MACV forces had more tactical air, artillery, and naval gunfire "than ground troops have ever had before," but even this he deemed insufficient, "not without the expenditure of an awful lot of lives."⁵⁸ The B-52 was essential in minimizing Allied losses.

~~TOP SECRET~~Innovations and Effectiveness Measures

(S-C-1) The high effectiveness of air operations in SEA in 1969 was in one sense a cumulative success, i. e., based on the fruition or improvement of concepts and tactics and weapons introduced previously and constantly refined. Thus, one of the most important developments in fighting the war in SEA was adoption of the concept of centralized management of the air effort, a concept with a long Air Force history. Introduced in March 1968 in connection with the battle for Khe Sanh, the MACV Single Manager for Air has steadily enhanced the effectiveness of air power. General Abrams, COMUSMACV, noting the great improvement since 1968, was very specific on how important centralized control over air power had become to him:

The air is really a powerful weapon. But to use this power effectively, you need both integrated all-source intelligence and an integrated all-resource reaction... particularly with air, including tac air, gunships, and B-52s. These must be organized to strike so all of them can be applied and integrated. If so, it will be a terrifying and powerful blow over a short period of time... From this level, power can be moved with ease... Where the enemy puts the heat on, whether it's the Plain of Jars or Duc Lap, it's only a matter of hours until tremendous shifts of power can be made. We realize it's not all that effortless on the part of the Air Force. You have to arrange for tankers and that sort of thing, but the whole system is geared to precisely that, with no long warning to the enemy. It's done right away. The centralized control of the application of power is an important feature and a critical one for efficient use of power.⁵⁹

A second development--also emphasized by General Abrams--was the dramatic improvement, since 1968, in intelligence collection for better pinpoint and pattern targeting, including the integration of all ground intelligence (i. e., also CIA sources). The improved system permitted Air Force firepower to zero in on an enemy highly skilled in camouflage cover and dispersion, and severely circumscribed his activity. This forced him to change his

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tactics and make greater use of sanctuary camps outside South Vietnam in an effort to escape the air gauntlet.

~~(S Op 1)~~ Two other crucial USAF supporting elements, whose operations had been increasingly perfected, were: reconnaissance--especially FAC reconnaissance--and airlift. The latter, in addition to its normal tasks, was vital in resupplying the CIDG camps throughout South Vietnam and also flew other, more spectacular missions such as moving the heavily equipped 1st Air Cavalry Division from I Corps to northern III Corps in 15 days during October 1968.⁶⁰

Equipment

~~(S Op 1)~~ Efforts to develop equipment best suited to conditions in Vietnam reached a high point in 1969, ironically at the time when costs were being cut back on all fronts. The newest attack aircraft in South Vietnam, the B model of the A-37, became operational in December 1969. It possessed equipment for in-flight refueling and a modified wing which enabled it to operate at heavier gross weights and take greater stress than the A-37A.

~~(S Op 1)~~ To provide efficient and timely support to ground commanders, Headquarters USAF in May 1968 had directed the Tactical Air Command (TAC) to test a method for reducing response time to "immediate" air support requests. TAC's solution was to use an armed FAC aircraft in conjunction with a gunship to provide a continuous USAF strike presence over an Army unit and make air support as readily available as artillery. In April 1969 this test, which involved an armed OV-10, was initiated as Project Misty Bronco. The overall results were very favorable--within the low threat environment of South Vietnam--and ground commanders were enthusiastic. The arming of all OV-10's was authorized on 5 June and the program was well along by the end of the year.⁶¹

~~(S Op 1)~~ The number of Spooky gunships, widely used to support troops in contact as well as to fly interdiction missions, doubled in 1969 over that in 1968. The AC-119G Shadow G, introduced into the theater in December 1968, was similar to the Spooky, but its extra firepower, night observation equipment, and its illuminator and fire control systems gave this gunship greater capability and flexibility. In turn, its performance was far exceeded by its sister gunship, the AC-119K Stinger, introduced in October 1969.

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Two jets augmented its reciprocating engines and an infrared detector and beacon tracking radar were tied to the fire control system--a technique similar to the one on the Shadow G. With these features Stinger became an all-weather attack aircraft, one that also included provisions for offset firing.⁶²

(~~C~~) The most sophisticated of the gunships was the specially equipped AC-130A (Spectre).^{*} It joined the fleet of night interdiction weapons in December 1969 under Project Surprise Package. With two 20-mm and two 40-mm guns and special features, it could detect, track, and destroy enemy trucks, petroleum storage areas, and AAA guns from an operating altitude of 12,000 feet. It could mark targets for its escort fighters with gunfire, laser, and LORAN coordinates, perform as a hunter-killer, and use real-time sensor information by virtue of its secure voice capability. Secretary Seamans, convinced there was no more important use for the C-130 airframe than the gunship role, proposed that the other AC-130's be converted to the latest configuration as soon as possible. The Surprise Package version of the AC-130A by far surpassed the others in the high rate of truck destruction recorded by the gunships (39 percent). It averaged 5.4 trucks destroyed or damaged per sortie, compared with 2.62 for the Spectre, and .36 for tactical fighters.⁶³

(~~C~~) Two aircraft, the EB-66 and the EC-47, were used for electronic warfare and reconnaissance. The EB-66 provided electronic countermeasures (ECM) and threat warning for B-52 missions and located and analyzed hostile radar environment. In 1969 it was equipped with a directional antenna system, which was very effective in drone support, but several other projected electronic improvements were eliminated by the fiscal austerity of 1969. The EC-47 contained extensive Airborne Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) equipment. Because of its low cost and overall success, the EC-47 program was expanded, rather than being affected by the austerity problem. Plans at the beginning of 1969 called for an increase of the EC-47 force from 49 to 57 aircraft.⁶⁴

^{*}Spectre was the call sign (S) for the AC-130A gunship; the name (S) for this version, specially equipped with special sensors and 40-mm cannons, was Project Surprise Package.

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(S-C-1) The use of ground sensors, first introduced on a large scale at Khe Sanh, attracted a great deal of interest in 1969 both as to concept and reliability.⁶⁵ Seismic and acoustic sensors were the main types used, although there were other more specialized ones. Sensor impulses were either "read" directly through hand-monitoring devices or were picked up by an orbiting EC-121 and relayed to the readout facility, either at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AFB or the Army and Marine facilities in I Corps. Especially vital for air interdiction, some 560 Igloo White sensors were being monitored by Air Force units in support of Commando Hunt III at the end of 1969.⁶⁶ In addition to electronic sensors, other sensor-surveillance techniques were used. They included airborne infrared sensors to detect personnel and vehicles by heat indication; side-looking airborne radar and side-looking infrared radar to detect moving vehicles, boats, and groups of people; ground surveillance radar; and night observation devices such as Starlight Scopes* to amplify available night light. Supplemented by reconnaissance and intelligence data, these devices helped provide timely information on enemy locations, assets, and movements.

Night Operations

(S-C-1) With Hanoi's troops mostly on the move during the hours of darkness (because of daylight vulnerability), night operations were always of crucial importance in countering enemy infiltration. In the Commando Hunt I campaign, for example, the Air Force devoted nearly 40 percent of its efforts to night interdiction strikes.⁺ During 1969, the Air Force's improvement of its night capabilities was one of the major advances in air effectiveness, particularly the spectacular truck-killing performance of the newer gunships with their highly effective night equipment.⁶⁷

(S-C-1) In addition, to overcome operational problems at night and in bad weather, the Air Force at the end of 1969 was using artificial light and Combat Spot techniques. Two basic types of artificial light were available: flares of various kinds, and the illuminator on the AC-119K. Flares were carried by gunships or by

*A device which gathers or intensifies available light at night (stars, moon) permitting visual acquisition of enemy movement or activities.

⁺See Figure 3.

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by F-100 and F-4 lead aircraft standing night alert. The A-37 had not been modified for this mission at the end of 1969, but a study was under way to determine its feasibility. The OV-10 and O-2 FAC's were used to drop flares on occasion.⁶⁸

(~~C Sp 1~~) Combat Skyspot (MSQ-77 radar) was the primary means for delivering munitions in bad weather and was also widely used at night. To improve the night search and rescue capability, in late 1969 a Xenon floodlight, low-light-level television, and a direct viewing device were being installed in the HH-53B helicopters at Udorn.⁶⁹ In its continuing efforts to acquire an improved night attack system in SEA, the Air Force also began to modify 16 B-57's, for night operations or in poor weather against fairly heavy defenses.⁷⁰ This project, named Tropic Moon, entailed installation and testing of highly sophisticated equipment, but the refitted aircraft were not to be available until 1970.⁷¹

(~~C Sp 1~~) In sum, the effort of the Air Force over the years, to get equipment that would address the problems peculiar to Vietnam, was meeting with success. But, ironically, it was doing so in the face of two dilemmas. The first was that the war in Vietnam was geared to "winding down," and budgetary decisions had to be made in terms of the future not of the past.* Important Air Force equipment requirements, long starved by Vietnam needs, were now presenting their demands. Strategic requirements, especially under the new "one major, two minor wars" strategy, had to come first. The second dilemma was that under the imperatives of Vietnamization, more and more equipment would be turned over to the Vietnamese, but the sophisticated new equipment could not be handled by the South Vietnamese Air Force.

Air Power Supports Guerrilla Warfare

(~~C Sp 1~~) An application of air power during 1969 in northern Laos also merits particular notice. For some time in this area of operations known as Barrel Roll, USAF units provided air support

*Thus, on the critically important item of gunships, the Secretary of the Air Force told Secretary Laird in mid-October 1969 that "while gunships have proved to be effective truck killers, we believe we have responded as well as the tight budget will allow in providing gunships to SEA..further expenditures for gunships must be traded off against other high priority needs of the Air Force."
[JCS 2472/538 (S), 13 Oct 69]

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for Royal Laotian Government (RLG) forces fighting a protracted see-saw battle with North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and local pro-Communist (Pathet Lao) forces. RLG forces included some 38,000 Meo guerrillas, led by General Vang Pao and trained and managed by CAS.* These forces had long depended heavily on air support to compensate for their deficiencies as regular ground troops and for artillery they did not have.

(S-SP-1) In late 1968, enemy advances had become so serious that Premier Souvanna Phouma was considering negotiations which would have stopped the important U.S. air interdiction effort in southern Laos.† Then, in the spring of 1969 the enemy went on the offensive in Laos for the first time during the rainy season, making further advances. As a result of these developments and in response to personal requests from Souvanna Phouma and General Vang Pao for "massive" air support, the largest tactical air commitment ever used for friendly ground forces in Laos was conceived by the U.S. Embassy. Designated Operation Rain Dance, it provided the RLG guerrilla army led by General Vang Pao with an average of 33 Seventh Air Force sorties daily for 22 days, from 17 March to 7 April.‡ Souvanna Phouma relaxed previous restrictions against bombing certain major targets in the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) area, even though this meant the destruction of numerous Pathet Lao villages and towns from which hundreds of civilians had to be evacuated.‡ A major Rain Dance objective was to destroy the large

*"Controlled American Source"--cover designation for CIA.

†The U.S. Ambassador to Laos, G. McMurtrie Godley, General Abrams, and General Brown agreed that the enemy effort in northern Laos was directed toward forcing the Government of Laos to have the U.S. suspend its bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail. [CHECO Rprt (S), The Air War in Vietnam, 1968-1969, App II "Interview with General George S. Brown, Commander 7AF."]

‡Politically, this was also a serious move for Souvanna Phouma to take. These areas had for years been Pathet Lao headquarters and, as head of the tripartite government that has ruled Laos since the Geneva convention in 1962, Souvanna was, and is, committed to welcoming the Pathet Lao's return to participation in his government, not to pushing them farther into the arms of the North Vietnamese.

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complex of enemy headquarters and storage areas in his PDJ sanctuary. In its first 4 days, the Air Force flying 261 sorties, and the Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF), flying 43 sorties, produced impressive results. On 3 April 40 F-105 and F-4 sorties destroyed Xieng Khouangville, a key Pathet Lao headquarters.⁷³

(~~C-1~~) The heavy air support in Rain Dance was universally considered a key factor in the improvement of the RLG position by 7 April, when the operation ended. The U.S. Ambassador referred to Rain Dance as a "USAF operation" and spoke of the "splendid cooperation of Seventh Air Force."⁷⁴ According to a senior CAS official, Rain Dance was "the first significant impact of the USAF on our operations" and, as subsequent events indicated, a prelude to Air Force support for future operations.⁷⁵

(~~C-1~~) When the enemy's spring drive greatly intensified, leaving the Laotian government in a state of near panic, Vang Pao considered moving his whole Meo people to Thailand, and CAS/Seventh Air Force cooperation did indeed accelerate. Gen. Oudone Sannaikone, the Chief of the Laotian General Staff, personally visited the U.S. Air Attache's office in Vientiane on 15 July with the appeal that "only airpower can stop the enemy's present offensive to take over the government."⁷⁶ The newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to Laos, G. McMurtrie Godley, proposed to step up the air campaign, and the Secretary of State agreed that "continued use of airpower is the best feasible military approach to the crisis."⁷⁷ The State Department's acceptance of the importance of air power to salvage a rapidly deteriorating situation spurred plans for increased air support, soon implemented in Operation About Face. This operation, initiated in late July, aimed at reestablishing the RLG presence in the fringes of the Plaine des Jarres. U.S. and RLAF aircraft continually struck critical choke points on Routes 7 and 61 to keep the roads impassable, and some 30 aircraft a day attacked enemy truck parks and storage areas. During the day RLAF T-28's provided cover for advancing forces, and at night AC-47 Spooky gunships--supplemented by A-1's, A-26's, and F-4's--provided protection.⁷⁸ Total attack sorties in the Barrel Roll area reached 3,620 in July, climbed to 4,664 in August, and to an all-time high of 5,133 in October.⁷⁹

(~~C-1~~) Heavy rains initially hampered About Face operations, but in late August reports indicated the enemy had beat a hasty retreat, abandoning equipment and suffering heavy casualties. The key

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factor in this turnabout was "extremely effective airpower." By mid-September, friendly forces were occupying the Plaine des Jarres for the first time in 7 years.⁸⁰ Some 18,000 civilians fled from enemy-held areas to the government's side. Most important, the Laotian government did not collapse as had seemed likely, obviating the consequences this might have had for bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail. As the U.S. Ambassador noted in a message to the Secretary of State:

We may never know precisely the degree to which air contributed in sustaining the war-weary, outnumbered and out-gunned FAR forces. But all concerned here in Vietiane are convinced that without USAF's remarkable effort the enemy would still be maintaining his pressure and from far, far, deeper in friendly territory.

While we are not certain, we believe that damage to the enemy probably represents the best results per sortie by tactical air in SEA. This, due not only to the skill of USAF pilots, crews, and support elements, but also in large measure to the outstanding performance of 7/13AF targeting where all sources intelligence was used so effectively in selecting the most lucrative targets.⁸¹

General Vang Pao was very explicit in his appraisal of the air role, in a 7 October letter to General Brown:

Operation About Face could have barely begun had it not been for many and excellent United States Air Force strikes that overwhelmed the enemy and forced him to flee in terror. The fighting for the Plain of Jars would have been a long and sanguine struggle had the enemy not been battered and demoralized by the air-strikes, and About Face is therefore a victory for the United States Air Force as well as for the Lao Government.

(S) General Brown in turn generously stressed the equal significance of USAF/CIA cooperation, of which he was one of the main architects. Commenting on the recent "unique application of air power," he noted that the CIA-directed counterinsurgency

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effort in northern Laos had received "the most concentrated tactical air support since the USAF first arrived in Southeast Asia." The unprecedented integration "of sophisticated tactical air support with indigenous unconventional operations has resulted in what might be called 'guerrillas with air superiority'." 82

(~~SECRET~~) Aside from political and operational results, these air actions in Laos had theoretical implications for the use of air power. Given the Nixon administration's policy of wanting to "lower its profile" and cut expenses, while still retaining power and influence, this type of operation could well have applicability elsewhere.* In any event it was true, as the U.S. Ambassador to Laos observed, that in About Face an enemy division was wiped out while U.S. elements lost only three killed, and that the U.S. military effort in Laos cost one-fifth the money it took to run a U.S. Army division in South Vietnam. 83 Operation About Face demonstrated that the U.S. commitment to support a country under attack could be limited to advice and support by air units and not require U.S. ground forces. Moreover, as the Assistant Air Attache in Vientiane observed, disengagement by U.S. forces could be carried out in a few days if necessary and, because of the clandestine nature of the commitment, could be done without loss of face. 84

(~~SECRET~~) In the view of one Air Force general on the scene, these facts meant that U.S. domestic opposition to forces overseas (likely in the case of ground troops, whose actions constitute a highly visible, and hence vulnerable target) might be less in regard to air power because it could be much more flexible and invisible. Air units could be based in one country and operate over another, or be readily transferred from one area to another, from one type of operation to another--all in a much more ambiguous manner. Within a foreign country--since it did not occupy ground or capture populations--air power would not directly threaten internal political and economic matters. Being able to "stand off" in this manner, made air power a very versatile tool: it could be used in greater or lesser intensity to threaten or "slap the wrist" of an enemy, or it could be completely

*As suggested in Kenneth Sams, et al., Air Support of Counter-insurgency in Laos (Project CHECO Special Rprt, 10 Nov 69), p 178, and illustrated subsequently by the 1970 Cambodian venture.

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turned off, because in most wars of this kind the bulk of it belonged to the United States. Finally, although current U.S. policy emphasized wider use of indigenous forces, there were risks in building up too strong and ambitious indigenous military forces. U.S. air power could be used in conjunction with such forces as General Vang Pao's without running the risk that a powerful indigenous army might get out of control.⁸⁵

(S) To summarize, although military operations as a whole declined in 1969 in SEA, air operations continued to play a critical and effective role. The highly destructive impact of air operations against the enemy in 1968, added to the cumulative expertise perfected through the years, carried over and paved the way for enhanced air effectiveness in 1969. The resources formerly expended on bombing North Vietnam had remained almost intact and were channeled into more intensified close air support in South Vietnam and into heightened interdiction efforts in Laos. Both operations worked very efficiently to block effective enemy action in South Vietnam--the first by preventing him from undertaking major combat activity, and the second by depriving him of delivery in SVN of needed resources. New efforts were developed to improve air/guerrilla tactics in peripheral areas such as Laos.

(S) Above all, the continued wide role of air operations dovetailed with the new administration's aim of lowering both the U.S. profile and American casualties. Air action over Laos, for example, effectively furthered the U.S. security position but, due to its largely secret nature, did not arouse domestic political repercussions. Even more important, air power was being used in a highly successful manner against enemy ground forces in South Vietnam, thereby keeping down U.S. ground forces losses. As General Abrams said, "basically what we are doing is trying to run up enemy casualties with our firepower, and the biggest weight of firepower comes from tactical air. And we also want to keep our losses down, again by tactical air."⁸⁶ When it came to priorities, low U.S. casualties took precedence even over budget cutting. Asked his views on proposed air reductions, General Brown had pointed out: "Since we have it, and if its use will reduce American casualties, it will be used. Reduction of Arc Light will save dollars, but that's not a winning argument when the other side of the case is made on reduction of casualties."⁸⁷

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IV. VIETNAMIZATION: PRIORITY POLICY

(~~SECRET~~) While substantially improving the effectiveness of its combat operations in Southeast Asia, the Air Force--like the other services--faced an equally demanding task, Vietnamization, which General Brown declared in late 1969 "equal in importance" to the Seventh Air Force combat mission.¹ Indeed, it became apparent² during the year that the buildup of the South Vietnamese armed forces to take over more combat responsibility had become a primary interest of the U.S. Government.*

(~~SECRET~~) Efforts to step up RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (I&M) began in the last days of the Johnson Administration. Particularly after the 1 November bombing halt, Washington officials believed that a strong RVNAF would strengthen the U.S. position in the expected negotiations.² Since the existing Phase I stage of the I&M program was too slow and inadequate to produce such a force, General Abrams proposed moving faster toward Phase II objectives. On 9 November 1968 he forwarded to the JCS a plan recommending a buildup of Saigon's forces to 877,895 men (compared to the 855,594 target in the October plan) by the end of fiscal year 1971. He also suggested that all units be activated by June 1972 instead of 1974, and an earlier transfer of U.S. military assets in South Vietnam to the Vietnamese. Although Secretary Clifford favored General Abrams' proposal,³ final decision would await the inauguration of the new president.

(U) The South Vietnamese, aware of the direction of U.S. planning since late 1968 and of the uncertainties contingent on negotiations in Paris, in late December and early January 1969 expressed their willingness to take over a greater share of the war, permitting some U.S. forces to withdraw. President Thieu was reportedly anxious to make such a proposal as a farewell gesture to President Johnson before he left office.⁴ No formal proposal was made, however, until the new administration could be sounded out.

*For a comparison of USAF/VNAF strike sorties in calendar years 1968 and 1969, see Figure 6.

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~~TOP SECRET~~The Nixon Vietnamization Plan

(TS-Op 1) As noted in Chapter I, President Nixon immediately undertook a review of the entire Vietnam war,* and initiated a discussion of alternative Vietnam strategy options. At the same time, the President directed a review of the U.S. military posture, taking into account various budget levels and strategies, and the security and foreign policy implications of each. This review led, after long debate, to promulgation of a new strategic plan whereby the United States would be prepared to fight one major and two minor wars, instead of the two major and one minor conflicts previously projected. Behind this wide-ranging reappraisal by the new administration, budget considerations had been primary, but continuing domestic pressure to get the U.S. out of Vietnam was also an important factor. In this connection, President Nixon and his advisors were immediately faced with mounting evidence that fruitful negotiations with North Vietnam--the other option for ending the war--were unlikely. It was against this background that the President was shaping another U.S. option for resolving the Vietnam conflict: Vietnamization.

(TS-Op 2) The President proceeded with care and deliberation in his Vietnamization planning. In early March he sent Secretary of Defense Laird to Saigon to warn South Vietnamese officials against making premature statements about U.S. withdrawal before this was shown to be feasible. The past administration having had a very low credibility in Vietnam policy with the U.S. public, Mr. Nixon was determined to be careful in his promises and to proceed cautiously in order to win public support for his Vietnam policy.⁵ He particularly wanted to first make sure that the South Vietnamese forces could be prepared to take over more war responsibility and to avoid giving the Paris negotiators any impression the United States was withdrawing under pressure.

(TS-Op 1) On 10 April, after careful study and planning, the President's decision to make Vietnamization a key administration policy was formalized with the issuance of NSSM 36, "Vietnamizing the War."⁺ In it the President asked his advisors to prepare a plan to Vietnamize the war on the basis of four alternative timetables (18, 24, 30, and 42 months), with a starting date of 1 July 1969. The

*NSSM 1, "Kissinger's 29 Questions," 21 January.

⁺See also Chapter I.

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goal was to turn over responsibility for all aspects of the war to South Vietnam with the United States continuing in a support and advisory role only.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) In commenting on General Abrams' accelerated Phase II plan in November 1968,⁶ the Joint Chiefs of Staff had previously reacted cautiously toward further RVNAF buildups and again were circumspect during a discussion of it with Secretary Laird on 9 April 1969.⁷ They believed the I&M program had already been accelerated to the maximum extent possible and pointed out that training of SVN personnel to use transferred U.S. equipment remained the pacing factor for unit activations. They also feared that the turnover of equipment would erode U.S. force strength throughout the world unless funds were provided to buy replacements.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) In their subsequent formal response to the NSSM 36 Vietnamization plan,⁸ the JCS stated that total U.S. withdrawals could approximate 244,000 if the U.S. role were limited to reserve, combat support, combat service support, and the advisory function. The JCS, along with MACV and CINCPAC, favored a residual U.S. force of some 306,000. OSD thought that U.S. withdrawals could go as high as 325,000, and some of its officials proposed a residual force of 225,000. OSD favored an earlier timetable for withdrawals, the JCS a longer one. There were other differences in views. The JCS thought 50,000 U.S. troops could be withdrawn from South Vietnam in 1969, OSD proposed 82,000. Unlike OSD and some State Department experts, the Joint Chiefs were opposed to any appreciable reductions in air power, insisting air support for South Vietnam would be a critical factor in countering enemy action as U.S. forces withdrew. All parties agreed, however, that even when totally implemented, the accelerated Phase II plan would produce a force designed to cope only with a residual VC insurgency threat (i.e., after North Vietnamese forces had withdrawn), not with the existing combined NVN/VC threat.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) Just before he had received the initial report on Vietnamization, Secretary Laird on 21 May sent a memo to the JCS and service secretaries, expressing concern about progress on the plan and stressing the need to meet the President's requirement for it. He added that he wanted them to consider balanced "slices" as well as combat units in their withdrawal plans and to include out-of-country forces and tactical air forces, "instead of assuming as has been done, that these would remain at current levels." He

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said he didn't want to prejudge the situation, but pointed out there were already budget constraints on the air effort. In their initial report, forwarded on 24 May, the JCS took note of Mr. Laird's additional comments, saying they would address them in detail in their final report. But they made it clear they were strongly against the Secretary's proposals since their implementation would lessen support for the RVNAF when the latter needed it most.

(S-C-4) While this policy debate proceeded, another important development along the road to Vietnamization occurred on 8 June when Presidents Nixon and Thieu met on Midway Island to discuss the latter's proposals for greatly strengthening the RVNAF. These proposals called for an increase in Saigon's forces by 170,000 men, improved living standards for the military, and the acquisition of sophisticated equipment including F-4's, C-130's, and air defense missiles for the VNAF. At this meeting the two Presidents agreed and announced publicly that the United States would withdraw 25,000 men. Following the meetings at Midway, Secretary Laird requested General Abrams and the American Embassy in Saigon to comment on Mr. Thieu's proposals. These were forwarded to CINCPAC on 27 June and in turn to JCS, who submitted comments and recommendations to Secretary Laird on 28 July.

(S-C-4) The Joint Chiefs were skeptical about the Thieu plan. They observed that its financial aspects would be highly inflationary and that the troop increase could exceed South Vietnam's manpower resources. They suggested a more modest increase of 117,000 men, including 3,200 airmen to provide more logistical and base support for the VNAF. They also viewed the South Vietnamese request for additional sophisticated equipment as impractical because of the shortage of skilled manpower to maintain and operate it. Above all, the JCS did not agree with the implication in the proposals that the RVNAF, with this further modernization and expansion, could take over major responsibility for fighting both the VC and the North Vietnamese. The JCS pointed out that the I&M Program had been designed only to enable Saigon to counter a residual insurgency, after North Vietnamese forces had withdrawn. They felt that, even with the proposed new strength, South Vietnam's forces would not be able to take over the major fighting responsibility against the current threat,⁹ particularly in view of such problems as inadequate leadership and desertion.

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(S-C-1) But the RVNAF's capability to take over all the fighting was precisely Mr. Laird's major objective. He disposed of the previous goals of the I&M Program, as well as the equally important assumption of prior withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces in one paragraph of a 12 August memo to the JCS and service secretaries:

Earlier RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Programs were designed to provide a balanced and self-sufficient RVNAF force capable of meeting insurgency requirements, and were based on the assumption that U.S., Allied and North Vietnamese forces would withdraw from Vietnam. Now the object of Vietnamization is to transfer progressively to the Republic of Vietnam greatly increased responsibility for all aspects of the war, assuming current levels of North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong forces remain in the Republic of Vietnam, and assuming U.S. force redeployments continue.

Accordingly, I desire that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Service Secretaries review the current RVNAF modernization and improvement program, and other on-going and planned actions to enhance RVNAF capabilities, with the goal of developing an RVNAF with the capability to cope successfully with the combined Viet Cong-North Vietnamese Army threat.¹⁰

(S-C-2) In the final interagency report on the plan for Vietnamizing the war,¹¹ forwarded by Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, JCS, to Mr. Laird on 29 August, the Joint Chiefs recommended that Vietnamization should proceed on what they called a "cut and try" basis, i.e., depend on periodic assessments of GVN political stability, RVNAF and pacification progress, Vietnamese attitudes, and the enemy situation. To overlook such developments and proceed with Vietnamization according to a deliberate timetable, as requested, could imperil the essential U.S. objective, namely, the right of the people of SVN to self-determination.¹² While agreeing that the goal of Vietnamization should be to strengthen Saigon forces sufficiently so they could handle a combined NVN/VC threat with minimum U.S. support, the JCS stated that the existing expansion and modernization provided a capability for handling only a residual insurgency threat.

~~TOP SECRET~~Change in Mission Statement

(TS Op 1) During this same period when Secretary Laird was pushing for a drastic increase in South Vietnam's combat responsibility, he was taking steps to decrease the U.S. combat role there by changing the mission statement of U.S. forces in Southeast Asia. He began by asking the JCS on 2 July 1969 for "a broad and deep reassessment of our military strategy and the employment of our land, sea, and air forces in SEA," noting the nation was confronted with a series of unique and important trends which make such a reassessment desirable, "perhaps even mandatory." He cited General Vo Nguyen Giap's 22 June speech which he felt, "outlined a change in degree, if not a change in kind, of NVN strategy," particularly the North Vietnamese general's emphasis on conservation of force and protracted war. He quoted General Abrams' 29 June message to General McConnell remarking on the lowered NVN infiltration activity, and noted NVN's previous heavy losses in men and materiel. He pointed to the success of the Vietnamization program, saying "the trend is clearly and markedly towards the South Vietnamese assuming major new responsibilities for their own security." He indicated the clear budgetary guidelines governing spending for SEA, and finally quoted from two recent presidential statements:

"We have ruled out attempting to impose a purely military solution on the battlefield."
(May 14, address to the nation)

"As far as the orders to General Abrams are concerned, they are very simply this: He is to conduct this war with a minimum of American casualties."
(Press Conference, 19 June)¹³

(TS Op 1) The JCS discussed the possibility of a change in the mission statement with Secretary Laird on 14 July. The new mission, as suggested by Secretary Laird, was "to allow RVN to determine their future without outside interference" and to assist the RVNAF to take over a greater share of the combat operations against the subversive forces that would deny them self-determination. In pursuit of this new goal, the United States would: provide maximum assistance in advancing RVNAF capabilities as soon as possible; continue military support for pacification and security programs;

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conduct military operations to accelerate RVNAF improvement, provide security for U.S. forces, and reduce flow of men and supplies to the enemy in SVN; and maintain plans for a comprehensive air and naval campaign in Vietnam. After consultations with CINCPAC and MACV, the Joint Chiefs rejected such a change as fraught with too many dangers. They specifically favored retaining the old mission, "to defeat externally directed and supported communist subversion and aggression." They said the suggested new one assumed a change in political goals and resulting change in the military mission.¹⁴

(~~TS Op 1~~) In regard to Secretary Laird's request for a broad reassessment of U.S. strategy in SEA, the JCS found the commands or services felt there was no need for a change. CINCPAC and MACV argued that the enemy's fundamental objective remained the same and that his reported withdrawals were probably dictated by a temporary need to regroup due to losses, weather, and the like. General McConnell supported this position. He suggested there had been insufficient time to assess the military situation to justify changing the mission, and that reassessment of enemy strategy indicated no reason to change U.S. strategy.¹⁵ In their reply to Secretary Laird, the JCS suggested that if U.S. political goals for Vietnam were changing, then the JCS should be provided those modified objectives as a basis for deriving military strategy.¹⁶

(~~TS Op 1~~) When Secretary Laird reiterated his previous views in another memo on 28 July, adding that the current mission statement¹⁷ did not conform with either General Abrams' current tactics or the President's explicit views, the JCS still resisted, to a degree. In a 30 July memo, they said the new draft mission statement was considered suitable, provided the President wanted to modify the objectives on which military directives and operations in SEA were based. They reiterated the previously voiced concern that a publicized mission change could jeopardize the Administration's credibility, since no real change in the pattern of operations would follow it.¹⁸ On 15 August, Secretary Laird informed the CJCS that, after discussion with the President, it was his judgment that the current mission statement did not reflect the President's policy guidelines nor the operational realities in SEA. Therefore, he directed updating

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the mission statement and its inclusion in appropriate documents. *19

(~~TS-C-1~~) This new guidance, put through in spite of contrary advice from some of its highest military and civilian advisors, amply demonstrated that the Nixon administration was in earnest about its Vietnamization policy. Above all, the insistence that the RVNAF would assume responsibility for the combined threat was a serious, fundamental move toward genuine Vietnamization.

(~~TS-C-1~~) The third and last of the administration's major Vietnamization policy innovations of 1969 came later in the year, in November, when Secretary Laird directed planning "to create a self-sustained RVNAF" capable of countering the present VC/NVA threat.²⁰ This required radically intensified efforts by the services to train and equip South Vietnamese forces (see Phase III planning below). Secretary Laird himself acknowledged the impact this directive would have on military planners when he observed in his 10 November memo to the Chairman of the JCS that he was "fully aware that Phase III represents a major change in the thrust of our efforts" at improving and modernizing the RVNAF.²¹

*The mission change may have had some of its roots in domestic political concerns. On 24 May 69 Sen. J. William Fulbright had written to Secretary Laird asking for the precise text of the order under which General Abrams conducted military operations immediately prior to the November 1 bombing halt, any change in that order by the Johnson Administration after the bombing halt, and the text of the order currently in force. Secretary Laird replied that there had been no change, that the mission of both administrations was to defend RVN against externally directed subversion and aggression. When Senator Fulbright again inquired about this on 16 October, the JCS wrote back (JCS 2472/496-1) via the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs (ISA), saying current broad guidance was oriented primarily to Vietnamization of the war. This thesis also seems borne out by a request from Dr. Kissinger of 7 July, asking JCS "if it were possible semantically" to change the guidance to COMUSMACV regarding prosecution of the conflict in SEAsia. [Memo (TS-S), Col E. N. Guinn, Deputy Dir for Plans and Ploy to CSAF, subj: Statement of Mission of U. S. Forces in Southeast Asia, JCS 2339/306, 30 Jul 69.]

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V. THE VNAF IMPROVEMENT AND MODERNIZATION PROGRAM

(S-C-1) American efforts to improve the South Vietnamese Air Force had been going on ever since the U.S. Air Force had taken over the air training and advisory role from the French in 1956. This activity was accelerated during the early sixties with the USAF Advisory Group and the Vietnamese working together to greatly improve VNAF organization and operational capability. In 1968 the VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program was formalized and greatly stepped up. In 1969 I&M efforts were doubly intensified.

(S-C-1) The essence of the Air Force's I&M task in 1969 was to meet the compressed requirements, piled one upon the other during that year, so as to increase VNAF force capabilities in accordance with the Nixon Administration's "Vietnamization" policies. The greatly intensified I&M mission presented staggering tasks for all the services, but was especially difficult for the U.S. Air Force for several reasons. The Vietnamese Air Force was at least 2 years behind the ARVN in ability to take on new responsibilities, ARVN having benefited from a large expansion in 1967 not shared by the VNAF.¹ The highly technical demands of some aspects of aviation training and the level of skills required in aviation logistics and management entailed more lead time than most other training, even under ordinary circumstances. Teaching such skills quickly to the Vietnamese, many of whom lacked a technological background--and language problems--were other factors greatly complicating the Air Force's task. Thus, while VNAF personnel strength almost doubled in 1969, most of the new men had to undergo intensive training before new squadrons could be activated. The turnover of U.S. equipment and bases to the VNAF, organizing a command structure capable of controlling an expanded, 40-squadron VNAF--all within the short time allotted--were some of the other elements making the task a monumental one.

Phase II Planning

(S-C-1) In October 1968 MACV had submitted its proposed Phase II plan for the VNAF, calling for twice as many squadrons by the end of 1974 (from 20 to 40) and increasing its strength from approximately 17,500 to 36,000 men. The force structure would include: 14 helicopter, 9 fighter, 6 transport, 7 liaison, and 2 gunship

squadrons plus 1 reconnaissance, and 1 training squadron. With the changed situation after the bombing halt in November, this Phase II planning with minor exceptions, was quickly approved by Deputy Secretary Nitze on 16 December. By 9 November, as already noted, General Abrams had submitted proposals for a still faster buildup, an accelerated Phase II plan. Essentially the same as the original Phase II, this revised plan for accomplishing the various tasks advanced the schedule to 1972 instead of 1974. In December Mr. Clifford commented favorably on this proposal and asked that a new, compressed schedule be prepared for the activation of South Vietnamese military units, together with a plan for transferring necessary equipment from identified U. S. units.²

~~(S-C-1)~~ On 26 December MACV transmitted to CINCPAC, an accelerated Phase II activation schedule, a list of equipment for the accelerated activation, plans for transferring necessary equipment from identified U.S. units, and plans for U.S. units which would no longer be required or effective after transfer of equipment.³ This plan was not acted on during the first quarter of 1969 while the new administration wrestled with larger problems and decisions. The proposal was, however, finally approved on 28 April by Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard, who stressed that "providing needed equipment for the RVNAF is...of greatest importance."⁴ On 24 May MACV submitted a new unit authorization listing an activation schedule for the South Vietnamese armed forces, receiving approval for the same from JCS on 12 June.⁵

Equipment

~~(S-C-1)~~ Under the new schedule MACV's plans for the Vietnamese Air Force called for activating all new units by December 1971, with turnover of equipment completed in 90 days.* Aircraft transferred in 1969 were the O-1, A-37, A-1, AC-47, and UH-1. Some 400 aircraft were authorized in January 1969; at the end of the year authorizations were 425, with 451 in the inventory.⁶ Helicopters were a major exception to the rule that U. S. units would turn over equipment to their RVN service counterparts; the U. S. Army was directed to transfer its helicopters to the VNAF.⁷ This decision stemmed from General Westmoreland's 1968 realignment of the VNAF helicopter mission to give airmobile support to the ARVN. It proved highly successful, the realignment also demonstrating the

*See schedule in Figure 7.

VNAF IMPROVEMENT AND MODERNIZATION PLAN

	PRE I & M FORCES			ADDITIVE FORCES				TOTAL FORCE		FY SQ ACTIVATION				
	SQ	UE	ACFT AUTH	PHASE I		PHASE II		FY 2/72		68 ¹	69	70	71	72
				SQ	ACFT AUTH	SQ	ACFT AUTH	SQ	ACFT AUTH					
TACTICAL														
F-5	1	18	18					1	18	1				
A-1/A-37 ²	3	18	54			1	18	4	72		3			1
A-1	1	18	18			2	36	3	54	1				2
A-1	1	24	24					1	24	1				
HELICOPTER														
H-34/UH-1H ²	4	20 ³	80		44			4	124		4			
UH-1H				4	124 ⁶	4	124 ⁶	8	248				8	
H-34	1	25	25					1	25	1				
CH-47						1	16	1	16				1	
TRANSPORT														
C-47	1	16	16					1	16	1				
C-119	1	16	16					1	16	1				
C-123						3	48	3	48					3
SAM ⁴						1	10	1	10		1			
GUNSHIP														
AC-47 ²	1	16	16			1	16	2	32		1			1
LIAISON														
O-1/U-17 ⁸						1	30	1	30					1
O-1/U-17 ⁹						1	25	1	25					1
O-1/U-17 ¹⁰						1	20	1	20					1
O-1/U-17	4	30 ⁷	120					4	120	4				
TRAINING														
U-17 ⁵	1	16	16	-1	-16									
T-41				1	18			1	18	1				
RECON														
RF-5A							6		6					
EC-47		1	1						1					
RC-47		3	3						3					
U-6A		8	8						8					
TOTAL	20	-	415	4	170	16	349	40	934	12	9	0	12	7

¹ FY 68 or Prior

² Aircraft converted in FY 69.

³ A-1 sqs to A-37s

⁴ H-34 sqs to UH-1s

⁵ 1 C-47 Sq to AC-47

⁶ UE increases to 31 in FY 70.

⁷ Special Air Mission, 4 VC-47, 4 UH-1, 2 U-17.

⁸ Conversion to T-41s in FY 3/70.

⁹ 80 Acft are transports, 32 are gunships, 12 Command & Control.

¹⁰ 20 - O-1 and 10 - U-17 aircraft. UE changes to 20 O-1 and

5 U-17's in FY 71.

¹¹ 30 O-1s. Eight U-17's to be reassigned to Sq. in FY 71

¹² 25 O-1s. Seven U-17's to be reassigned to Sq in FY 71

¹³ 20 O-1's. Five U-17's to be reassigned to Sq in FY 71

Figure 7

Source: USAF Mgt Summary, Southeast Asia, 9 Jan 1970.

doctrinal point that successful assault operations could be conducted with air assets under control of an air force as well as an army.⁸

(S-C-1) Among the major accomplishments in 1969 was the conversion of four helicopter squadrons (CH-34's) to UH-1H's. In the early part of 1969, the Department of the Army (DA) had suggested substituting CH-34's in place of the UH-1H's as planned, but this was disapproved by MACV and CINCPAC.⁹ At about the same time, the JCS approved a MACV proposal to divert 60 UH-1 helicopters to the VNAF from scheduled deliveries to the U.S. Army in Vietnam (USARV) in order to accelerate the VNAF Phase II Program. As of 30 September, 85 UH-1H helicopters had been delivered, and all four squadrons possessed authorized unit equipment (UE) of 20 to 21 aircraft. Subsequently, the increasing availability of VNAF helicopter pilots completing CONUS training and follow-on helicopter deliveries permitted the beginning of a program to expand the squadron UE's from 20 to 31 aircraft, which was to be the standard for all VNAF UH-1H squadrons.¹⁰

(S-C-1) The VNAF equipment buildup also included converting part of the fighter force (three units--the 516th, 520th, and 524th Fighter Squadrons) from the old propeller-driven Douglas A-1E aircraft to the new and modern jet-powered A-37B aircraft during 1969. The equipment began arriving in November 1968 and by May 1969 the full complement of 54 A-37B aircraft was on hand. By June, all three of the squadrons had passed their Operational Readiness Inspections (ORI's). Another goal was to convert one transport squadron (C-47) to a combat squadron (AC-47). On 30 June 1969, the Vietnamese took delivery of their first five AC-47 gunships, assigning them to the 47th Transportation Squadron, which was then redesignated the 417th Combat Squadron and relieved of its transport mission. The squadron UE was 15 aircraft; transfer of the remaining gunships (16) was completed by the end of August. As part of the arrangement, the VNAF returned to the U.S. Air Force eight C-47's previously used by the squadron. By September, the squadron had completed AC-47 conversion training and was declared operationally ready after VNAF-IG inspection on 6 and 7 October.¹¹ The average flying time for the squadron in late 1969 totaled more than 6,000 hours, and several pilots had logged twice that in the C-47. Advisory personnel were unanimous in their favorable assessment of the squadron, a hopeful sign in light of the fact that gunship action was the one operational air activity scheduled to increase after USAF activity phased down.¹²

(S Op 1) At the end of 1968, the VNAF had a serious shortage of O-1 aircraft (having only 52 out of an authorized 80) urgently needed for ALO/FAC operations. Under the I&M program, the Seventh Air Force was to transfer its O-1's to VNAF, but delivery was held up due to the command's failure to receive O-2 replacements. To meet this requirement, CINCPACAF on 20 May asked and received Headquarters USAF approval to transfer 42 O-1 aircraft to the VNAF at a rate of 10 per month, June through August, and two per month, September through February 1970. This entailed some temporary degradation for Seventh Air Force but was acceptable in view of the importance of the I&M program. By October 1969, all but 10 of the aircraft had been transferred, and they were scheduled for delivery by February 1970.¹³

Training

(S Op 1) General Abrams admitted "the toughest and longest training job we have with Vietnamization is the one the VNAF faces."¹⁴ The problem was to teach the small Vietnamese Air Force as quickly as possible how to perform tasks formerly done by a U.S. force of approximately 60,000 men and 1,200 aircraft, as well as those previously carried out by Army rotary wing pilots and Marine/Navy airmen.¹⁵ There could be little doubt that the eventual combat capability of the VNAF--a key factor in the whole Vietnamization program--depended directly on the success or failure of the I&M training, which was to become the largest such single military assistance program (MAP) effort in USAF history.

(S Op 1) The accelerated Phase II schedule called for more than 1,400 Vietnamese pilots by fiscal year 1972, almost all trained in the United States by the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Army (for helicopters). In addition, more than 6,000 maintenance personnel were scheduled for training in the U.S. and Vietnam.¹⁶ Training of the 15,000 men recruited during 1969 came first, and those destined for helicopter units were given the highest priority by MACV. Fixed wing training came next, and support training, third.¹⁷ The U.S. Army had responsibility for conducting a 32-week helicopter pilot training course in CONUS. In early 1969 questions arose on how best to train the required number of helicopter pilots. CINCPAC resolved it by endorsing a plan to train 1,475 VNAF pilots between October 1969 and September 1970 by increasing the U.S. training base to maximum capability and decreasing the number of U.S. pilots trained during the period by 2,214. CINCPAC also recommended establishing in South Vietnam a VNAF transition program and helicopter pilot

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undergraduate program when conditions and resources permitted. In early February 1969 the JCS approved these recommendations.¹⁸ They also authorized 2,440 more manpower spaces to support the VNAF helicopter mechanics training program and the use of Army rather than USAF resources for this purpose.

~~(S, Cp 1)~~ Except for O-1 pilot training conducted by the VNAF at Nha Trang, all fixed wing training for the VNAF was conducted by ATC and TAC in the United States. Primary training for pilots consisted of a 44-week course in T-28 and T-41 aircraft at Keesler AFB, Miss. After they completed this course, candidates trained in A-37's and C-47's at England AFB, La., in F-5's at Williams AFB, Ariz., and in C-119's at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio.¹⁹ Except for helicopters, the Air Force assumed primary responsibility for maintenance and support training, although from the start it had planned to develop the VNAF's capacity to train its own maintenance and support personnel.²⁰ U.S. contract engineering technicians and mobile training teams were sent to Vietnam to supplement technical school programs. Previously, USAF Mobile Training Teams had trained A-37 maintenance men when the A-1 squadrons converted to the A-37 and when the Air Force Logistics Command reorganized the VNAF Logistics Wing.²¹

~~(S, Cp 1)~~ The VNAF Air Training Center at Nha Trang Air Base expanded its enrollment and efforts at greater self-sufficiency during 1969. It operated schools for language, communications and electronics, and technical training, in addition to a flying school, general service school, and military school. The last one--along with courses given at other VNAF bases--provided basic military training for cadets, NCO's, and airmen. The general service school trained men in such functions as personnel, administration traffic control, and air police. An Air Ground Operations Course at the Air Training Center trained air liaison officers and forward air controllers. In early 1970 2,250 students were enrolled at the Center and an additional 1,050 at VNAF tactical wings. An intermediate level Command and Staff College--to improve VNAF middle level management--was being established by the end of 1969, with the first class of 39 captains and majors scheduled for graduation in March 1970.²²

~~(S, Cp 1)~~ U.S. officials constantly searched for ways to conduct more I&M training within Vietnam itself. Although it was difficult to expand in-country pilot training because of hostilities and security problems, the Advisory Group developed a fixed wing

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undergraduate pilot training program at Nha Trang to provide liaison pilots for three of the O-1 squadrons to be formed later. The VNAF also developed an Integrated Training Program whereby VNAF personnel trained on the job under Seventh Air Force personnel at bases where both were collocated. If Seventh Air Force certified the performance of such personnel, they were accepted by the VNAF. By the end of 1969, this integrated training encompassed intelligence, photo processing, civil engineering, air traffic control, medicine, and security.²³ At one point during the search for new training approaches, the JCS had suggested reducing the activity of VNAF combat squadrons so that they could be used for flying and support training. Seventh Air Force, however, disapproved this proposal since it would lower the squadrons' combat capabilities or delay their becoming operationally ready.²⁴

(S Op 1) A major problem in the VNAF I&M training program was the English language requirement. In view of the limited technological vocabulary of the Vietnamese language, and the fact that even Vietnamese instructors often introduced English technical terms in their courses, Air Force officials decided to conduct expanded I&M training in English rather than translate technical manuals and orders into Vietnamese. In doing so, they followed precedents with MAP programs for Korea, Japan, and China. However, this policy put a great strain on existing language training resources. To remedy matters, the RVNAF English Language School in Saigon and the English language program at the VNAF Training Center were expanded, and 386 airmen English instructors were obtained from the United States in March 1969. Even so, the results for pilot training in 1969 were disappointing--some 20 percent of the pilots and between 55 percent and 65 percent of the airmen were washed out over the English requirements. According to the Air Force Advisory Group (AFGP) Director of Training, some 2,000 airmen--mostly helicopter mechanics--failed in the United States training schools due to language problems. In an effort to alleviate the problem, the Air Force started remedial language programs at Lackland and Tan Son Nhut.²⁵

(S Op 1) The English language problem was so central that it was increasingly jeopardizing the entire I&M program.²⁶ As a result, planners began to shift the focus of training from the United States to Vietnam, particularly for maintenance personnel. They decided that reducing dependence on U.S. facilities would mean less cost and less time, higher morale (many airmen did not relish leaving their families for the long journey to the United States), and speedier development of VNAF self-sufficiency. To this end, 234 Vietnamese

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Air Force instructors were training in the United States during the latter part of 1969, with the aim of setting up 17 new maintenance courses at Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa, with some 2,300 students scheduled to graduate from them in 1970. Until the VNAF had completely developed their capabilities, USAF mobile training teams would monitor the training. The courses covered aircraft and weapons maintenance, civil engineering, and many other skills for a total of 40 specialties.²⁷

(S, Cp 1) Despite these increased efforts, the VNAF's experience base at the end of the year was still extremely narrow. Fifty percent of the airmen had been in service less than 12 months, 77 percent of the officer corps were lieutenants,²⁸ 25 percent of the captains and above were in training, and more than 58 percent of the enlisted men were in basic training or were unskilled.²⁹ The lengthy period required to learn aviation skills, the short time available, the low level of technical proficiency of VNAF airmen, the language problem, all slowed progress. To insure that unit activation schedules could be met required intensive efforts by USAF and VNAF planners to overcome the training problem.

VNAF Operations

(S, Cp 1) Command and control of its own aircraft was a key factor in VNAF self-sufficiency and, as a matter of high priority, Seventh Air Force set out in 1969 to upgrade the VNAF's capability to control all their assets through the Direct Air Support Centers (DASC's) and to direct all their own strikes. Seventh Air Force also sought to improve VNAF training to the point of making them capable of controlling all U.S. strikes in support of the Vietnamese ground force as well. The ultimate goal was to turn over to them the responsibility for the Tactical Air Control System (TACS) in each Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) so that USAF personnel could resume an advisory role. The United States would retain responsibility only for B-52, herbicide, resupply, and other special missions.³⁰ In order to do this, South Vietnamese and U.S. Air Force DASC and TACP (Tactical Air Control Party) teams were collocated to enable VNAF personnel to learn jobs better and eventually take them over.

(S, Cp 1) In the same way, South Vietnamese FAC proficiency was upgraded by having Seventh Air Force FAC's working with the Advisory Group. The upgrading of FAC's and Air Liaison Officers (ALO) was formalized by a MACV directive and a VNAF/Seventh

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Air Force operations order. A Joint VNAF/Seventh Air Force/AFGP plan for upgrading VNAF TACS ALO/FAC TACP's was also published in March 1969 and was followed in May by the VNAF's own plan (No. 69-14).³¹ By the end of the year substantial progress had been made. From 505 sorties flown by VNAF FAC's during January 1969, the number rose to 1,083 in December 1969. During the same period, the percentage of all Allied FAC sorties flown by the VNAF increased from 10 to 25 percent.³²

~~(S-C-1)~~ In IV Corps, where conditions had allowed more rapid progress, the South Vietnamese were by year's end operating the Direct Air Support Center with U.S. Air Force assistance only. Their FAC's had been controlling USAF and RAAF tactical air strikes on a regular fraggged basis since 1 April, and by December the VNAF had assumed responsibility for supporting the 7th and 9th ARVN Division Tactical Areas. There were 37 South Vietnamese FAC's (21 pilots and 16 observers) operating in IV CTZ, qualified to control USAF/RAAF strikes.³³

~~(S-C-1)~~ As had been anticipated, the flying and maintenance of fighter aircraft gave less trouble than any other aspect of the I&M program, due primarily to VNAF's past experience--some pilots had flown 4,000 combat missions. The VNAF did have management problems with the increased number and types of aircraft and with instrument flying and night operations. Inevitably too, with the big expansion, the Vietnamese would have to face a dilution in the quality of their previous fighter pilot standards.³⁴

Facilities and Materiel

~~(S-C-1)~~ In 1969 it became more and more obvious the RVNAF I&M Program and U.S. withdrawal plans were closely interrelated: an action taken in one program usually affected the other. At the urging of Seventh Air Force, MACV and PACAF recommended substituting a new "integrated planning" concept for the "T-Day Plans" previously governing Seventh Air Force redeployment and deactivation operations. Under the new concept, the VNAF buildup and Seventh Air Force redeployment would be closely coordinated. Higher headquarters approved the suggestion,³⁵ which covered training, personnel buildup, base support, joint planning, civil engineering, and construction, and was particularly applicable in the transfer of aircraft and bases. In the latter case a survey was made of the bases to be

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used by the VNAF and by February 1970, Da Nang, Pleiku, Bien Hoa, Binh Thuy, Soc Trang, and Tan Son Nhut had been surveyed. By October 1969 the major Seventh Air Force flying units at Nha Trang had already been relocated to other bases. Only a transition force of about 800 USAF personnel remained (out of 4,000) to operate the base until the VNAF became self-sufficient.³⁶ By early 1970 the VNAF was occupying six of these bases jointly with U.S. units. In addition to a base in each of the four corps zones, the VNAF would use Pleiku for forward deployments, Tan Son Nhut as headquarters, and Soc Trang as a spill-over from Binh Thuy for helicopters in IV Corps.³⁷

~~(S Op 1)~~ Some problems were anticipated during the period of dual occupancy when additional temporary facilities would probably have to be set up. Another problem was VNAF deficiencies in handling base support. To remedy this, Seventh Air Force and the Advisory Group planned to devote a major portion of the VNAF training program to base-support skills and to leave a USAF augmentation group at each base until VNAF personnel were trained.³⁸ To remedy logistics deficiencies, the AFGP requested that Air Force Logistics Command teams be sent to Vietnam to bring depot operations to a satisfactory level. In the course of 1969, the VNAF Air Logistics Wing at Bien Hoa, established in 1965, was converted to the VNAF Air Logistics Command. Its maintenance directorate was organized around the functions of industrial engineering, aircraft and propulsion repair, fabrications, aircraft support, and quality and production control. The depot had a 100 percent repair capability for the O-1 and U-17 aircraft and could perform Inspection and Repair as Necessary (IRAN) maintenance on the O-1. Depot-level repair was available for the J-85 engine and was programmed for T-53 engines. J-85 engine test stands were built at Binh Thuy, Nha Trang, and Da Nang, which allowed further organic maintenance for the VNAF's A-37 jets. A newly constructed precision measuring equipment laboratory was located at Bien Hoa, as well as a building for the repair of 75 different types of communications and electronic equipment.³⁹

~~(S Op 1)~~ In the typical VNAF wing organization, a "technical group" performed the basic materiel functions responsible for flight-line, periodic, and field maintenance, and for supply. A wing supply squadron account supported twenty-five to thirty thousand line items and was responsible for fuels, with all major bases stocking JP-4 and 115/145 fuel. But as of 31 December 1969 delivery of all aviation fuel was still under U.S. control, transported to the wing supply

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squadrons through U.S. supply channels. An armament and munitions squadron under the technical group handled munitions storage and loading at VNAF bases. By late 1969 the VNAF had learned to maintain the armament systems on the AC-47, A-37, F-5, A-1, O-1, U-17, and UH-1 aircraft.⁴⁰

~~(S-C, 1)~~ VNAF supply support was another problem area. Materiel chiefs in Vietnam believed the managing and programming of VNAF supply resources could best be solved by providing the Vietnamese with an automatic data processing capability; consequently, they requested a UNIVAC 1050-II in October 1969, which was approved by Headquarters USAF in December.⁴¹ To monitor overall progress and problems in the I&M Program, the Advisory Group devised a Program Management System (PMS), a simple time-phased check-list of the actions necessary to achieve specific capabilities of facilities. At all stages in the development of a PMS project, at all working levels, USAF and VNAF personnel worked together with the Joint I&M Management Committee at the top. When problems arose, the monitors could project them at Advisory Group, Seventh Air Force, and VNAF staff meetings.⁴²

Phase III I&M

~~(TS-C, 1)~~ Progression to a Phase III improvement and modernization program for RVN forces--which were to be strengthened so they possessed the capabilities to meet a combined NVN and VC threat--had been foreshadowed in Secretary Laird's memo of 12 August.* The Joint Chiefs, in both their 29 August final report on NSSM 36 and their 24 September reply to the above memo, argued that the RVNAF was incapable of assuming such responsibility. However, on 10 November, Secretary Laird directed the JCS to proceed to Phase III planning.⁴³ In turn, the JCS asked CINCPAC for an input to a plan which would "create a self-sustained RVNAF capable of countering the present VC/NVA threat," with the U.S./Free World commitment phased down to a support force by 1 July 1971 and, by continuing steps, to an advisory force (MAGG) by 1 July 1973.⁴⁴ Asked by CINCPAC for its views, MACV forwarded its comments on 29 December. It recommended an increase in VNAF manpower from 35,786 in fiscal year 1970 to 43,737 by end of fiscal year 1973. The RVN Marine Corps during the same time period would remain roughly the same size,

*See above, p 59.

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while the RVN Navy would grow from 31,645 to 37,947, and the RVN Army from 387,835 to 422,224. Phase III planning was also to give more emphasis to the requirements of South Vietnam's national police and paramilitary forces.⁴⁵

(~~S Op 1~~) As a result of Secretary Laird's 12 August guidance, a combined Seventh Air Force--USAF Advisory Group ad hoc committee was quickly formed, comprised of all directorates and staff agencies of Seventh Air Force and all divisions of the Advisory Group. They began meeting daily to discuss VNAF I&M.⁴⁶ Their activity intensified after they received Secretary Laird's Phase III planning directive (of 10 November). When Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard visited Southeast Asia in December to discuss the problems arising from the directive, General Brown informed him that Secretary Laird's guidance had forced him to make a major change in his planning and that he had gone "back to the drawing board."⁴⁷

(~~TS Op 1~~) In response to Mr. Laird's Phase III directive, USAF military planners in Vietnam and Washington during the remainder of 1969 and the first months of 1970 reworked plans for proposed VNAF force structures to meet the Defense Chief's goals. As in the case of Phase II, the limiting factor was VNAF training--with English language training still a critical factor. The force resulting from Phase III--if Seventh Air Force proposals were accepted--would probably consist of 49 or 50 squadrons with about 1,300 aircraft, including helicopters, and 44,000 personnel--an increase of 9 or 10 squadrons, 350 aircraft, and 7,500 personnel over the final Phase II force. The aim was the qualitative as well as quantitative improvement of the VNAF. Seventh Air Force's recommendations for a 20-25 percent increase in VNAF aircraft and personnel would require one more FAC and visual reconnaissance (liaison) squadron, two fighter squadrons, two C-7 airlift squadrons, five helicopter squadrons, an expansion of two of the existing airlift squadrons and eight of the fighter squadrons, and convertible gunship packages for two airlift squadrons.⁴⁸ At the end of Phase III, the VNAF would have 52 percent of the 1969 combined USAF and VNAF fixed-wing capability, and 20 percent of the USAF and U.S. Army rotary wing.⁴⁹

(~~S Op 1~~) The Phase III studies saw future RVN security being determined not only by the level of enemy activity, but also by RVNAF improvement, progress in pacification, and the size of U.S. support forces remaining in-country. One study proposal called for a transitional USAF force to step into the breach during periods of

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increased combat activity. Seventh Air Force suggested that such a force be left in Vietnam, with its eventual phasedown tied to VNAF growth and performance and enemy activity. Calculations about enemy activity could not be precisely made but, within limits, the level of security could be maintained by adjusting aircraft sortie rates. Thus, "surges" of increased flying would be possible if the logistical and manpower capabilities of the VNAF and the transition U.S. forces were enhanced. Progress in pacification would have far-reaching effects on security and was considered the basic factor which would permit the United States to safely reduce its force. Perhaps the most crucial long-term risk factor was the viability of the RVN institutions. The effect of the Lao operations on the war in South Vietnam was also recognized. With the proposed reduction in USAF interdiction forces, another essential condition for minimizing risks, Seventh Air Force stated, was that the USAF forces based in Thailand be kept at the 1969 level to continue effective and flexible interdiction of the enemy's lines of communication into RVN.⁵⁰

U. S. Air Power and Vietnamization

(~~TS~~ ~~Sp 1~~) Vietnamization implied increased South Vietnamese and decreased U.S. military forces. In 1969, 60,000 American military personnel were in fact withdrawn from South Vietnam. But aside from the equipment turned over to the VNAF, U.S. air reductions during 1969 consisted only of one B-57 squadron, two Special Operations squadrons, and two F-4 squadrons once authorized but not sent as replacements. Several factors contributed to this situation. First, while the Nixon doctrine called for giving indigenous forces a larger role, it also called for giving them support. Strengthened indigenous forces could fairly easily substitute for U.S. ground troops, as was gradually being done, but the support provided by USAF forces was a somewhat different matter. While training the VNAF to assume a larger share of support was being earnestly undertaken, the particular problems involved in aviation training made it a slow process. Moreover, there were important support functions which only the U.S. Air Force could provide. For, according to plans at the end of 1969, the VNAF would not undertake functions such as interdiction of enemy supply routes outside of Vietnam, defoliation, B-52 bombing, and possibly air defense.⁵¹

(~~TS~~ ~~Sp 1~~) Another factor limiting USAF reductions was that the thinning out of ground forces made air support all the more mandatory. The JCS and General Brown had cited this factor early in the

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Vietnamization discussions. An Air Staff study, Coronet Tar, undertaken to provide Air Staff suggestions to JCS and Seventh Air Force in light of the final "Vietnamization plan," reported as its major conclusion that:

Overall, the lesser reduction in air resources demands that an increased share of the regular force mission in RVN be accomplished by air. The shift in force strength emphasis from regular forces in para-military localized forces similarly demands increased Command and Control mechanism to provide air support of these elements. The net overall weakening of Allied force capability will demand increased air responsiveness to insure not only attainment of objectives, but survival of these forces and of the RVN.⁵²

The Nixon strategy--pressing both Vietnamization and negotiations as ways to settle the war--was another factor contributing to the maintenance of air strength in spite of reductions elsewhere. The pursuit of successful negotiations included keeping the pressure on North Vietnam via stepped up military actions or threats thereof, usually by employing air power. This point had been repeatedly made by military leaders in their arguments against air cutbacks.

(~~TOP SECRET~~) More concrete evidence of a continuing air role in face of U.S. ground withdrawals became evident as the year wore on. The new mission statement of 15 August* included--besides the primary emphasis on aid to RVNAF I&M and pacification--three operational tasks, all of which required a major air role: providing security for U.S. forces, interdicting enemy men and materiel, and maintaining plans for a comprehensive air and naval campaign in Vietnam. The final report (29 August) on NSSM 36, "Vietnamization," stipulated that U.S. forces would be needed to offset RVNAF deficiencies in air mobility, artillery, tactical air, air defense, logistics, reconnaissance/intelligence, and command control/communications. While total ground force capability was to be markedly decreased by U.S. withdrawals, USAF in-country force levels envisioned in the JCS residual force were essentially unchanged. Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard's "strategic guidance" of 1 November, implementing the new "one-and-a-half war" strategy, put main emphasis on

*See p 62.

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helping America's Asian allies develop their own defenses. It said the U.S. should plan for only a limited backup ground force capability but should plan for materiel, logistics and intelligence support, and backup tactical air support. Finally, on 3 November, President Nixon defined "Vietnamization" as a "plan developed with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal, first, of all U.S. combat ground forces,* and eventually of other forces, and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly scheduled timetable."⁵³

(S. C. 10) Despite all these "indicators" of a continuing role for air, even under "Vietnamization," the U.S. Air Force was not certain at the end of 1969 where matters stood in this regard, as indicated by a memo to Secretary Seamans from Under Secretary of the Air Force John L. McLucas on 28 October. Noting that Vietnamization definitely included the removal of American ground forces from Vietnam, he wondered whether it also was the U.S. goal to withdraw USAF personnel at an early date or whether there would be a continuing Air Force presence for several years in the future. He pointed out that:

The approved JCS plan calls for us not to have turned over the air equipment included in the Phase II RVNAF Modernization Program before end 71... But even after this equipment is turned over, the VNAF will not have the capability to conduct air-to-air or large-scale interdiction campaigns; it is aimed at the counter-insurgency threat. A Vietnamization program...leaving the South Vietnamese able to resist not only the VC but the NVA as well is a different situation.
...Assuming NVN continues to pose an air threat of the present magnitude, before we withdraw completely we should give the VNAF some more advanced air force capabilities. I think we ought to ask the question whether it is realistic to assume that this can be done, under present planning assumptions, before about 1973 or 1974. Even with this advanced capability in the hands of the VNAF, some U.S. Air Force units may be needed nearby to squelch attempts by the NVN to overrun the country.

*Author's emphasis.

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A large-scale withdrawal of our group troops will result in the loss of a great deal of capability... it is probable, at least initially, that some measure of the loss will have to be compensated for by increased employment and improved capabilities of airpower...⁵⁴

(~~TS~~) The idea of studying ways for the Air Force to be effective without U.S. ground troops but with SVN ground troops had been suggested to Under Secretary McLucas by Deputy Air Force Under Secretary Harry Davis on 13 August.⁵⁵ The Coronet Tar study cited earlier, which undertook to find ways of improving the Air Force's SEA capability in the light of Vietnamization and to evaluate requirements for partially offsetting ground force withdrawals⁵⁶ also presented a number of recommendations along this line. In a subsequent report to Mr. McLucas on 21 November, Mr. Davis listed the following seven of Coronet Tar's "air oriented strategies" and suggested they be used in Air Staff "inputs" to JCS discussions on Vietnamization:*

1. Re-orient air operations to permit support of para-military forces (GVN Region and Popular Forces) to facilitate population control.
2. Improve capabilities (better intelligence, expanded strike authority) for deterring enemy force concentration.
3. Increase surveillance and control of contiguous areas for better in-country security.

*On 7 November Lt. Gen. John W. Carpenter III, Vice Chief of Staff, appointed a special task group, called Credible Crusade, to study such matters and provide findings and recommendations to Seventh Air Force and PACAF for their consideration in supporting JCS efforts. Since CINCPAC and COMUSMACV provided the main source of information and evaluation for the JCS, "the earliest, most appropriate and effective manner in which Air Staff judgments and recommendations can be inserted into JCS channels is by providing them to PACAF and 7th Air Force." [Ltr (S), Lt Gen John W. Carpenter III to 23 Air Staff addressees, subj: "VNAF Improvement and Modernization Planning," Atch 2]

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4. Expand air exploitation within South Vietnam by setting up interdiction and border control areas and providing forces and munitions geared to this relatively benign environment.
5. Utilize newest infiltration devices (including sensors) to extend secure contiguous perimeters throughout South Vietnam.
6. After U.S. ground withdrawals, conduct interdiction in Laos and other out-country air operations to minimize the enemy's external support.
7. Increase the air awareness of South Vietnam's ground forces.

(S) A continuing Air Force role had already been considered, as noted above, by the combined Seventh Air Force/USAF Advisory Group ad hoc committee in addressing the Phase III planning ordered by Secretary Laird in November. One of their proposals called for leaving a transitional USAF force to intercede in case of increased enemy activity after most U.S. forces had been withdrawn. Another would maintain USAF forces in Thailand at their 1969 strength level to continue interdiction against enemy lines of communication into South Vietnam.

(S) Finally, tied in with continuation of a USAF operational role in SEA was the question of how much sophisticated equipment to give the VNAF. This issue had never been addressed satisfactorily, but in 1969 it increasingly demanded attention. The South Vietnamese, particularly General Ky,* had all along wanted more equipment. Their requests for advanced hardware had constituted one of their main proposals at the Midway conference in June,

*General Ky, in a 10 April meeting with Secretary Laird at the Pentagon, had also urged the United States to relax some of its regulations and procedures and adjust more to local conditions. He believed training could be conducted without using all the methods and facilities that U.S. forces use and that logistics costs could be halved if the South Vietnamese, with their lower requirements, replaced U.S. troops. [JCS 2472/464 (S), 10 Apr 1969]

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when they submitted their plan for taking over a greater share of the war effort. The JCS and MACV had opposed giving such equipment to them "until it can be maintained and operated."⁵⁷ The U. S. Air Force favored leaving the door open and providing additional hardware as the Vietnamese became more capable or if a "change in operational requirements" made it necessary.⁵⁸ The speed-up of Vietnamization plans and the Nixon doctrine emphasizing greater responsibility for indigenous forces appeared to increase their need for advanced equipment. However, it soon became clear that the simple mathematics of available manpower and the training/time difficulties involved, militated against an early turnover of such hardware. According to a Seventh Air Force staff study in late summer

the sophisticated weaponry required to operate in the electronic SAM and AAA threat; to counter Mach 2 interceptors in order to maintain air superiority in Vietnamese air space; and to conduct an effective interdiction campaign are not within the maintenance and/or support capabilities of the VNAF. Accordingly, a residual USAF capability must provide an umbrella of protection for the VNAF in any situation which envisions an NVN air threat, and forces must be provided to round out VNAF shortfalls.⁵⁹

(S) This conflict with U. S. Vietnamization policies posed a dilemma and critical voices began to be heard. On the one hand, the Air Force was charged with making the VNAF too much in its own image and not training and equipping it in accordance with the environment and capabilities. Thus in July, the Deputy Director of Defense Research and Engineering, Leonard Sullivan, Jr., in an exchange of memos with the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Lt. Gen. Glen W. Martin, said:

With regard to overall tactical aircraft assets available in Southeast Asia... I simply feel that for a basically counterinsurgency war, we should not have to be so dependent on expensive tacair (Navy, Marine, or Air Force)... The war is going to continue at some level long after U. S. perseverance has disappeared. Our allies are not going to have the air power we have. As long as we use it so lavishly, we will never be able to teach the RVNAF how to get along without it-- because we don't know how. I honestly think we should be forced to learn, gradually, at least.⁶⁰

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Secretary Laird acknowledged the problem in his 12 August memo requiring SVN to assume responsibility for the combined NVN/VC threat, when he stressed the great importance of developing "strategy and tactics best matched with RVNAF capabilities."⁶¹ After he ordered Phase III training in early November--to address the combined NVN/VC threat--the issue required immediate attention. This was reflected in Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard's memo to the Secretary of the Air Force on "VNAF Modernization" in December. Stressing the serious constraints on manpower, he urged Air Force planners to consider the needs of the other services and of the South Vietnamese nation as a whole and "make certain we are not overloading the Vietnamese with capabilities beyond their basic needs... We should concentrate on the types of aircraft and other equipment that offer the best mix of capability, maintainability, and low manpower requirements." He emphasized seeking ways to overcome the long training times created in part by the need for English language training, and insisted we must "focus on what the Vietnamese forces must have rather than on what functions we are now doing that they could do."⁶²

(~~SECRET~~) Parallel developments during the year in Laos (and subsequently in Cambodia) had shown the futility of providing additional equipment without the trained personnel and support capabilities to operate it. In light of the requirements of the Nixon doctrine, the problem of building indigenous air forces tailored to their own environment would have to be addressed for the sake of future contingencies. But the other side of the dilemma--the fact that USAF forces in Southeast Asia were still contending with a very real North Vietnamese threat which they could not just walk away from--also had to be faced. With the VNAF unable to stand up to it for the foreseeable future, the question remained how to fill the vacuum. Should the Air Staff suggestion be followed? Should the Vietnamese be provided more sophisticated equipment as they became more capable, with the USAF itself retaining an interim role and then being prepared to stay in Thailand as recommended by Seventh Air Force and CINCPAC? The scientific experts, eager to exploit U.S. technological superiority to bridge the gap, proposed a different solution.

(~~SECRET~~) Dr. John S. Foster, Jr., Director, DDR&E, on 6 June proposed a special "elite" U.S. residual force which would accentuate U.S. technological sophistication not readily transferable to our allies. Such a Special Low Intensity Conflict (SLIC) force, as he called it, would be oriented to MAP/MAAG equipment and be a component of STRICOM for low intensity warfare.⁶³ The JCS

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disapproved this proposal on 30 June.⁶⁴ The Secretary of the Air Force also disapproved such a force "to fit all contingencies," but recommended that the Air Staff do some thinking on how to apply sophisticated equipment to the problem under consideration.⁶⁵ Deputy Air Force Under Secretary Harry Davis discussed the possibility of creating some such "elite Air Force"--in addition to the regular Air Force--with Lt. Gen. George B. Simler, Maj. Gen. Sam J. Byerley, and Brig. Gen. Charles W. Lenfest of the Air Staff.^{*66} And on 21 November, Under Secretary McLucas told Gen. John D. Ryan, USAF Chief of Staff, that the Air Force still needed to address the problem of having systems to fight low intensity wars (with simple equipment) as well as "first line Air Force" capabilities.⁶⁷ However, Gen. John W. Carpenter, III, Assistant Vice Chief of Staff, pointed out on 20 December that the Special Operations Force (SOF) had been created to do just this, and any enhancement of the SOF at the expense of general purpose forces was ruled out by current budget constraints.⁶⁸

(S-C-1-3) Thus, as 1969 ended, the complete picture of Vietnamization as applied to the South Vietnamese Air Force was not fully resolved. In spite of the strongest efforts, it was simply not possible to develop air expertise as fast as U.S. Vietnamization plans would like. Whether the obstacles were so great that the VNAF would end up as a modest force with only simple equipment, or whether it would eventually receive more sophisticated weapons, remained unclear. What was clear was that the North Vietnamese threat remained and that the U.S. Air Force for the time being would have to maintain a strong operational role in the war in South-east Asia.

Summary

(S-C-1-2) The year 1969 was clearly a year of change in the war in Vietnam. The Nixon administration recognized almost immediately that negotiations with North Vietnam, on which hopes for ending the war had been based, could not be counted on to produce satisfactory results. At the same time, the President knew his

*General Simler, Director of Operations, was being reassigned at this time to USAFE; General Byerley succeeded him as Director of Operations; General Lenfest was Deputy Director for Force Development, DCS/Plans and Operations.

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election mandate included responding to a strong domestic opposition to continued U.S. casualties and spending for the war. Very early in his administration he and his advisers began considering accelerated "Vietnamization" as an alternate way to reduce U.S. involvement while enabling South Vietnam to survive through its own efforts. After some weeks of study and planning, an official administration policy (NSSM 36, "Vietnamization") was issued, directing specific, time-phased planning to turn over greater combat responsibility to the South Vietnamese and reduce the U.S. commitment.⁶⁹ Planning and implementing programs followed rapidly throughout the year.

(TS-C-9) The return of the first 25,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam was announced in June. In mid-August, Secretary Laird told the JCS that the South Vietnamese would take over responsibility for countering the combined Viet Cong/North Vietnamese threat, not just a residual insurgency. In early November he directed immediate U.S. military planning to help create a South Vietnamese force capable of countering the combined Viet Cong/North Vietnamese threat.

(TS-C-9) Policymaking on Vietnam was not entirely a straightforward sweep toward Vietnamization, however. Through the first half of 1969, certain elements in the State Department, CIA, and especially in OSD Systems Analysis, differed with the JCS, CINCPAC, MACV, and others on how the war was really going, how effective U.S. air interdiction operations were, and many other aspects of the conflict. Stressing budgetary problems, they were inclined to continue the wind-down of the war that had seemed imminent in late 1968. But with North Vietnam's intransigence persisting, such views gradually lost influence in favor of those held by the JCS and other U.S. military and civilian leaders. They continued to recommend keeping the pressure on North Vietnam, maintaining the operational initiative, and keeping U.S. air strength in Southeast Asia intact and using it.

(TS-C-9) As the year went on, it became apparent that President Nixon, even while emphasizing Vietnamization, was still preserving his other option of trying to force North Vietnam to negotiate. U.S. forces were still engaged in combat but their tactics had changed. No longer did U.S. ground forces undertake large-scale search and destroy operations. To do so would have meant too many U.S. casualties. The ground fighting and the high U.S. casualties dwindled, but wherever the enemy showed himself, he was still being relentlessly attacked, especially by air units. The bombing raids over North Vietnam had stopped, but new ones pursued the same objective--destroying enemy supplies--just as intensively over Laos.

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(~~S-Cp 5~~) In effect, as a result of policy and strategy changes by the new administration, air power ended up playing more of a role in the Vietnam war in 1969 than ever before. The President's double-option strategy of pursuing peace by negotiation and Vietnamization, favored air power both ways. It was the main tool he needed if he intended to keep the pressure on North Vietnam and bring about fruitful negotiations. As for Vietnamization, while it meant increasing displacement of United States ground forces by South Vietnamese, it also carried a promise of continuing support for the indigenous forces. Hence air power, which was extremely vital to South Vietnamese operations--particularly the kind the VNAF could not provide--was retained and to a degree enhanced. In addition, to its great contribution in training and strengthening the South Vietnamese Air Force, the U.S. Air Force retained an operational role of its own. Compared to the other services, particularly the Army, the USAF role seemed to be in the ascendancy.

(~~S-Cp 6~~) The highly controversial air interdiction strategy acquired new stature in 1969 when the important NSSM 36 decisions confirmed continuation of a strong air role in Southeast Asia. Indeed, judging by later events, these decisions of 1969 pointed toward interdiction as the strategy in the expanded Indochina war. Taking into account U.S. domestic opposition to continued heavy U.S. casualties, the adoption of any other strategy would scarcely have been feasible. It was JCS and MACV who championed interdiction, but it remained of course very much an Air Force concept. Another lesser strategy innovation in 1969 was also to a large extent an Air Force effort. The Seventh Air Force/CIA air-supported guerrilla campaign in Laos seemed to presage a new approach in fighting counterinsurgency wars, subsequently applicable in Cambodia and conceivably other places as well.

(~~S-Cp 3~~) It was a great paradox. The big search and destroy missions were largely a thing of the past. The U.S. Army was re-deploying. The Green Berets and the Marines were relinquishing their roles. But air power cuts were minimal and SAC bombers, officially only TDY visitors, were almost taking over the action in Vietnam. The Air Force, which had never really shared the Army's enthusiasm for this type of operation, was staying and fighting the counterinsurgency war.

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APPENDIX

Strength and Deployment of
USAF Aircraft and Crews
in Asia

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USAF AIRCRAFT / AIRCREWS SOUTHEAST ASIA

TYPE AIRCRAFT	AIRCRAFT				CREWS		
	AUTHORIZED	ASSIGNED	POSSESSED	OPS READY	AUTHORIZED	FORMED	READY
A-1	75	90	72	58	114	71	69
A-37	61	65	65	60	92	81	55
AC-119	32	29	29	21	48	32	29
AC-123	2	2	2	-	3	4	4
AC-130	7	7	7	3	14	10	10
AC-47	3	3	3	2	4	5	5
B-52	-	-	39	39	-	47	47
B-57	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
C-121	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
C-123	70	32	72	55	105	104	94
C-130	11	11	83	69	27	150	150
C-47	6	6	5	2	9	11	10
C-7	96	95	84	69	144	120	114
CH-3	22	13	11	8	28	20	18
DC-130	-	-	2	2	-	3	3
EB-66	20	21	19	11	30	31	30
EC-121	24	24	26	21	36	35	35
EC-47	57	55	49	38	114	103	92
F-100	180	230	187	139	230	200	192
F-102	-	-	4	4	-	8	8
F-105	72	82	74	56	106	96	96
F-4	288	304	258	199	429	350	346
HC-130	11	11	10	7	17	9	9
HH-3	11	17	17	14	29	22	17
HH-43	31	31	29	25	45	32	32
HH-53	14	8	5	4	13	10	9
KC-135	-	-	37	37	-	61	61
O-1	46	95	91	81	298	276	199
O-2	241	244	243	206	256	265	254
OV-10	94	115	113	88	167	241	173
RB-57	4	4	4	3	6	5	5
RC-130	-	-	4	4	-	2	2
RF-101	16	20	14	12	24	21	21
RF-4	76	83	72	56	114	97	92
U-2	-	-	1	1	-	2	2
UC-123	14	20	17	13	21	21	19
UH-1	21	17	12	7	21	22	11
TOTAL	1,605	1,785	1,761	1,414	2,544	2,567	2,313

Figure 9

Source: USAF Mgt Summary, Southeast Asia, 9 Jan 1970.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	antiaircraft artillery
AFB	Air Force Base
AFGP	Air Force Advisory Group
ALO	air liaison officer
ANG	Air National Guard
ARDF	airborne radio direction finding
ARVN	Army, Republic of Vietnam
ATC	Air Training Command
CAS	controlled American source
CHECO	Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific Command
CINCPACAF	Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces
CINCSAC	Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CONUS	Continental United States
CSAF	Chief of Staff, Air Force
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DA	Department of the Army
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
DDR&E	Director of Defense Research & Engineering
DMZ	demilitarized zone
ECM	electronic countermeasures
FAC	forward air controller
FAR	Force Armee Royal (forces of the Royal Lao Government)
GVN	Government of Vietnam

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I&M	Improvement and Modernization
IG	Inspector General
IP	Initial Point
IRAN	Inspection and Repair as Necessary
ISA	International Security Affairs
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LOC	line of communication
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAP	Military Assistance Program
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NSC	National Security Council
NSDM	National Security Defense Memorandum
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
NVN	North Vietnam
ORI	operational readiness inspection
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PDJ	Plaine des Jarres
PMS	Program Management System
POL	petroleum, oil and lubricants
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RLAF	Royal Laotian Air Force
RLG	Royal Laotian Government
RTU	replacement training unit
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces

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SA	Systems Analysis
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SEA	Southeast Asia
SIOP	Single Integrated Operational Plan
SLIC	Special Low Intensity Conflict
SOF	Special Operations Force
STRICOM	Strike Command
SVN	South Vietnam
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TACP	tactical air control party
TACS	tactical air control system
TDY	temporary duty
TOT	time on target
UE	unit equipment
USARV	US Army in Vietnam
USMC	US Marine Corps
VC	Viet Cong

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