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Atch 1

Airpower In Limited War

No war in history has been reported as fully or commented on as extensively as the war in Vietnam. The commentaries certainly aren't limited to members of your profession who are continuously associated with aerospace activities. I've discovered, in some 15 years of association with military problems and military people, that most Americans are willing to give advice -- or at least opinions -- on military affairs. The same people probably wouldn't think of advising a lawyer, doctor or economist in his area of professional expertise.

I don't make this observation critically. Military affairs are, after all, public affairs. The interests, even the life, of our country depend on how well our military affairs are conducted and how carefully military objectives are meshed with national objectives. If the general public were to lose interest we'd be in deep trouble.

It does seem to me that there is a rather general tendency among Americans -- not only civilians -- to over-simplify some of the problems of national defense -- particularly the direct use of military power to support

national objectives. Perhaps, at least in part, this is because we have a long tradition of going all out to solve our internal physical problems of nation building, construction and production. We are always impatient to get the job done.

It is difficult for most of us to apply an approach of restrained use of power to warfare. It is particularly difficult since our major wars of the past have been fought for an unlimited objective -- the defeat and surrender of an enemy in the shortest time by the application of maximum power. It is probable that such a straightforward objective will not again apply to a war fought with conventional weapons, in which one or both of the super powers are involved either directly or indirectly. It might not apply even to a general nuclear war between the two, if such a tragedy should occur.

This is a result of several factors, foremost among them being the possession by both super powers of large nuclear armed forces which, if put to use, could make the relatively unlimited use of power in past wars look pale by comparison. Korea was a watershed in this turn of events and Vietnam is a prime example of the delicate problems of

Of all the military forces involved in a limited war, it probably is most difficult to determine the proper level at which the attack component of our air power should be applied, and to evaluate its effectiveness under self-imposed restraints. There is no doubt that air power could destroy North Vietnam if it were in our interests, the interests of South Vietnam and the interests of the free world to do so. Our government does not believe it would be, and neither do the great majority of Americans.

There is not as general an agreement on the proper level of airpower application. Nevertheless, most of us know that the ability to destroy North Vietnam or other areas, even though not used, plays an important part in limited war. The existence of this potential sets a limit on how high a rational enemy may be willing to escalate a limited war, when he knows that at some point, further escalation would lead to his utter defeat. This is one of the great advantages our over-all air superiority provides.

U.S. Objectives in Vietnam

The President and other senior officials of the government have repeatedly outlined our military objectives in Vietnam. I'm sure you are familiar with them, but to make certain we are all thinking within the same framework, I'll quote President Johnson's statement of objectives in his press conference of October 6, 1966. He said:

"Our purpose is a limited one and that is to permit self-determination for the people of South Vietnam.

"So it has been the policy of your present Administration to provide the strength that General Westmoreland felt was necessary to prevent the aggressor from succeeding without attempting to either conquer or to invade or to destroy North Vietnam."

It is within this context of restrained and responsible use of military power that I want to give you my evaluation of the effectiveness of airpower in Vietnam. I'm going to touch on two inter-related questions:

1. What have been the effects of the air campaign in South Vietnam?

military targets south of the Demarcation Line.

You will recall that in the early stages of this war -- through 1964 -- U.S. military personnel were in South Vietnam in an advisory and support role. However, by 1965, it had become apparent to the South Vietnam government and to us that the direct support of U.S. combat units would be necessary to turn the tide that was then running in favor of the Viet Cong. At the request of the GVN, we began to deploy ground and Air Force combat units to South Vietnam in the spring of 1965.

As 1964 drew to a close, the enemy was shifting from guerrilla action to large scale operations in order to defeat the South Vietnamese army and take control of the government.

Indications of this shift in strategy were the increase in enemy battalion level attacks from about one per month in 1963 to three a month in 1964; an acceleration of Viet Cong terrorist incidents from 17,000 to 28,000 in a year; and a deployment of large enemy forces in the central highlands with the apparent intent of cutting South Vietnam in half.

The North Vietnamese army of about 250,000 was available for combat in South Vietnam. North Vietnam had several thousand trucks, fuel supplies, seaports along its southern coast and a rail system running from China to the South Vietnamese border. This transportation net, if allowed to operate at capacity, could have moved very large elements of the North Vietnamese army into South Vietnam rapidly -- before we could build up our ground forces.

It is a matter of history that the planned offensive did not succeed. It was spoiled by the combined operations of U.S. and South Vietnamese ground and Air Forces and by Navy and Marine air. Our success in preventing the enemy's major offensive of 1965 was the result of the best air-ground teamwork in the history of modern warfare. Airpower had the earliest effects, and made the biggest difference from the war that had gone on in Southeast Asia a dozen years earlier.

phase of the air war until later.

It will be equally obvious that B-52 bombing attacks in South Vietnam, starting in June 1965, were another significant factor. These attacks kept the enemy constantly off balance by preventing him from concentrating his forces, by destroying supply bases in remote regions, and by denying him rest areas in jungle sanctuaries that hitherto had been almost impregnable.

Tactical fighters of the USAF, Navy, Marine Corps and VNAF were, by the end of 1965, flying more than 13,000 strike sorties a month in South Vietnam. Viet Cong and North

Vietnamese casualties totaled about 35,000 for the year. Air attacks have accounted for a substantial part of the total. By way of comparison, total enemy casualties for the previous year -- 1964 -- had been 17,000.

The level of tactical air activity and B-52 bombing continued to increase in 1966. Last year the B-52s, which began operations in June, flew some 1,000 strike sorties, an average of about 150 a month. During the first eleven months of 1966, they have flown nearly 5,000 sorties, for an average of approximately 425 a month. During the past 6 months (June through November 1966), USAF, Navy and Marine tactical aircraft flew more than 63,000 strike sorties in South Vietnam. About 40,000, or 60% were flown by USAF pilots. An additional 15,000 sorties were flown by the VNAF in this period. Our total sorties run well ahead of 1965. Total enemy casualties for the first eight months of this year exceed those of the entire year 1965. Equally significant, battalion size attacks were reduced from a high of 7 a month in 1965, when the Communists still were trying to mount their large-scale offensive, to a low of 1.7 a month in the period July through November 1966. This is despite the fact that

had in 1965. I'll discuss some other reasons for that apparent anomaly when I come to the bombing campaign in the North.

Airpower has enabled us to consistently defeat enemy units with considerably less than half the number of men required by the often quoted 10 to 1 ratio thought necessary by some to deal with guerrilla forces and relatively small regular units in jungle warfare.

Interrogation of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese prisoners shows that they fear B-52 attacks more than any other type of allied action. Next on their "fear list" are tactical fighters, followed by armed helicopters and artillery. A threefold increase in the number of our night attack sorties since 1965 gives the enemy no rest. Both friend and enemy rate the effectiveness of aerial firepower as a dominant factor in the war.

The Air War in North Vietnam

I want to turn now to air operations in North Vietnam. The purpose of these operations is: first, to make it as difficult and as costly as possible for the enemy to support his own and Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam, and second to convince him that the peace table is preferable to continuation of a war he

cannot win. Obviously we have not yet reached the second objective -- an end to the war. The first objective -- limiting the flow of men and supplies -- has been much more successful than some commentators suppose.

It is true that infiltration from the North continues. I do not believe that an air blockade of land and sea routes will ever be completely effective any more than a sea blockade can prevent all commerce from entering or leaving a country. Our interdiction campaign can be made, and is being made, more effective each month as our intelligence, tactics, techniques and equipment are refined by constant analysis. However, the measure of its effectiveness is not so much the number of troops that can be infiltrated as it is the enemy's ability to support those troops once they have entered South Vietnam. Communist armies, like any other armies, cannot fight effectively for long without food, ammunition and replacement equipment. If we assume that the purpose of Communist infiltration is to attack and defeat allied forces in South Vietnam, the decline in large scale enemy attacks seems to indicate that he is encountering severe difficulties in moving his supplies. Let's see why this is so.

The level of our attacks on military targets in the North

has increased steadily since they began in February 1965. Putting aside January 1966, when the bombing pause was in effect, the number of missions rose from 553 in February of 1966 to a high of 3,621 in September.

What have been the effects on enemy supply capabilities? From March 1965 through September 1966, air attacks destroyed or damaged more than 7,000 trucks, 3,000 railway cars, 5,000 bridges and 5,000 barges and boats. In September of this year, some 700 trucks, about the same number of rail cars and 1,400 barges were destroyed or damaged. Roads were cut or cratered in 600 places and 450 bridges destroyed or damaged. This is serious degradation of the North Vietnamese logistic net. Interrogation of prisoners indicates that units arriving in South Vietnam have suffered heavy losses of personnel through air attack, disease and desertion while enroute. After their arrival they probably are not receiving more than 50% of their daily requirement of supplies. We can't determine precisely what percentage of required supplies the enemy actually receives since his requirements are based on his plans. Sustained attacks by large units would require considerably larger tonnage than would guerrilla type harassing operations.

The cost to North Vietnam of infiltrating men and supplies through the air blockade is very high. Somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 people are needed to repair damage to roads, bridges and railroads. Combat troops must be deployed along the routes to defend against air attack. These people, in turn, have to be fed and supplied. Truck convoys must carry their own fuel, thus reducing cargo loads. All of these supporting drains on the enemy's supply system further reduce the level of supplies that are actually delivered to combat troops. We cannot be sure of the overall attrition but it is certainly reasonable to assume that it is a significant amount. Much of the tonnage that does pass into South Vietnam does not arrive at the desired point and hence has to be moved again within South Vietnam and exposed to interdiction by tactical fighters operating south of the 17th Parallel.

I have already pointed out one result of the air interdiction of North Vietnam routes together with interdiction and air and ground attacks as well as other military action in the South: a reduction in battalion level attacks from 7 a month to less than 2 a month. The monthly average of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars killed in action has

capacity, the bulk of his ammunition storage and explosive manufacturing facilities, and nearly all bridges outside the Hanoi and Haiphong areas. A large number of military buildings have been destroyed or damaged, as well as military facilities along the southern coast. Not all of these enemy assets are put permanently out of use. In some cases, bridges, buildings and storage facilities can be repaired or substitutes found. Our bombing of these targets does vastly complicate North Vietnam's problems of supporting aggression in the South, however.

There are other targets that could be attacked but, for a number of reasons have not been. In some cases they support

a civilian economy which we do not want to destroy because of the suffering it would cause the civilian population. In other cases, these potential targets are close to urban residential areas. In still other cases they do not significantly affect the enemy's ability to continue fighting -- at least in the short term. All of these targets are hostages to U.S. airpower which operates over North Vietnam every day. It is a constant reminder to the leaders of North Vietnam of an airpower potential that is being used responsibly and with restraint. That power can be increased to a much higher level if it is concluded, on balance, that this will contribute to the attainment of our objectives. It is also a constant and visible reminder to the people of North Vietnam that their leaders cannot avoid the cost of aggression.

No report on the air war in Vietnam would be complete without mention of the work of our strategic and tactical airlift forces. The Military Airlift Command has flown unprecedented tonnages of cargo and numbers of passengers between the United States and Southeast Asia. MAC C-141s, which evacuate the seriously wounded directly to hospitals in the States, have helped reduce deaths from battlefield injuries to an all-time low. Within the theater, our C-130s,

greater tonnage thus far in 1966 than was airlifted by troop carrier units in the entire Korean War. These tactical airlift forces move troops into battle and supply them with food, weapons, equipment and ammunition in a land of heavy forests, soggy rice fields and often unpassable roads. Airlift has been a priceless asset. Without it, our air and ground forces could not have operated nearly so successfully.

I don't want to leave the impression that the air war in Vietnam has been easy or cheap. It has not been. Especially in the early months of the build-up, while our bases were under construction, Air Force people worked seven days a week under very difficult conditions. They still work seven days a week, but conditions are a lot better than they were in 1965.

In the South, countless sorties have been flown in weather that would have been impossible a few years ago. In the North, anti-aircraft fire around some targets is as heavy as anything encountered over Germany in World War II. No one is likely to refer to it -- as Secretary of State John Hay did to the Spanish American War -- as a "splendid little war."

Conclusion

My over-all conclusion is that the level of USAF operations in both South and North Vietnam is appropriate to our national objectives. We are not undercommitted; neither are we overcommitted. The Air Force is doing its job well -- to the complete satisfaction of the forces we support as part of a joint team. At the same time our present level of effort allows us the option of increasing airpower pressure on the enemy if that becomes necessary.

In support of this conclusion I want to say:

1. That the quality and quantity of USAF close support of ground forces is the best in the history of joint operations. General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has described the air support in South Vietnam as "without parallel in history."

2. That Air Force interdiction operations are better than in any war of the past because of improved reconnaissance and an ability to hit targets accurately under adverse conditions.

3. That the strategic bomber has proved its effectiveness in limited war.

which has increased rapidly in capacity and effectiveness since 1961, has been a significant factor.

There will always be opportunities for improvement pretty much across the board: weapons, electronics, conventional munitions, command and control systems, tactics and techniques. I hope we'll never reach a point where we're satisfied.

The greatest asset we have is the men and women of the Air Force. I am constantly impressed by their courage, know-how and determination to find better ways of doing their jobs. Along with these trained and experienced people, we have the weapons and the supporting systems to meet any requirements that may be placed on the Air Force -- in Southeast Asia or wherever else aerospace power may be needed to achieve our national objectives.