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The exercise revealed the need for a number of changes in configuration of the Forward Floating Depot, one of which was to reduce the number of rations carried. (C)

THE COMMUNIST MILITARY THREAT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

The following discussion provides a broad general outline of the communist military threat to Southeast Asia as CINCPAC saw it and as it influenced his plans, decisions, and actions in the latter half of 1964.¹

Concept of Threat

Southeast Asia was pressed securely between the thumb of North Vietnam and the palm of Communist China. Typically, the area was extremely rough, densely vegetated, and only passable by primitive and infrequent routes. These features, CINCPAC thought, would preclude a communist invasion on the grand scale that had been experienced in Europe. Instead, he felt, an invasion would probably involve multiple penetrations by task forces² advancing over the few routes threading through Southeast Asia; much like the Japanese invasion of Malaya during World War II. Although division and sometimes army size units would transit some of the routes, they would approach in column and seldom be mutually supporting. Only the lead battalion would have the occasion to deploy with companies abreast and then only when faced by roadblocks or other hasty defense tactics.

The expansive rice-cultivated deltas in the vicinity (65 mile radius) of Bangkok, Rangoon, and Saigon would permit broader fronts

2. Task forces consist of a preponderance of "trigger puller" combat troops with provisions allowed for route security forces, rear area engineers, additional signal support, administrative troops, motor transport units, and antiaircraft defense of key points along each route.

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and full utilization of artillery. There, vegetation would give little hinderance and there were more feeder routes. Even so, off-road trafficability and deployment would be inhibited by seasonally flooded soil.

CINCPAC considered that the size of the Red military threat in Southeast Asia was largely based on the logistical capabilities of the unsophisticated routes. For the most part the roads were nothing more than bulldozer blade-width tracks that had been improved over the years by adding fist-sized rock, gravel, or other material to improve trafficability. Passing sufficient combat power to provide a threat to Southeast Asia would saturate each of the routes to its capacity.

The initial communist invasion would doubtlessly be phased so that the widely separated columns would converge at key points on a previously determined schedule. (Phasing, in this sense, means to laterally control; a difficult maneuver involving several advancing columns.) CINCPAC believed that the communist plan would envisage deep penetrations through continuous and rapid daily motion. Certainly the invading force would not race through the initial stage of the operation and then stop to build up their rearward lines of communication when so much depended on speed. Instead, CINCPAC thought, the invader's advance would feature boldness and speed and have enough combat power to overrun the in-place defenders. Their aim would be to disrupt a timely U. S. /SEATO reinforcement of the area by destruction or early capture of entry points. The communists would realistically assume that their massive attack would trigger reinforcements, but the external U. S. logistics lines were thousands of miles in length.

It was also unlikely that additional communist units would follow up the invasion, thought CINCPAC, because invasion routes would be saturated at the outset. He conceded, however, that Chinese military manpower provided the potential for a consistent follow-up of replacements to fill the gaps created by casualties.

The Communist Assessment and Their Decisions: CINCPAC assumed that the Reds would be cognizant of the Free Asian military forces they would face when they transited Burma, the Laos buffer area, and when they crossed the Mekong. Even so, he thought the Communists would start their operation with the assessment that the Southeast Asian defense forces in place would offer little resistance and that success would depend on nullifying U.S. reinforcements.

The Communists would probably estimate that the Pathet Lao and People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)¹ would defeat the FAR in Laos; at the same time providing security for the relatively unobscured transit of major Red troop units through Laos.

Departing the North Vietnamese staging area near Dong Hoi, the Communists would cross the demilitarized zone (DMZ) into South Vietnam with the assessment that the Viet Cong (VC) would occupy most of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) time. Probably only one ARVN division would be free of harassment to meet the surprise invasion. However, not wishing to sell the South Vietnamese short, the Red planners would conclude that a second ARVN division would probably be available as well as 15 assorted special battalions (airborne, ranger, marine, armor) to be employed piecemeal. The Communists would count on infiltrating sizeable units from Laos, a week prior to D-day, and taking control of the high ground north of Darang (Col des Nuages).

It would be assumed that it would be next to impossible for Burma to mass its 85 army battalions into a large force at a given point. These Burmese units were scattered throughout Burma in a counter-insurgency role, and they had only two semi-operational brigade headquarters. Further, the Burmese had never maneuvered on a scale larger than battalion, and the country's transportation system would not support large scale deployments. The red planners would probably conclude that there would be token Burmese resistance from Lashio to Mandalay, but it would degenerate to small-scale guerrilla actions. A sizeable communist force would be dropped off at strategic points within Burma to deal with any resistance elements.

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The Reds would also conclude that, if the U. S. reacted immediately, approximately two American divisions could be committed piecemeal. They would consider that their IL-28 Beagle bomber attacks together with TU-2 Bat bombers would slow U. S. reinforcement by damaging Thai air bases and the port facilities at Bangkok, Danang and Saigon. (Figure 1-13 illustrates the communist bomber capability). However, the Chinese would not wish to be overly optimistic so they would not place great reliance on this. The U. S. would probably have a sizeable amount of air power in place, but it would be supported by a fair to poor early warning system.

Since the coups d'etat commenced in the 30's, a substantial part of the armed forces of Thailand had been stationed in the Bangkok environs so the Thai politicians could maintain surveillance over each other. The Communists would conclude that this would continue, particularly because the Thai were not positive as to how the U. S. would react to a full scale invasion.

The Chinese would expect that the most they would have to initially contend with in north and northeast Thailand would be components of two of the three Thai infantry divisions. (The Thai also had a cavalry division and a separate regimental combat team deep in Peninsular Thailand.) They would reckon that three regimental teams (approximately 2,200 men each) would meet them in the north around Chiengrai, Chieng Mai, and Lampang and that three more regimental teams would be dispersed to Udorn, Nakhon Phanom, and Mukdahan.

The Thai willingness to fight, and to conduct delaying actions against the tremendous odds facing them, would be directly correlated to the promised commitment of U. S. /SEATO ground forces.

Weather and Military Operations in Southeast Asia; Appendix F discusses the affects of the Southeast Asian weather on military planning and operations in that area. It also contains illustrations depicting the Southeast Asian wind and rainfall patterns and precipitation data for selected locations.

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Perhaps the U.S. would, in the future be reluctant to bomb Red China as during the Korean War. But the Red Chinese would concentrate the major part of their air power on the air defense of mainland China as the Americans might elect the highly controversial option of bombing China's homeland. The Chinese Communists hoped that the U.S. would forego a strategic nuclear retaliation for fear of world opinion. Although they might be faced with tactical nuclear weapons in the Southeast Asian arena, the Red Chinese considered that the advancing columns, shrouded by vegetation and darkness, would present few lucrative targets. More importantly, the Chinese believed that the Southeast Asians did not wish to be liberated by nuclear weapons. If the U.S. used nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia, the Chinese personnel losses would probably not be great; but "blow down" would create logistical problems and might force heavier reliance on light units using the hundreds of trails leading into Southeast Asia.

The Asian Communists would conclude that their three main tasks were:

- (1) Invade South Vietnam, defeat its harassed army, and make all of Vietnam a communist entity.
- (2) Transit Laos quickly with practically no opposition. Swim the Mekong at multiple points to create safe bridgeheads for rafted equipment and rapidly continue the penetration toward Bangkok. This force to be assisted by Red Chinese divisions marching through North Thailand.
- (3) Invade Burma and immediately declare a no-nonsense policy in the areas overrun. When the penetration advanced as far as Pegu (50 miles north of Rangoon), take the option of sending one division into Thailand via Mae Sot and Tan and/or two infantry regiments by way of Three Pagoda's Pass and Kanburi directly to Bangkok.

The Communists in estimating their force requirements would conclude it necessary to support themselves entirely with all classes of supply. However, as a bonus, they would hope to find large quantities of foodstuffs in Southeast Asia which the natives would be delighted to spare once they were told of cash remunerations. They might also fall heir to some petroleum products, military ordnance and other

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stores, but they would not count on this.

The Military Threat: The threat to Southeast Asia was based on the combined military might of Communist China and North Vietnam, both dedicated communist nations with little foreseeable opportunity to defeat the Western World through economic strangulation. Both had elected to follow revolutionary means to gain the objectives of communism.

The Red Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) consisted of a navy (CCN), air force (CCAF), and an army (CCA). The CCA, 161 divisions and 2,321,000 men, was the largest army in the world. The CCAF had over 2,000 jets ranging from MIG-15 to MIG-21; it was the largest air force in the Far East. The CCN was primarily a coastal defense force of PT boats, but it also had 28 submarines (21 "Whiskey" Class) whose effectiveness was untested.

Ground Threat - With an estimated strength of 224,800, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) had the largest and most effective ground force on the mainland of Southeast Asia. This force had vanquished the French. Its morale was reportedly high and the leadership competent. The PAVN had five infantry divisions, seven infantry brigades, one antiaircraft division, one artillery division, and ten independent infantry regiments. The North Vietnamese Navy, a coastal defense force, formerly consisted of approximately 46 PT boats and motor gunboats. Since the August events in the Gulf of Tonkin the exact count was not available.

A history of these forces revealed an unwillingness to undertake military operations unless they had a heavy numerical superiority over the opposition. However, the logistic restrictions of overland routes limited the Communists ability to achieve that. But they would probably reckon that the Southeast Asian nations were unable to concentrate their military resources. Thus against South Vietnam's 105,000 army combat troops plus 30,000 U.S. reinforcements¹ the Communists could only commit about nine (plus) divisions or 125,800

1. Two U.S. divisions.

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combat troops.¹ Against Thailand's 40,000 army combatants, reinforced initially by about 24,000 other SEATO troops, the Reds could commit something on the order of nine divisions or 136,000 combat troops. Against the Burmese Army combat core of about 77,000, the Red Chinese could commit six divisions or 95,000 combat troops.²

In terms of ground combat power (infantry, armor, artillery) the Communists could have a slight superiority of 356,000 combat troops against an Allied total of around 255,000. This equates to one and a half Communists to one Allied ground combatant. It should be kept in mind however, that the Communists would have surprise to their credit, and their 24 divisions would actually be on the ground and possess the initiative. On the other hand, some of the Allied forces would be thousands of miles from the battle, and many local units would be tied down by tactical operations or politics. Many would not have the wherewithal to reach the multiple-pronged enemy onslaught. Crossing into South Vietnam, Burma, and Thailand the Communists would face no more than 100,000 ground force Allies playing the role of trigger-pulling combatants. A realistic equation of initial ground combat power was roughly three and 1/12 to 1 in favor of the Communists.

In terms of geographical approach and territorial objectives, the Communist ground threat during dry weather is illustrated in Figure i-15.

Air Threat - The Red Chinese could make available 150 IL-28 Beagle bombers out of the 290 in their inventory. It had been estimated, even in consideration of an 80 percent in-commission rate, that 225 bombers were sufficient to handle the Southeast Asian targets. These aircraft, operating from airfields in southern China, could reach almost any target located northward of Bangkok and Saigon to include

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1. Infantry, artillery, and armor.
 2. Does not include administrative and rear area troops.

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those two cities.¹ In addition, the Chinese Communists could deploy 360 MIG-15/17 jet fighters toward Southeast Asia, and 40 IL-10 Beasts that were reclassified as prop ground attack aircraft. This totaled 625 aircraft.

The overall communist campaign would probably commence with Beagle and Bat bomber strikes against selected targets² throughout Southeast Asia. U.S. fighter/bomber aircraft deploying to Southeast Asia from other locations would probably find most of the major airfields and their facilities heavily damaged after the first 24 hours of Chinese bombing sorties.

Of the 360 jet fighter aircraft it was likely that 180 would be used to control airspace and to perform air defense missions in the extreme south of Red China and in North Vietnam. The remaining 180 jet fighters would probably be used in a "guns only" close support attack role in conjunction with the 40 IL-10s.

It should be noted that the Red Chinese had the capability of airlifting 5,000 troops in the first sortie. Their experience in conducting a lift of this magnitude, however, was limited.

Naval Threat - The Communist Chinese were capable of:

1. Conducting anti-shipping tactics by employing 28 submarines. The "W" Class submarine carried a warload of 12 twenty one inch torpedoes or 16 torpedo-tube mines. These submarines could arrive in the South China Sea in approximately six days. It was estimated that 12 to 15 submarines could be committed initially but only four to six would be available on a sustained basis.

2. Providing conventional amphibious lift for about 15,000 lightly equipped troops. This capability could be

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- 1. Bomb load data have been derived from the intelligence annex of USAF Specific Operational Requirements (SOR) publication. The Beagle's 6,600 pound bomb load capability has sometimes been erroneously calculated as only 2,200 pounds. Bats are estimated to have a 2,200 pound bomb load capability.
 - 2. Airfields, rail marshalling yards, port facilities, key rail bridges.

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increased considerably with use of powered junks, which could lift as many as 45,000 additional troops over a short distance.

3. Conducting large-scale defensive and small-scale offensive minelaying.

4. Conducting operations with a major part of its PT boats against naval forces and shipping in the South China Sea. The P-6 and P-4 PT boats were capable of speeds over 45 knots and were armed with 21 inch and 18 inch torpedoes respectively. The CCN considered PT boat units as part of its "elite" forces. These boats, utilizing the cover of weather and capitalizing on their small size, would endeavor to retaliate against blockading forces or U.S. combat or supply shipping. They had no on-board reload torpedo reserve and their short range radar provided insufficient air warning. Also, the 25mm guns were relatively ineffective against modern aircraft.

Summary of Threat: Any communist military campaign to conquer Southeast Asia would be largely a land campaign with principal reliance on army forces supported by the CCAF. In the event of such a campaign the Communists would count on the Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam to step up their guerrilla warfare efforts.

It is possible that the Red Chinese might not attack Burma in the initial phase of the war because of a political decision by Peiping. Even so, Chinese troops enroute to Thailand might cross the eastern Shan States to reach Thailand.

COMMUNIST FORCE STRENGTH CHANGES

(Figure I-18 refers.)

Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR)

As in the past, the USSR was the most important communist force in the Far East and the one reflecting the most important changes in military posture during 1964. Continuing the trend of the previous year, there was a reduction in the number of personnel in the Soviet armed forces. This was offset, in part, by the deployment of improved weapons and equipment.

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