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THE FLAMING DART AIR STRIKES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM, 7-11 FEBRUARY 1965

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to record and analyze national command and control aspects of the FLAMING DART air strikes against North Vietnam on 7-11 February 1965. These strikes were the prelude to the initiation of the continuing ROLLING THUNDER campaign of air strikes against North Vietnam. They are significant from the command and control standpoint because they were undertaken in the context of a deepening crisis in the Vietnam war, and marked the beginning of a US shift from a limited "advise and assist" role in the Vietnam war to one of direct participation on a greatly expanded scale.

The study is one of a series carried out in response to DJSM 1111-61 of 14 September 1961, as revised and updated by CM 2019-66, 23 December 1966, which requested the Weapons Systems Evaluation Group to undertake case studies of crises or critical incidents, in order to provide an empirical basis for evaluating and improving national military command and control arrangements and procedures.

The study covers the policy background and context of the strikes, the basic strike decisions and collateral actions, and the measures taken at the national level to control and monitor the strike operations. Emphasis is given to the flow of information to and from the principal decision-makers during the critical periods in which the decisions were made and executed. In the latter connection, the study covers the responsiveness of communications between Washington and the field, and the operational reporting system in effect at the time, relative to the demands placed upon them. The study also describes the activities of the Joint Staff and the National Military Command Center in providing the necessary information support to national command authorities. Summary observations on what are believed to be

the chief command and control lessons of the incident are presented at the end of the report, on pages - . Detailed documentation is provided in chronologies presented in Appendixes A and B.

The study is based on an analysis of memoranda, messages, logs, and other recorded or documentary materials that were made available in the Joint Staff and in ISA. Observers were stationed in the National Military Command Center during the episode, at the invitation of the Director J3 (DJ3), in order to follow the action there at first hand. In addition, analysts were also able to interview a number of staff officers associated with the event, in order to fill in gaps in the recorded material and permit a reasonably accurate and objective reconstruction of the episode from the command and control standpoint.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

THE POLITICO-MILITARY CONTEXT 7

I. INTRODUCTION

The FLAMING DART air strikes were carried out on 7, 8, and 11 February 1965, initially as retaliatory actions associated with incidents in the Vietnam war.

The U.S. had carried out air strikes against North Vietnam once before, during the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf episode. Both the August and the February strikes were initiated as reprisals, and both involved the restrained and discriminating application of force in pursuit of carefully limited objectives. However, the objectives of the action in each case were different, as were the broader political and military implications of taking the action. The contrast between the two is worth noting, because it illustrates the importance of political "crisis management" aspects of contemporary military operations, and shows what made the February strikes (rather than the August strikes) the occasion for an important turning point for the U.S. in the continuing Vietnam war.

The August Tonkin strikes were a one-time retaliatory action in response to a North Vietnamese attack on destroyers of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, which had been patrolling in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. In more or less tit-for-tat fashion, the strikes were carried out by Seventh Fleet aircraft, and were directed primarily against North Vietnamese patrol boats (the types of vessels which had attacked the U.S. destroyers) in selected base and coastal operating areas. As an extra punitive measure, oil storage tanks associated with one of the patrol boat bases were also hit, but with this exception the reprisal effort was confined to the boats, and no attempt was made to damage or destroy their base facilities. The entire operation was a unilateral U.S. action.

At the time of the Tonkin strikes, U.S. officials depicted them as a "positive reply" -- one which was "limited but fitting" -- to an unprovoked attack on U.S. vessels operating within their rights on the high seas. Officials stressed the "one-shot" nature of the strikes, and explicitly stated that, provided there were no further enemy attacks, the U.S. considered the incident closed. In some statements it was pointed out that the North Vietnamese attack on the destroyers was part of a "larger pattern of aggression" by North Vietnam in Southeast Asia, but the primary justification given for the U.S. response was the attack on U.S. vessels, and not this "larger pattern of aggression." This justification, together with declarations that the U.S. strikes were not intended to expand or escalate the guerrilla war in Southeast Asia, tended to make the strikes appear as an isolated action, bearing only incidental relationship to the war itself. The war continued to be officially pictured as a war that was being fought by the South Vietnamese, and properly so, with the U.S. in a limited "advise and assist" supporting role, and with strict limitations on any direct participation by U.S. forces in combat operations.

It is clear from official U.S. statements at the time that the Tonkin strikes were not intended to change the basic "ground rules" of the conflict in Southeast Asia. The strikes were intended to confirm, by deed, that North Vietnamese forces could not flagrantly attack U.S. forces with impunity; but nothing was said to imply that North Vietnam could not continue to direct and support the indirect aggression in the South, at a guerrilla warfare level, with reasonable confidence that its own territory would continue to be treated as a sanctuary. Any domestic or foreign fear that the Tonkin strikes might represent a new departure in this respect -- a decision, for example, to carry the war to North Vietnam as the fundamental source of the aggression in the South -- no doubt tended to disappear during the next few months, in the absence of any further U.S. strikes.

The February 1965 strikes were also initiated as reprisals, but the political context in which they took place was quite different from that of the Tonkin strikes, and the manner in which they were officially handled revealed a much broader intent and purpose. By contrast with the Tonkin strikes, the February strikes did link the U.S. reprisal to the "larger pattern of aggression" by North Vietnam, and did signal a change in the ground rules of the conflict in the South.

The initial February strikes, those of 7 and 8 February, intended as a single reprisal, followed a pair of unusually severe Viet Cong (VC) attacks against U.S. installations at Pleiku in South Vietnam. The Pleiku incident was not the first incident in which terrorist action was directed against Americans in South Vietnam, with many casualties and much damage. Neither was it the first such incident for which the U.S., in official statements, held the North Vietnamese regime ultimately responsible. It was, however, the first such incident in the South which triggered an overt reprisal against the North, on the basis of the North's direct responsibility for such incidents.

In retaliating against North Vietnam for a VC incident in the South, the U.S. made its first open break with self-imposed ground rules which had permitted the North to direct and support a large-scale guerrilla war in the South, but which had precluded forceful U.S. countermeasures against its own territory. The strikes thus constituted a strong signal to all concerned that the U.S. would not necessarily abide by such rules in future.

The 7-8 February strikes also represented a first step in more directly and actively associating the U.S. with the South Vietnamese in "their" war. Although the strikes were unquestionably prompted by the Pleiku incident, every attempt was made to justify them in broader terms -- not merely as a response to a single outrage committed against Americans, but as a response to a series of outrages, committed against South Vietnamese as well as Americans. This effort to

link the reprisal to VC offenses against both parties was reinforced by having the reprisal strikes conducted by both South Vietnamese and U.S. forces.

By demonstrating that the U.S. was prepared to join with the South Vietnamese in military reprisals against North Vietnam for actions committed against either or both parties in the South, the strikes tended to weaken the policy line that the war was essentially a Vietnamese war, with U.S. involvement confined to advice and support. Once the U.S. began participating in such military reprisals on a regular basis, it would unavoidably begin to appear as more of a co-belligerent, along with South Vietnam, against the VC and their sponsors in North Vietnam.

The practical significance of this point should not be underrated. The requirement to maintain a credible policy line that the U.S. was not really directly engaged in the war had been a major obstacle to the acceptance of many proposed military actions to achieve U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia, and had been responsible for most of the political constraints within which U.S. forces operated there. If it became less feasible or less worthwhile to maintain such a policy line, as a result of reprisal actions like FLAMING DART, the reasons behind the rejection of some of the proposed actions and the reasons for some of the constraints would lose some of their force, perhaps opening the way to a wider range of politically acceptable U.S. options in dealing with the war.

Although the 7-8 February strikes represented the first overt breach of North Vietnam's sanctuary status, and a move toward more actively engaging U.S. forces in the war, they constituted a limited and tentative first step rather than an irrevocable commitment to a broader course of action. The context of the strikes was one of reprisals for "spectacular" VC incidents, those of an unusually provocative nature, which could be interpreted as deliberate challenges or tests of will, or as attempts by the enemy to escalate the conflict. The governing

concept was still "tit-for-tat", with the idea of equivalent and appropriate punishment maintained by confining the strikes to a small number of targets in the extreme south of North Vietnam which could plausibly be associated with the infiltration of men and supplies into the South.

Because official U.S. spokesmen represented the 7-8 February strikes in this manner, as a "fitting" reprisal for the VC incident at Pleiku, they appeared to associate the departure from previous "ground rules" with the enemy's resort to such incidents, and left unresolved the question of whether the former ground rules might not continue to be observed if the VC refrained from perpetrating them. Some high-level pronouncements created the impression that the rules might still hold good except for such incidents, by implying that the strikes were "one-shot" operations related to the Pleiku incident of 6 February, and by reiterating that the U.S. still sought no wider war. Thus, whether the U.S. intended to go beyond a policy of event-associated reprisals was left in considerable doubt.

Then, on 10 February, the VC attacked and demolished a Vietnamese hotel in the city of Qui Nhon which was being used as a U.S. enlisted men's billet, inflicting numerous casualties. Within 24 hours U.S. and South Vietnamese forces executed another set of air strikes against targets in North Vietnam.

This time, significantly, the strikes were not characterized as a reprisal linked to the immediate incident. They were characterized more loosely, as a "response" to "continued acts of aggression," including an increased number of ambushes, assassinations, and attacks -- of the sort which had been a normal feature of the war. Although it was explained that the strikes were directed against military facilities used for the training and infiltration of the VC who committed such acts, the words "retaliation" and "reprisal" were scrupulously avoided.

The switch in terminology from "retaliation" or "reprisal" to "response", and from a specific incident or incidents to "continued aggression" was a conscious decision. In part, it stemmed from a reaction against the reprisal policy enunciated after the 7-8 February strikes, which, though it permitted U.S. forces to strike back at North Vietnam, left the initiative in the hands of the enemy and confined the U.S. to responses that could be made to seem equivalent or "fitting." In addition, however, and more significantly, the new terminology was intended to pave the way for a more positive program of continuing air strikes against North Vietnam, at a weight and tempo to be determined by the U.S., as a response to the entire Communist challenge in Vietnam.

Besides setting the stage for a continuing program of air strikes against the North (which was initiated on 2 March 1965, as ROLLING THUNDER), the handling of the 11 February strikes implied an even further erosion of the policy position that this was a Vietnamese war to be fought by the Vietnamese. With the gradual abandonment of that position, the U.S. began to take on an increasingly active role in hostilities, in the South as well as the North, and initiated a buildup of forces in the area to carry out a large-scale military effort, on the ground as well as at sea and in the air. Within the space of a few months, U.S. power and prestige became more deeply committed in the war than ever before.

The 7-8 February strikes came to be called FLAMING DART I, and those of 11 February came to be called FLAMING DART II. Together, as indicated above, they precipitated a rapidly moving sequence of events that transformed the character of the Vietnam war, and the U.S. role in it. It is this feature of FLAMING DART more than any other which subjected U.S. command and control processes to unusually severe stresses during the 7-11 February events.

II. THE POLITICO-MILITARY CONTEXT

When FLAMING DART occurred, the VC were clearly winning the war in South Vietnam. The military situation had been steadily deteriorating for more than a year, and the Government of Vietnam (GVN) forces were generally on the defensive. Most of the country was in VC hands, and only centers of population were relatively secure. The GVN itself was shaky and disorganized, as the result of several waves of political disorders and several abrupt changes of government. Civil administration was in a state of near disintegration. Demoralization within the GVN and the armed forces was widespread, and there was a critical danger of internal collapse. Meanwhile, the Communists were strengthening their support base in Laos, stepping up the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam, and mounting larger and more aggressive attacks. All the evidence in late 1964 and early 1965 strongly indicated that the Communists were preparing for a decisive phase in their campaign to conquer South Vietnam.

Throughout 1964, while the situation in South Vietnam grew increasingly worse, the basic U.S. strategy was to continue to prod the GVN into launching an effective, coordinated campaign to defeat the VC and pacify the country; to further expand training, logistical and other support measures, short of openly introducing U.S. forces for direct combat;[1] and to intensify an essentially psychological warfare

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[1] U.S. troops in South Vietnam numbered some 16,000 at the beginning of 1964, and were increased to 23,000 by the end of the year. They performed advisory and training functions normally associated with the Military Assistance Program; plus, in addition, combat support functions in categories which were beyond South Vietnamese capabilities, such as communications, aerial reconnaissance, airlift, and close air support. The rules under which U.S. forces operated at the time were intended to minimize overt U.S. military involvement in the war.

effort to induce the North Vietnamese to cease and desist from further aggression in Southeast Asia. The latter included repeated reaffirmations of the U.S. commitment to the defense of Southeast Asia, made both in public and in diplomatic channels; hints and warnings that the U.S. might expand the war with countermeasures against North Vietnam, such as guerrilla raids, air attacks, naval blockade, or even land invasion, if the aggression persisted; and a number of overt military actions of a precautionary nature, intended at least as much to "signal" the U.S. commitment and intent as to affect the military situation.

Among the more prominent precautionary or preparatory actions taken during 1964, with due attention to their utility as warning signals of possible further actions, were the following: accelerated jet airfield and other military construction in Thailand and South Vietnam, to accomodate U.S. forces if required; prepositioning U.S. contingency stockpiles in Thailand and the Phillippines; forward deployment of a carrier task force and land-based tactical aircraft within striking distance of the area; and the assignment (in mid-year) of an unprecedented high-level diplomatic team to Saigon, including the then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) as Ambassador and the Under Secretary of State (UndSecState) as Deputy Ambassador. These and other measures were carried out with considerable publicity, designed to portray them as hard evidence of the U.S. determination to carry out its commitments in the area. Such evidence was mainly intended for the enemy's eyes and ears, but it was also counted upon to strengthen South Vietnamese confidence in ultimate U.S. intentions, and to bolster friendly morale in Southeast Asia generally.

In addition to highly publicized preparatory actions, the U.S. undertook a number of unpublicized actions, primarily as low-key indications to the enemy of the U.S. willingness and capability to employ increasing force in the situation. Chief among these were the initiation of the DESOTO Patrol, a U.S. destroyer patrol deep into the Gulf of

Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam, with the dual purpose of gathering intelligence and displaying U.S. naval power; the initiation of Laotian air strikes and limited GVN cross-border operations against VC infiltration routes in Laos; the initiation of GVN maritime raids and other harassing actions against North Vietnam; the initiation of YANKEE TEAM, low-level photoreconnaissance missions over Laos, conducted by U.S. jet aircraft with fighter escorts for possible action against enemy ground fire; and finally, at the very end of 1964, the initiation of BARREL ROLL, armed reconnaissance by U.S. jet fighters against Communist infiltration routes and facilities in Laos.

Although these limited measures had some military significance, they were not designed primarily for their potential military effect on the South Vietnamese military situation, but rather as calculated "signals" to North Vietnam and, indirectly, to Communist China. They were intended to convey that the U.S. was willing and able to bring substantial military pressure to bear against North Vietnam, if it did not reduce or halt its intervention in the South. YANKEE TEAM and BARREL ROLL, for example, which were quite limited in scope and value when viewed as reconnaissance and interdiction efforts in Laos, were mainly intended to suggest the possibility of similar -- and larger -- actions against North Vietnam itself.

The fact that the foregoing actions were not officially publicized (although they all eventually became public knowledge, via U.S. press accounts) stemmed from a desire to communicate an implicit threat of further action to the enemy, without arousing undue anxieties at home that the U.S. was escalating, or planning to escalate, the war.[1] In this connection, it should be noted that 1964 was a Presidential election year, and that the possible escalation of the Vietnam war

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[1]The result was an impression of considerable vacillation in U.S. policy at times. Implied threats of further U.S. action would sometimes reach the press, only to be followed soon after by sharp official denials.

became a significant campaign issue. During the campaign, the President took positions which were widely construed as being opposed to any U.S. escalation of the war, either in the North or the South, so that any conspicuous "signals" to the enemy of a potentially tougher U.S. policy had to be handled with a good deal of care.

Within this pattern of precautionary actions and psychological signals to demonstrate U.S. resolve and to suggest U.S. intent, the August 1964 Tonkin reprisal strikes appeared as a brief interlude, their potential value as forceful signals to the enemy largely balanced by the care taken to allay public fears that they might represent more than an isolated event. The ultimate "signal" to the enemy was no doubt somewhat mixed.

Meanwhile, within the U.S. Government, 1964 was a year of high-level deliberations about alternative courses of action in Southeast Asia, and intensive military planning for various contingencies that might arise. In both the deliberations and the planning, much attention was given to implementing some sort of reprisal policy against North Vietnam, and by the end of the year various concepts of reprisal action were accepted as integral elements of any program of significant military pressure against North Vietnam which might be undertaken.

The Development of Military Plans and Policies

The President authorized military planning for more intensive military action against North Vietnam as early as March 1964.[1] This was to include border control actions in Laos and Cambodia, individual retaliatory actions against North Vietnam, and, finally, graduated military pressures against North Vietnam, all to be accomplished primarily by GVN forces with minimum U.S. support. The authorization was for planning only, with no commitment to a favorable decision.

The March authorization led to the development of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, a three-phase plan covering operations against VC infiltration

[1] NSAM 288, 17 March 1964, TOP SECRET.

routes in Laos and Cambodia and against targets in North Vietnam. Phase I provided for air and ground strikes against selected targets in Laos, together with hot pursuit actions into Laotian and Cambodian border areas. Phase II provided for "tit-for-tat" air strikes, airborne, amphibious raids, and aerial mining operations against targets in North Vietnam. Phase III provided for increasingly severe air strikes and other actions against North Vietnam, going beyond the "tit-for-tat" concept. According to the plan, air strikes would be conducted primarily by GVN forces, assisted by U.S. or FARMGATE aircraft.[1]

Along with the development of OPLAN 37-64, JCS, PACOM, and Service planners developed a detailed list of specific targets for air attack in North Vietnam. The targets included those which, if damaged or destroyed, would (a) reduce North Vietnamese support of Communist operations in Laos and South Vietnam, (b) reduce North Vietnamese capabilities to take direct action against Laos and South Vietnam, and finally (c) reduce North Vietnam's capacity to continue as an industrially viable state. Detailed characteristics were provided for each target, together with damage effects which could be achieved by various scales of attack against them. This target list, which was informally called the "94 Target List" after the number of targets it initially contained -- 82 fixed targets and 12 specified road and rail segments -- became Annex R to OPLAN 37-64 and became the basic reference for much of the subsequent planning for air strikes against North Vietnam, when target selection was involved.[2] During the August Tonkin Gulf incident, for example, target decisions were based on this list.

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[1]FARMGATE aircraft were U.S. aircraft with Vietnamese markings, utilized in a "combat training" program for Vietnamese pilots. They were piloted by U.S. personnel with Vietnamese "trainees" aboard and were employed in combat operations within South Vietnam.

[2]JCSM 460-64, 30 May 1964, TOP SECRET; JCS 2343/383-2, 24 August 1964, TOP SECRET.

The JCS have continued to maintain an official target list for North Vietnam, but it has grown to include several hundred targets.

While the planning authorized by the President's March 1964 decision proceeded, the subject of possible military actions against North Vietnam remained under consideration. On 25 July, for example, the JCS were asked to furnish recommendations on appropriate military actions which would contribute militarily to the counterinsurgency effort in the South and reduce the frustration and defeatism of the South Vietnamese leaders, by undertaking punitive measures against the enemy outside of South Vietnam; the actions were to entail minimum risk of escalation by the enemy and were to require minimum U.S. participation in a combat role.[1] (At the time, the chief military actions authorized outside of South Vietnam were limited Laotian air strikes against Communist forces in Laos, GVN harassment operations against North Vietnam, DESOTO Patrols in the Tonkin Gulf, and YANKEE TEAM photoreconnaissance operations in Laos.) In response, the JCS recommended GVN air strikes against Laotian infiltration routes, GVN ground operations across the Laos border, and selected air strikes against North Vietnam, using GVN and/or unmarked aircraft. In forwarding these recommendations, the JCS stated that while the value of the recommended measures in reducing the flow of support from North Vietnam was limited, such actions could signal sharply to Hanoi and Peking that they must pay a higher price for continuing it.[2]

Limited though they were, and well within the constraint of minimum participation by U.S. forces, the JCS recommendations were not acted upon.

The Tonkin Gulf incident of 4-5 August, together with a new wave of disorders and a governmental shakeup in South Vietnam later in the month, stimulated further JCS proposals. On the one hand, the Tonkin incident had led to some retraction, in the form of a temporary suspension of DESOTO Patrols and GVN maritime operations against North Vietnam; on the other, the incident led to a substantial increase in

[1] JCS 2343/426, 26 July 1964, TOP SECRET.
[2] JCSM 639-64, 27 July 1964, TOP SECRET.

the U.S. military posture in Southeast Asia, to deter or deal with any enemy reaction to the U.S. strikes.[1] As a result of the latter, the U.S. was in a higher state of readiness for military operations in Southeast Asia than ever before.

On 26 August the JCS recommended retention of the U.S. forces deployed to forward bases during the Tonkin Gulf incident, resumption of the DESOTO Patrols, and resumption and intensification of GVN maritime and other harassing operations against North Vietnam. In addition, they recommended GVN air strikes in Laos, supported as need be by U.S. armed air reconnaissance against infiltration routes and facilities there; plus air strikes by GVN and U.S. forces against North Vietnam in retaliation for stepped up VC incidents, should they occur. The JCS again noted that the recommended actions were probably insufficient to compel North Vietnam to halt its support to the Communists in Laos and South Vietnam, and proposed that the U.S. be prepared to initiate additional U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam [as in Phase III of OPLAN 37-64] to accomplish this.[2]

The above JCS recommendations were repeated in somewhat stronger fashion on 9 September, while the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam was in Washington to participate in another reassessment of U.S. policy. In their paper, the JCS recommended retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam in the event of any attack on U.S. units or any extraordinary or dramatic North Vietnamese/VC action against South Vietnam, and they explicitly recommended the initiation of regular air strikes by GVN and U.S. forces against North Vietnamese targets.[3]

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[1]The U.S. forces deployed to the area were those designated in OPLAN 37-64. They included a CVA Task Group (a third) to the South China Sea; 2 B-57 squadrons and 1 tactical fighter squadron to South Vietnam; 2 tactical fighter squadrons to Thailand; 2 tactical fighter squadrons and 8 KC-135 tankers to the Philippines; and, to the South China Sea in the vicinity of South Vietnam, 1 CVS group, 1 Marine Special Landing Force, and 1 Marine Brigade. The deployments were ordered by JCS 7739, 050043Z August 1964, TOP SECRET.

[2]JCSM 746-64, 26 August 1964 (Enclosure to JCS 2343/444-1), TOP SECRET.

[3]CM 124-64, 9 September 1964 (Enclosure to JCS 2343/457-1), TOP SECRET.

The President's decisions were issued on 10 September.[1] He authorized (a) resumption of DESOTO Patrols and GVN maritime operations against North Vietnam; (b) discussions with the Laos government concerning intensified Laotian air strikes in the Laos panhandle, U.S. armed air reconnaissance in Laos, and cross-border operations by GVN forces; and (c) preparations for retaliatory actions against North Vietnam in the event of any attack on U.S. units or any extraordinary North Vietnamese/VC action against South Vietnam. The forward deployments associated with the Tonkin incident and OPLAN 37-64 were not withdrawn, but the forces involved were precluded from action in South Vietnam and no decision was made to utilize them in operations in Laos or North Vietnam. They remained essentially immobilized, demonstrating the U.S. "presence."

Throughout September and October, the JCS continued to urge stronger action, particularly in Laos, where infiltration was clearly on the increase, but also in North and South Vietnam, in order to stem the rapid deterioration which was taking place. On 27 October the JCS proposed an expanded program of accelerated military and political actions, both inside of and outside of South Vietnam, to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. Immediate military actions which were recommended included the employment of U.S. fixed-wing aircraft within South Vietnam, retaliatory actions against North Vietnam in response to extraordinary North Vietnamese/VC initiatives, low-level reconnaissance probes into North Vietnam, and air strikes against lines of communication in North Vietnam in conjunction with air operations against nearby targets in South Vietnam and Laos. The JCS stated that these immediate actions should be followed by increasingly severe military pressures against North Vietnam, culminating in an all-out air attack, a naval "quarantine," and the commitment of U.S. ground forces to Southeast Asia, as required.[2] In short, the JCS were proposing a complete

[1] NSAM 314, 10 September 1964, TOP SECRET.
[2] JCSM 902-64, 27 October 1964, TOP SECRET.

change in the U.S. strategy for dealing with the war, involving major participation by U.S. forces, and going considerably beyond OPLAN 37-64 concepts. And they were recommending great urgency because GVN survival had become precarious and time was fast running out.

On 1 November 1964, just prior to the U.S. Presidential election, the VC executed a serious mortar attack against Bien Hoa airbase near Saigon. Four Americans and two Vietnamese were killed; 30 Americans and two Vietnamese were wounded; nine aircraft (including five B-57s) were destroyed, and another 18 aircraft were damaged.

The JCS recommended immediate reprisal action, to be followed in short order by a sequential program of air strikes against Communist areas in Laos and North Vietnam. The JCS program started with a 24-36 hour period of air strikes in Laos and low-level air reconnaissance south of the 19th parallel in North Vietnam, designed to provide a cover for the introduction of U.S. security forces in the south to protect key U.S. installations, and for the evacuation of U.S. dependents from Saigon. This would be followed, in the next three days, by a B-52 strike against Phuc Yen, the principal airfield near Hanoi, and by strikes against other airfields and major POL facilities in the Hanoi/Haiphong area; and subsequently by armed reconnaissance against infiltration routes in Laos, air strikes against infiltration routes and targets in North Vietnam, and progressive PACOM and SAC strikes against remaining military and industrial targets in the 94 Target List.[1]

The JCS recommendations were not accepted. It may be surmised that the magnitude of the actions proposed was excessive, in terms of what political authorities were willing to approve as a suitable reprisal for the Bien Hoa incident, particularly on the eve of the

[1] JCSM 933-64, 4 November 1964, TOP SECRET, which formalized recommendations made orally to the SecDef on 1 November.

U.S. election; and that the President was not yet ready to approve a program of continuing air strikes against North Vietnam, at least until alternative courses of action could be carefully reexamined. In any case, after a few days elapsed with no reprisal decision, it became apparent that too much time had passed to consider the feasibility of a reprisal linked directly to the Bien Hoa attack, and the matter was dropped.

The consideration of new courses of action in Southeast Asia came to a head after the Bien Hoa incident and after the Presidential election, when a National Security Council working group[1] was formed to evaluate alternatives. The operative premise of the group was that the situation in South Vietnam was indeed critical and that current U.S. programs were inadequate. After a month of intensive examination of various options, ranging from an intensification of existing programs to the initiation of large-scale hostilities against North Vietnam, the working group recommended a graduated program of controlled military pressures, to simultaneously boost morale in the South and to increase the costs and strain on the North.

The recommended program was in two phases. The first phase, which was expected to last about 30 days, was quite limited, and was intended primarily to "signal" Hanoi that it should desist from supporting the insurgency in the South or face progressively higher costs and penalties. It included the intensification of actions already underway, the initiation of armed aerial reconnaissance against infiltration routes and facilities in Laos, and possible GVN/US air strikes against North Vietnam as reprisals for major VC actions in the South. This would be followed by a transitional period of undetermined length -- presumably long enough to see whether the "signal" had gotten through to Hanoi -- during which Phase I actions might continue without change or be stepped up a bit by the initiation of air strikes a short distance across the border against infiltration

[1] Chaired by the Assistant Secretary of State, Far Eastern Affairs, with the CJCS represented by the DJ3.

targets in North Vietnam. Thereafter, at a time to be determined, if the GVN improved its effectiveness to an acceptable degree and if the North did not yield on acceptable terms,[1] the U.S. would embark upon a second phase program of progressively more serious air strikes, possibly running from two to six months. Targets in the North would start with infiltration targets south of the 19th parallel and work up to targets to the north, and could eventually lead to all major military-related targets, aerial mining of ports, and a naval blockade, with the weight and tempo of the action adjusted to the situation as it developed. The approach would be steady and deliberate, with the U.S. retaining the option to proceed or not, escalate or not, or quicken the pace or not, at any time.

Concurrently with this "progressive squeeze" against North Vietnam, the working group recommended that the U.S. be willing to pause to explore negotiated solutions, should North Vietnam show any signs of yielding, while maintaining a credible threat of still further pressures. In the view of the working group, the prospect of greater pressures to come was at least as important as any damage actually inflicted, since the real target was the will of the North Vietnamese government to continue the aggression in the South rather than its capability to do so. Even if it retained the capability, North Vietnam might elect to discontinue the aggression if it anticipated future costs and risks greater than it had bargained for.[2]

When asked to comment on the working group's program, the JCS criticized it as inconclusive, because it did not clearly provide for the continuation of military pressures until U.S. national objectives in Southeast Asia were achieved -- a stable and independent non-Communist government in South Vietnam and a stabilized Laos conforming to the Geneva Accords of 1962. The JCS further stated that

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[1] In retrospect, any expectation that North Vietnam might "yield" after experiencing the limited military pressures of the first phase period appears to have been unbelievably optimistic, and a serious misjudgment of North Vietnam's will to continue the war.

[2] Draft NSAM on Southeast Asia, 29 November 1964, TOP SECRET.

the slow and uncertain pace of the program could permit and encourage enemy build-ups, invite further escalations, and make miscalculations more likely regarding U.S. resolve and determination.

The JCS recommended instead a more accelerated program of intensive air strikes against key targets from the outset, as offering a higher probability of achieving U.S. objectives, at lesser risk, casualties, and cost; and as presenting a clearer picture to all concerned of U.S. determination and U.S. objectives. The JCS program consisted of the military actions they had recommended in response to the Bien Hoa incident, starting with air strikes against airfields and POL facilities in the Hanoi/Haiphong area and extending to progressive air strikes throughout North Vietnam. The program would be conducted rather swiftly, but its tempo could be adjusted to mesh at some point with negotiations, and it could be suspended short of full destruction of North Vietnam, if U.S. objectives were achieved earlier.[1]

The more accelerated JCS program was in consonance with relatively consistent JCS views that the way to exert significant military pressure on North Vietnam was to bring to bear the maximum practicable conventional military power in a short time.

Although the foregoing represented the course of action preferred by the JCS, they also submitted to the SecDef (at his request) their views as to how a graduated program of systematically increased military pressures against North Vietnam should be conducted, to (a) signal the willingness and determination of the U.S. to achieve its objectives; (b) reduce North Vietnamese support of the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos, and (c) punish North Vietnam for supporting insurgent actions. Sequential military actions in this program included resuming or intensifying the DESOTO Patrol, GVN maritime harassment of North Vietnam, and air/ground operations in the Laos panhandle; initiating U.S. armed reconnaissance and interdiction in Laos and low-level reconnaissance probes of North Vietnam near the Laos border,

[1] JCSM 955-64, 14 November 1964, TOP SECRET; and JCSM 982-64, 23 November 1964, TOP SECRET.

against infiltration-associated targets and lines of communication; conducting air strikes against infiltration-associated targets elsewhere in North Vietnam; aerial mining of ports, a naval quarantine/blockade, and increasingly severe air attacks in North Vietnam; air strikes against the remaining targets in the 94 Target List; and amphibious/airborne operations to establish a lodgment on one or more coastal areas of North Vietnam. The program included appropriate reprisals in the event of serious North Vietnamese/VC provocations, and certain collateral actions, such as evacuation of dependents and introducing U.S. ground forces into South Vietnam for security and deterrent purposes.[1]

It is worth noting that the expressed differences between the JCS and the November working group were not between those who wished to prosecute the war to its fullest and those who wished to terminate U.S. commitments and withdraw from Southeast Asia. Both accepted the limited national objective of defending South Vietnam and Laos, and both agreed that among other things there was a requirement for applying greater military pressure against North Vietnam in order to achieve it, as a form of "strategic persuasion" to induce North Vietnam to call off the war. The major differences were over how much and what kind of military pressure to apply, when and how to start, how fast and how far to go, when to seek a political settlement, and perhaps what to settle for. Differences over these issues were considerable, of course, but they did not appear to reflect an extreme "hawk" versus "dove" alignment. Perhaps the strongest JCS objection to the working group program was that it seemed ineffectual, in their view, and might stop short of achieving stated national objectives.

The President conditionally approved the working group's proposed program on 1 December, without, however, fixing a precise timetable or firming up details of implementation. It was anticipated that the program would begin after certain diplomatic preliminaries, to obtain

[1]JCSM 967-64, 18 November 1964, TOP SECRET.

Laotian concurrence for actions in Laos, to exact some quid pro quo from GVN leaders in terms of improved cooperativeness, and to alert certain allies (particularly those from whom the U.S. hoped for concrete measures of support) to the proposed course of action. In particular, it was hoped that a greater degree of political stability could be brought about in South Vietnam, before subjecting its government to the possible stresses and strains of expanded military action, and before committing the U.S. too deeply to a deliberate expansion of the war against the North. As noted above, improved stability in the GVN had even been written into the working group program as one of the prerequisites for advancing beyond Phase I.

The President's 1 December decisions were closely held during the next months, as an extremely sensitive matter. The working group had prepared a draft NSAM to be promulgated, but none was issued, and the decision was conveyed by informal means.[1] The impression in the Joint Staff was that the President generally approved the program as a kind of "master plan" for U.S. action in Southeast Asia, but possibly wished to retain a certain flexibility of choice with respect to necessary implementing decisions. In any case, officers felt that each successive step in the program would have to be submitted for separate further approval, and would thus be subjected to further review and reconsideration, on an ad hoc basis.

The diplomatic preliminaries were taken care of during the first weeks in December. The Ambassador to South Vietnam, who had been brought back to Washington to participate in the decisions on the working group program, returned to Saigon with instructions to outline what the U.S. expected the GVN to do to strengthen its internal position, and received certain assurances. [ ]

[1] For this reason, subsequent JCS papers could refer to the decision only in vague terms, for example: "Subsequent to NSC meetings associated with [the Ambassador's] recent trips to Washington, the JCS were informed that a controlled program of gradual pressures on the DRV had been approved . . ." (JCSM 1041-64, 11 December 1964, TOP SECRET); and "In early December 1964, . . . a program of graduated pressures against the DRV was adopted" (JCS 2339/169, 10 February 1965, TOP SECRET).

The first new military measure in the program, limited U.S. air strikes against infiltration routes and facilities in Laos, was initiated on 14 December, under the nickname BARREL ROLL. As indicated earlier, the strikes were not publicized, and were considered more important for their political value as "signals" to North Vietnam than as militarily useful interdiction operations.

Just as the BARREL ROLL program was getting underway, US-GVN relations took an awkward turn. On 20 December a group of "Young Turk" officers in the RVNAF, apparently in collusion with the RVNAF Commander-in-Chief (and former Premier) Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, had abruptly dissolved the High National Council, a provisional legislative body which the U.S. had been supporting in trying to effect an orderly transition from military to civilian rule. The Young Turks' action, and U.S. attempts to have the Council reinstated and preserve some semblance of civilian government, precipitated an open crisis in US-Vietnamese relations. U.S. representatives criticized Vietnamese military interference in politics and warned that the U.S. might have to withdraw its support; Vietnamese leaders openly accused the U.S. of intervening in their internal affairs.

The unsettled situation in Saigon was one of the factors which may have caused the U.S. to pass up an opportunity to carry out a reprisal action against North Vietnam, as called for in Phase I of the new program. On 24 December, Christmas eve in Washington, the VC bombed the Brink BOQ, a U.S. officers' billet in the heart of Saigon. Two Americans were killed and 63 were injured; 34 Vietnamese

and one Australian were also injured. It was the type of incident which seemed to fall well within approved guidelines as to what justified a reprisal, and the JCS recommended an immediate air strike against Vit Thu Lu Army barracks (Target No. 36, just north of the 17th parallel, barely across the border of North Vietnam). They proposed that this be primarily a U.S. operation, with Vietnamese participation if feasible (considering the time element), and employing up to 40 aircraft sorties. It was to be a one-day strike, on a much smaller and more politically viable scale than the recommended JCS reprisal for the Bien Hoa incident.[1]

In Washington there was a reluctance to act immediately on the JCS recommendation, and certainly a disinclination to carry out a reprisal strike on a Christmas day. In addition, the President was at the LBJ Ranch, the SecDef was out of town, and Congress was not in session. State representatives felt strongly that the President should consult Congress before carrying out a reprisal strike, and several days went by before officials decided to take the question to the President at the Ranch. It was finally discussed with the President on 29 December -- too late, in the SecDef's opinion, for a reprisal action -- and resulted in a negative decision.

Thus, Phase I of the new program, from mid-December 1964 to mid-January 1965, passed without a reprisal action. Both the Ambassador and COMUSMACV agreed that there was little chance for improving the situation in South Vietnam without advancing to Phase II, but the unsettled political situation in Saigon continued, and in mid-January it was decided to extend Phase I another 30 days, to mid-February 1965. Meanwhile, the JCS urged that BARREL ROLL be accelerated, and that reprisal strikes against North Vietnam be carried out 24 hours after the next act of terrorism in the South.[2] Clearly, the pressure was building up to go forward with the program.

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[1] JCSM 1074-64, 28 December 1964, TOP SECRET.

[2] JCSM 7-65, 7 January 1965, TOP SECRET; JCSM 28-65, 15 January 1965, TOP SECRET; and JCSM 70-65, 29 January 1965, TOP SECRET.

Reprisal Concepts and Plans

Throughout 1964, the idea of taking retaliatory or reprisal action against North Vietnam in response to North Vietnamese and/or VC provocations had been a relatively consistent theme in the military planning for more intensive action in Southeast Asia, as authorized by the President as early as March of the year. The idea appeared in a number of JCS-recommended programs, and received considerable attention during the deliberations of the November working group as well. It particularly appealed to some as a way of initiating a bombing program against North Vietnam, since it might be politically more advantageous to begin with a reprisal for an outrageous VC action than in cold blood without special provocation. It was one of the important measures recommended by the working group to the President for immediate implementation, beginning with any suitable opportunity, and was presumably approved by him.

During the course of the Vietnam war, the VC had occasionally brought off an especially dramatic or spectacular incident, such as a major attack on a bridge, a raid on a provincial or district capital, or a large-scale terrorist strike against civilian or military personnel. Such incidents had important psychological as well as military impact. They demonstrated the ability of the VC to conduct large and well-planned operations at times and places of their own choosing, and showed up the impotence of the GVN in maintaining essential security. They were therefore acutely embarrassing to the GVN, and had a depressing effect on friendly morale. In the U.S., press accounts generally magnified them out of all proportion to their significance in the war.

In the past, U.S. forces and facilities had sometimes been singled out in such incidents -- as in the terrorist bombing of U.S. baseball bleachers on 9 February 1964, or the 2 May 1964 attack on the USS CARD, a CVS, in Saigon harbor. With U.S. personnel in the country in large numbers, many in scattered locations, and many of them

dependents, the VC were undoubtedly capable of stepping up such incidents, and there was considerable concern in Washington that they might choose to do so, as part of their campaign against U.S. involvement in the war. Such a step on their part would indicate a new, more aggressive, turn in the war -- even an "escalation" -- with the added dimension of direct challenge to the U.S. itself. The step would also be difficult to prevent or counter within the confines of the South Vietnam war, without tying down an excessive number of troops in static defense duties.

During 1964, therefore, the idea of taking reprisal actions against North Vietnam gained favor as the appropriate response to dramatic North Vietnamese and/or VC incidents, as a punishment for resorting to such incidents and as a deterrent to their repetition. In the JCS view, any extraordinary incident which reflected a serious provocation in comparison with ongoing military operations justified an appropriate reprisal against the North. The August 1964 attack on U.S. destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf was considered such a provocation, and the U.S. reprisal in response to it was represented as a suitable precedent. The JCS wished to further extend the Tonkin precedent to cover extraordinary VC incidents in South Vietnam as well, whether directed against Americans or South Vietnamese, to offset any implication that the U.S. was willing to react vigorously only when unilateral U.S. interests were affected.

The daring VC mortar attack on Bien Hoa airbase on 1 November lent considerable urgency to the formulation of reprisal policies and plans. The attack was the most spectacular anti-American incident to date, and, in the JCS view at least, constituted a serious escalation of the war which warranted a severe punitive response. Perhaps only the imminence of the Presidential election and time delays in the U.S. decision process prevented some form of U.S. retaliation at the time.

In any case, the November working group which was formed after the Bien Hoa incident devoted considerable attention to laying out advance guidelines for future reprisal actions, so that such actions could be timely and not unduly delayed in the decision process.

The working group recommended that the U.S. and the GVN be prepared at any time to carry out reprisal air strikes against North Vietnam in the event of extraordinary VC provocations -- such as attacks on airfields, an attack on Saigon, attacks on provincial or district capitals, major attacks on U.S. citizens, attacks on important POL facilities, attacks on bridges and railroad lines, or other "spectaculars." The group recommended that reprisals be undertaken preferably within 24 hours of an incident, so that they would be clearly associated with it; and that GVN forces be used to the maximum extent, supplemented as necessary by U.S. forces.

In connection with these recommendations, the working group prepared a list of 17 appropriate reprisal targets, all south of the 19th parallel in North Vietnam, taken from the 94 Target List. The targets ranged from military barracks and supply depots to several airfields, a port, and one naval base, all linked to the infiltration problem as a common thread of justification. One or more targets would be chosen at the time, depending on the nature of the incident. Sortie requirements for each target varied widely, from four in one case to a high of 115 in another.

In the working group's view, some potential North Vietnamese and/or VC actions were considered to be of a different order of magnitude, or of a different class, from VC actions in the South, and warranted separate treatment. While certain of these actions, such as another attack on the DESOTO Patrol, would still justify only a limited reprisal in response, others were so large as to justify U.S. counter-actions that went far beyond a simple reprisal principle.

The above guidelines were presumably approved by the President as part of his 1 December decisions on the working group's program.

It will be noted that the guidelines implied a high state of readiness to carry out reprisals on short notice, since the incidents calling for reprisal were at the enemy's option and could occur without warning. The guidelines also called for very rapid decisions on the reprisal targets to be struck, since undue delays would tend to dissipate the reprisal connotation of the action. Prior planning was essential, therefore, if reprisals were to be executed promptly. The thinking in the Joint Staff was in terms of having previously staffed and briefed target packages available, ready for decision.

Reprisal planning was still in progress on 24 December, when the Brink BOQ incident occurred. Within the Joint Staff, the failure to carry out a suitable reprisal for the incident raised serious questions as to whether the reprisal guidelines which had been set forth represented U.S. government policy and whether the U.S. decision process was flexible enough to implement them.

Nonetheless, reprisal planning continued, much of it in connection with the forthcoming resumption of the DESOTO Patrol. The Patrol had already been the object of hostile North Vietnamese action, on 2 and 4 August 1964, when it was fired upon (giving rise to the first U.S. retaliatory strikes), and again on 18 September 1964, when it was "menaced" by enemy vessels.[1] In the event the Patrol was attacked again, military authorities wished to be ready with a prepackaged set of reprisal targets that was politically acceptable, with preassigned forces to strike them, and with a detailed strike plan. Accordingly, CINCPAC and the JCS began preparing and refining a suitable plan. This was CINCPAC Frag Order No. 3, nicknamed FLAMING DART.

[1]The 18 September incident was ambiguous. The DESOTO Patrol opened fire on several unidentified vessels (spotted on the radar at night) which appeared to be closing in rapidly as if to attack and which did not respond to warning shots. The Patrol apparently sank or drove off the hostile vessels. It could not be proved to the satisfaction of U.S. decision-makers that the Patrol was actually attacked or that an attack had been intended, however, and the U.S. did not carry out any reprisal strikes. A few days after the incident, Moscow reported that three North Vietnamese vessels had been sunk.

The target date for the resumption of the DESOTO Patrol (after a stand-down following the 18 September "menacing" incident) was early February 1965. As that date approached, various drafts of Frag Order No. 3 came under high-level scrutiny, and a number of last-minute changes were made.[1] Several minor targets were substituted for several of the more significant targets recommended by CINCPAC and the JCS, in order to reduce the risk of aircraft losses and to reduce overall sortie requirements. (For example, an Army supply depot and port facilities in the Vinh/Ben Thuy area were dropped in favor of two barracks areas elsewhere, because at the time of the August Tonkin strikes the Vinh/Ben Thuy area was found to be heavily defended.) In addition, several options were introduced, to provide a variety of target choices in terms of numbers and combinations of targets. This presumably permitted a selection of reprisals of varying severity, depending on the seriousness of the provocation.

On 2 February, 5 days before the DESOTO Patrol was scheduled to start, Frag Order No. 3 took on final shape. The JCS requested CINCPAC to break out the designated reprisal targets into three attack options, consisting respectively of three, five, and seven specified targets; and to plan to conduct air strikes against them when directed, by option or by target, in any combination. The options and targets, together with estimated sorties, were as follows:

		Strike	Flak	CAP	Total
Option One					
Tgts 33	Dong Hoi Barracks	24	8	8	40
36	Vit Thu Lu Barracks	24	8	4	36
39	Chap Le Barracks	40	12	4	56
	Total.....	88	28	16	132
Option Two					
Tgts 33, 36, 39 of Option One, plus:					
24	Chanh Hoa Barracks	28	12	12	52
32	Vu Con Barracks	10	8	4	22
	Total.....	126	48	32	206
Option Three					
Tgts 33, 36, 39, 24, 32 of Option Two, plus:					
14	Thanh Hoa Bridge	32	12	4	48
74	Quang Khe Naval Base	22	4	2	28
	Total.....	180	64	38	282

[1] CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, and COMUSMACV 301845Z January 1965, TOP SECRET.

Of these seven targets, six were south of the 19th parallel, and on the November working group's reprisal target list; one, the Thanh Hoa Bridge, Target 14 in Option Three, was north of the 19th parallel. (See Figure 1.)

The strike plans against these targets were to be based on the employment of U.S. forces in mainland Southeast Asia in the alerted state, five land-based tactical fighter squadrons plus up to three CVAs; but they would also provide for strikes from a nonalert status, i.e., with U.S. forces on rotation in country plus the one or two CVAs normally on station. Strikes from a nonalert status, if ordered, would be simultaneous, launched within the minimum feasible reaction time, and/or as near as practicable to first light following the reprisal incident.

In addition, CINCPAC was also requested to include "preliminary provisions" for a strike at Target 32 -- Vu Con Barracks on Option Two above -- by the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), with U.S. flak suppression, combat air patrol (CAP), pathfinder, and search and rescue (SAR) aircraft authorized. These provisions were not to be revealed to the GVN unless separately directed, since the inclusion of this VNAF strike might or might not be ordered, depending on the circumstances.[1]

CINCPAC responded on 3 February by issuing Operation Order FLAMING DART, directing CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT to be prepared to conduct air strikes when directed against the above targets by option, or against any combination of the above targets within or between options, in retaliation for North Vietnamese attacks against the DESOTO Patrol. CINCPACFLT was authorized to employ up to three CVAs, and CINCPACAF was authorized to employ aircraft currently based in mainland Southeast Asia. CINCPACFLT was assigned Targets 33 and 36 of Option One, 24 of Option Two, and 74 of Option Three. CINCPACAF

[1] JCS 4484 to CINCPAC, info COMUSMACV et. al., 030019Z February 1965, TOP SECRET.

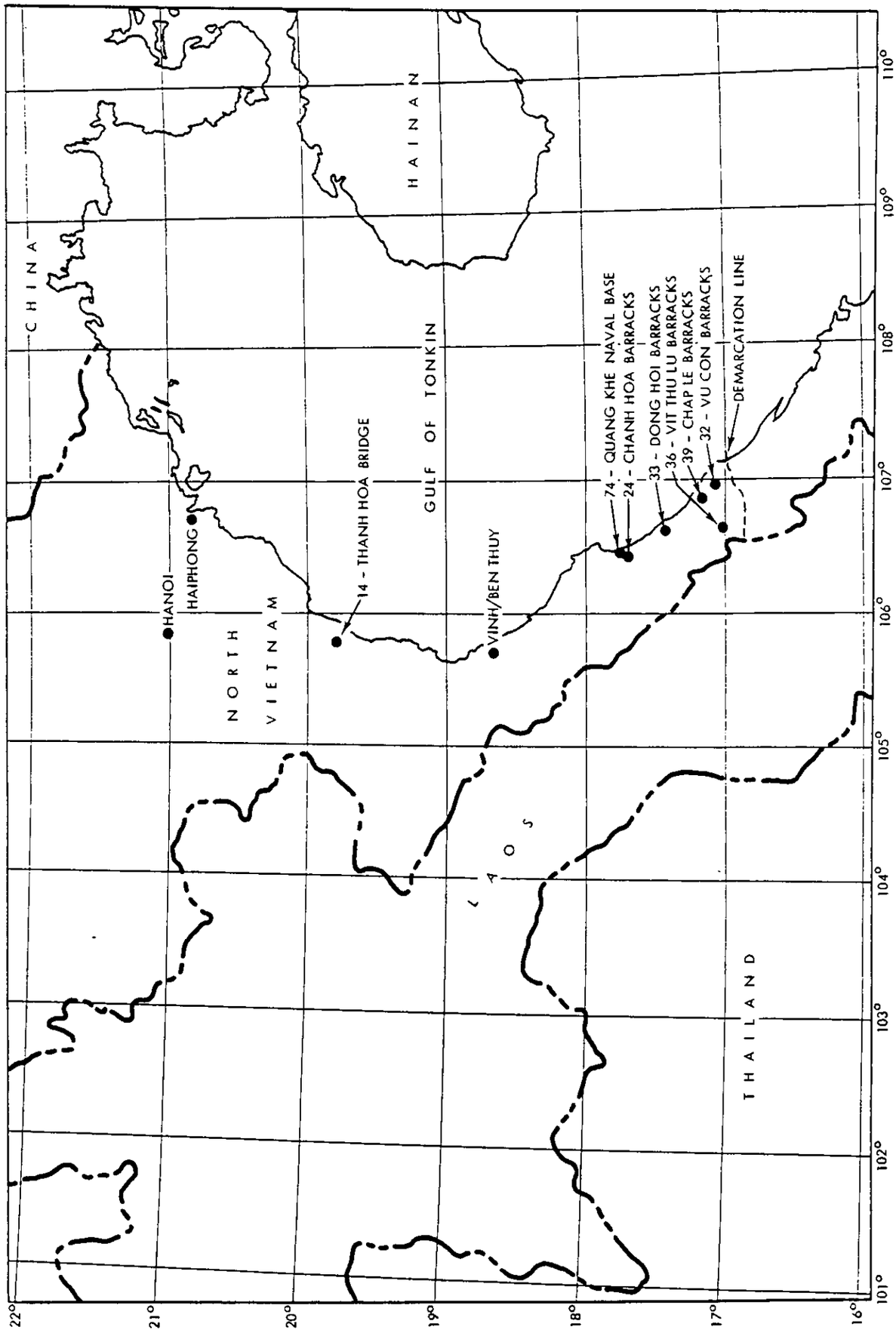

FIGURE 1. Flaming Dart Targets

was assigned Targets 39 of Option One, 32 of Option Two, and 14 of Option Three. CINCPACAF would assume operational control of PACAF forces on mainland Southeast Asia under the control of COMUSMACV and, acting through the Commander, 2nd Air Division, at Tan Son Nhut, would coordinate timing and routes to preclude mutual interference. The type of aircraft would be at the option of the operational commanders. Aircraft would be armed with optimum conventional ordnance for the target to be attacked, excluding napalm.[1]

Although Operation Order FLAMING DART was prepared for the specific eventuality of an attack on the DESOTO Patrol, it was so designed that it might also provide the vehicle for a reprisal decision in the event of other provocations, such as a dramatic VC incident in South Vietnam. The particular targets involved had been briefed to the principal decision-makers, had the virtue of being known and understood by them, and even had their tentative approval. Moreover, nearly all the targets were in the far south of North Vietnam and all could be associated with infiltration, which were two of the conditions laid down in the guidelines for retaliating against the North for spectacular incidents in the South. The Operation Order therefore might well serve as a generalized preplanned reprisal target package, offering a wide spectrum of choices, and sufficiently flexible to be utilized for a variety of circumstances.

Although Joint Staff planners had the broader utility of the FLAMING DART plan in mind, it was still the previously attacked and harassed DESOTO Patrol, scheduled to resume on 7 February, which occupied foremost attention in Washington and the field as an early possible occasion for a reprisal action. Then, a few days before the Patrol was due to resume, it was cancelled on orders from Washington. Soviet Premier Kosygin was on his way to Hanoi, and the U.S. did not wish to engage in anything which might appear provocative during his visit.

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[1] CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, and COMUSMACV, 040014Z February 1965, ~~TOP SECRET~~

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