TOP SECRET

COPY No. 2

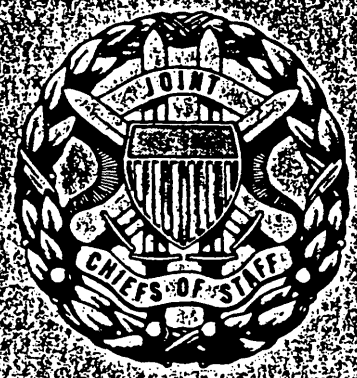
00005

THE HISTORY OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM

1960-1968

PART I



OASD(PA) DFOISR
TOP SECRET CONTROL
Copy No. 570
Case No. 87-F01-671
T.S. No. 88-TS-080
Document No. 5

HISTORICAL DIVISION
JOINT SECRETARIAT
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

EXEMPT FROM GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
EXEMPTION CATEGORY (1), (3)
DECLASSIFY UPON NOTIFICATION OF ORIGINATOR
(CONTAINS FOREIGN CLASSIFIED INFORMATION)

~~REGRADED SECRET~~
~~DATE 10 JUL 1981~~
~~AUTHORITY~~
~~DECLAS OR~~

87-85

TOP SECRET

CJCS #17

EXCISED UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 5USC552
(b) (1) 25 MAY 1988 87-F-0671

#615

AUTHORITY

This volume is one of several special studies comprising the official history of the actions and activities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff relating to the war in Vietnam. It has been prepared by historians in the Historical Division of the Joint Secretariat in accordance with professional standards of historiography. Inasmuch as the content of the volume has not been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff it is to be construed as descriptive only and not as constituting the official position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on any subject.

JAMES A. SHANNON
Brigadier General, USAF
Secretary

CONTENTS

PART I (1960-1964)

Chapter		Page
	INTRODUCTION	xxiii
1	THE FINAL YEAR OF THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION	
	US Policy	1- 1
	The Tay Ninh Incident	1- 3
	The Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front	1- 5
	The Limitations of the GVN	1- 7
	US Programs	1- 8
	GVN Forces	1-11
	The Counterinsurgency Plan	1-18
	Strains in the US Military-Civilian Relationship	1-25
2	REASSESSMENT: KENNEDY'S PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR VIETNAM	
	Reports on Vietnam in Early 1961	2- 2
	A Program of Action for Vietnam	2- 7
	The Johnson Visit	2-11
	Border Control	2-18
	The Uncertainties of Mid-1961	2-20
3	A NEW PHASE: POLICY AND MILITARY OPERATIONS	
	Taylor-Rostow Mission	3- 1
	Operations: McNamara Takes Command	3-12
	A New Command	3-16
	Trouble with Diem	3-17
	Coup Attempt	3-20

Chapter		Page
4	SEARCH FOR STRATEGY	
	US Counterinsurgency Training and Planning	4- 1
	The Outline Campaign Plan	4- 5
	The Thompson Plan	4- 7
	The Binh Duong Plan - Operation SUNRISE	4-12
	The Hilsman Report	4-13
	The Strategic Hamlet Program	4-15
	The National Campaign Plan	4-24
5	GROWTH OF US MILITARY INVOLVEMENT 1962-1963	
	The MAP and GVN Force Levels	5- 1
	Long-Range Program	5- 3
	More US Support	5- 6
	Air Augmentation	5- 9
	Rules of Engagement and Restrictions on US Air Operations	5-13
	Intelligence and Communications Buildup	5-16
	Civilian Irregular Defense Groups	5-16
	Use of Napalm	5-18
	Political Developments in 1962	5-19
	Progress Reports	5-24
	The Wheeler Report	5-26
	Hilsman-Forrestal Report	5-31
	Balance Sheet	5-34
6	THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN VIETNAM THROUGH AUGUST 1963	
	The Battle of Ap Bac	6- 1
	Diem's Public Image	6- 3
	The Press and US Military Participation in the War	6- 5
	Signs of Friction	6- 8
	Diem's Domestic Political Troubles	6-11
	Reappraisal of US Policy	6-20
	Talk of a Negotiated Settlement	6-30

Chapter		Page
7	THE FALL OF THE DIEM REGIME	
	Pressure on Diem	7- 1
	The Krulak-Mendenhall Mission--Progress in the War	7- 3
	Definition of US Objectives	7- 6
	Public Reactions	7- 8
	A Program of Action	7- 8
	The McNamara-Taylor Recommendations	7-13
	Progress Reports	7-18
	Coup Plotting Again Emerges	7-20
	Trouble Between General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge	7-24
	The Coup	7-31
	A New Start	7-32
	Status of the Counterinsurgency	7-34
	The 20 November Honolulu Conference	7-35
8	THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION	
	1964: A New Year Begins	8- 1
	The Khanh Coup, 30 January 1964	8- 4
	The French Attitude and Other International Aspects	8- 9
	Early Actions of the Johnson Administration: NSAM 273	8-14
	Planning for Actions Against North Vietnam	8-17
	OPLAN 34A Gets Under Way	8-22
	GVN National and Province Plans	8-23
	New Organization and Planning in Washington	8-24
	The JCS Recommendations of 22 January	8-27
	JCS Planning After the Khanh Coup	8-31
9	THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RECOMMENDS A PROGRAM	
	Preparation for a Visit to South Vietnam	9- 1
	Cross-Border Operations	9- 8
	Naval Blockade of North Vietnam	9-10

Chapter		Page
9	THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RECOMMENDS A PROGRAM--Continued	
	The March Trip.	9-11
	Secretary McNamara's Report	9-12
	JCS Views on the McNamara Report. . . .	9-18
	Other Views on the McNamara Report. . .	9-20
	Approval of the 12 Recommendations: NSAM 288.	9-20
	Implementation of NSAM 288: RVN Forces	9-23
	Implementation of NSAM 288: Cross-Border Operations	9-28
	YANKEE TEAM	9-32
	Implementation of NSAM 288: Future Operations.	9-33
	The Target List	9-38
10	THE CONSULTATIONS OF MAY AND JUNE, 1964	
	General Khanh Takes a New Tack.	10- 1
	The May Visit of the Secretary of Defense	10- 3
	Additional Aid Funds Requested.	10- 7
	Post-Visit Consultations.	10- 8
	JCS Contributions to the Honolulu Conference Preparations	10-17
	The Honolulu Conference, 1-2 June 1964.	10-23
	Survey of the Existing Situation. . . .	10-24
	The Policy Group Discussions.	10-29
	After the Honolulu Conference	10-30
	Action at the United Nations.	10-33
	Further Thought on a Congressional Resolution.	10-35
	General Taylor's Recommendations on Patterns of Attack.	10-38
	CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64	10-40
	Status of Recommendations 11 and 12, NSAM 288.	10-41
	Resignation of Ambassador Lodge	10-41

Chapter		Page
13	JCS RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING THE BIEN HOA ATTACK--Continued	
	The Bien Hoa Attack; JCS Recommendations of 1 and 4 November.	13-10
	A Month of Critical Consultations Begins	13-20
	JCS Views on Countering Enemy Reaction, 14 November.	13-21
	A JCS Program for Increasingly Severe Military Pressures, 18 November. . . .	13-23
	The Comments of Ambassador Taylor. . . .	13-26
	Comments of Mr. Rostow	13-29
14	THE PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS OF 1 DECEMBER 1964	
	JCS Comments on Initial Policy Draft, 23 November.	14- 1
	The Views of Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV.	14-12
	Further Consultations Shape the Recommendations to the President.	14-21
	The Presidential Decisions of 1 December	14-30
15	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS, DECEMBER 1964	
	Ambassador Taylor Confers with the GVN .	15- 1
	Khanh's Purge of the HNC, 20 December. .	15- 5
	Intensified OPLAN 34A Operations	15- 9
	BARREL ROLL.	15-11
	Plans to Strengthen the RVNAF.	15-14
	The Mode of Phase I Implementation . . .	15-18
	The Brink Hotel Explosion.	15-19
	An Afterword by General Wheeler.	15-22
16	THE US ESTABLISHMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1964	
	The US Personnel Commitment.	16- 1
	US Military Organization in South Vietnam.	16- 3

Chapter		Page
11	AMBASSADOR TAYLOR'S FIRST MONTH	
	Ambassador Taylor Takes Charge.	11- 1
	Major Increase in US Military Personnel	11- 4
	Disturbing Moves by General Khanh . . .	11-11
	Ambassador Taylor Proposes Combined Planning.	11-15
	JCS Recommendations for Additional Action.	11-18
	Action in the Gulf of Tonkin.	11-20
	The Joint Congressional Resolution. . .	11-24
	The United Nations and Communist Countercharges.	11-27
	The View from Saigon.	11-28
	Study of Courses of Action in Washington	11-34
12	US ACTION AWAITS GOVERNMENT STABILITY	
	The GVN Degenerates	12- 1
	Ambassador Taylor's Recommendations of 18 August	12- 5
	The JCS Recommendations of 26 August. .	12- 8
	The 94 Target List.	12-13
	Further Elaboration of the JCS Views. .	12-14
	Other Preparations for the Taylor Visit	12-16
	Discussions Leading to the Presidential Decision: NSAM 314	12-20
	A DESOTA Patrol with Equivocal Results.	12-24
	The Rise of Doubts Regarding General Khanh	12-26
	Cross-Border Operations	12-32
	The JCS Recommendations of 27 October 1964.	12-34
13	JCS RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING THE BIEN HOA ATTACK	
	First Days of the Huong Government. . .	13- 1
	OPLAN 34A Approval Procedures	13- 4
	The Progress of JCS and CINCPAC Planning.	13- 5

Chapter		Page
16	THE US ESTABLISHMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1964--Continued	
	Problems of US Military-Civilian Coordination.	16-14
	The Use of Advisors	16-22
	US Participation in Combat Operations	16-25
	Development of Facilities	16-31
	Base Protection	16-35
	Third Country Assistance.	16-38
	PART II (1965-1966)	
17	THE US COMMITMENT GROWS	
	Signs of an Enemy Victory	17- 1
	The Republic of Vietnam	17- 3
	Political Turmoil Continues	17- 4
	The United States Military Position in the RVN.	17- 9
	The Dependent Problem	17-10
	Proposals for Additional Military Measures in Vietnam	17-12
	Reprisals	17-16
	The Pleiku Attack - A Turning Point .	17-17
18	THE QUANTUM JUMP - ROLLING THUNDER	
	The Bundy Report-7 February 1965. . .	18- 2
	The Eight Week Program.	18- 5
	The Air Strikes	18- 7
	ROLLING THUNDER	18-10
	ROLLING THUNDER Falters	18-11
	Command and Relationship Problems . .	18-15
	Use of Napalm	18-17
	ROLLING THUNDER-Relaxation of Restrictions.	18-18

Chapter		Page
19	LIMITED DEPLOYMENT OF US FORCES	
	Steps to Improve Security of US Forces.	19- 1
	Changing the Role of US Forces.	19- 5
20	LOGISTIC REQUIREMENTS - SHIFT TO A WAR FOOTING	
	Westmoreland's Assessment	20- 1
	Additional Logistic Units and Personnel	20- 3
	The Meyer Report.	20- 6
	Real Estate and Construction.	20- 6
	In-Country Military Reorganization. . .	20- 7
	Coordinated Logistics Planning.	20- 8
	The Military Logistics Council.	20- 9
	Maintenance	20-10
	Ammunition Handling and Storage	20-11
	Support of Contingency Plans.	20-12
	Construction of Airfields in RVN. . . .	20-12
	Laying the Ground Work for an Expanded War	20-14
	Funding the War	20-16
	The MAP	20-17
	Communications for Command Control. . .	20-20
	Improvement in Transportation Capabilities.	20-20
	Balance of Payments	20-21
21	PLANNING FOR DEPLOYMENT - March-June 1965	
	The Decision to Commit US Forces to Combat.	21- 2
	CINCPAC Deployment Conference - 9 April	21- 4
	The 173d Airborne Brigade	21- 7
	The JCS Deployment Plan	21- 7
	Ambassador Taylor's Objections.	21-10
	Deployment of Additional Forces	21-15
	The JCS Plan, 30 April.	21-17
	Experimental Programs	21-20
	Expansion of the Logistics Base	21-22
	Development of Cam Ranh Bay	21-26

Chapter		Page
22	GROWTH OF FORCES IN RVN TO END OF 1965	
	The Combat Picture - The CTZs	22- 3
	A New Ambassador is Appointed	22- 5
	COMUSMACV Calls for More Troops	22- 6
	Command Arrangements.	22-13
	Command and Control-US/RVN/Allied Forces.	22-15
	Command Arrangements - SE Asia.	22-22
	Third Country Forces - 1965	22-24
	The RVNAF	22-28
	The Joint Survey Requirements	22-29
23	GROUND COMBAT OPERATIONS - RVN JULY - DECEMBER 1965	
	Concept of Employment - US/FWMA/RVNAF .	23- 2
	The Village Burning Incident.	23-11
	Operation SILVER BAYONET.	23-13
	The Enemy Threat Increases.	23-14
24	AIR, NAVAL, AND SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS	
	ARC LIGHT Operations.	24- 1
	Approval Authority.	24- 6
	The Okinawa Problem	24- 7
	Free Bomb Zones	24- 8
	ARC LIGHT in Ground Support Role. . . .	24- 9
	Attempts to Decentralize Control. . . .	24-11
	Other Air Operations in RVN	24-12
	Use of US Jets.	24-13
	Use of FARM GATE Aircraft	24-14
	Establishment of STEEL TIGER.	24-15
	MARKET TIME Background.	24-16
	Command and Control Arrangements - MARKET TIME	24-21
	Cross-Border Operations into Laos-- SHINING BRASS	24-24
	Rules of Engagement - Southeast Asia. .	24-27
	The Cambodian Border Problem.	24-30
	OPLAN 34A	24-33

Chapter		Page
25	ROLLING THUNDER CONTINUES	
	Procedures for Development of ROLLING THUNDER Package	25- 1
	RT 9 - RT 12 - Interdiction of LOCs	25- 3
	RT 13 - RT 14	25- 5
	Temporary Suspension	25- 6
	CINCPAC Proposes Changes	25- 7
	Ambassador Taylor's Proposed ROLLING THUNDER Tactics	25- 8
	ROLLING THUNDER Moves North - RT 15 - RT 28/29	25- 9
	Blockade and Mining	25-16
	The Target Study - NVN is Evaluated	25-17
26	ENEMY AIR DEFENSES - ROLLING THUNDER	
	The Enemy Air Threat	26- 5
	Enemy AA/AAA	26- 7
	Reconnaissance Rules Change	26- 8
	The Early September Call for Stronger Action	26- 9
	Attacks on Dams and Locks	26-12
	De Facto Reduction of Bombing Pressures	26-14
	Review of ROLLING THUNDER	26-14
27	THE CIVIL SIDE - DEVELOPMENTS IN RVN	
	Economic Problems	27- 8
	The Montagnard Problem	27-11
	Pacification	27-13
28	THE SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION - 1965	
	Ambassador Taylor's Views	28- 2
	The JCS Position	28- 4
	The Presidential Offer	28- 5
	Hanoi's Four Points	28- 7
	More JCS Views on Negotiations	28- 8
	Confidential Diplomatic Efforts--10-20 May	28- 9

Chapter		Page
28	THE SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION - 1965--Continued	
	Further Proposals and Efforts	28-12
	The Italian Initiative.	28-15
	The Holiday Truce Period.	28-17
	Preparation for Tet	28-23
29	LESS WAR BUT NO PEACE: THE SITUATION IN JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1966	
	The Peace Offensive	29- 1
	Disagreement on US Policy	29- 3
	The Military Picture-January 1966 . . .	29- 9
	The Enemy Side.	29-10
	The Enemy Reaction.	29-11
	The GVN and Its Problems - January 1966	29-12
	Tet	29-13
30	REINSTATING ROLLING THUNDER	
	Arguments for Resumption of Bombing . .	30- 1
	Actions Recommended by the Field Commander	30- 7
	The JCS Recommendations	30- 8
	An Intelligence View of the "Peace Offensive".	30- 9
	The Peace Offensive Fails	30-11
	ROLLING THUNDER is Resumed.	30-12
31	ROLLING THUNDER - PLANNING AND POLICY FEBRUARY-JUNE 1966	
	The Target Systems.	31- 1
	The LOCs.	31- 2
	Mining the Ports.	31- 3
	POL	31- 4
	Infiltration into RVN	31- 5
	The Intelligence View	31- 6
	RT 49	31- 6
	Mining of NVN Ports	31-10

Chapter		Page
31	ROLLING THUNDER - PLANNING AND POLICY FEBRUARY-JUNE 1966--Continued	
	COMUSMACV Proposes a Shift in Air Effort	31-11
	The Search for Expanded Authority - RT 50	31-13
	Allocation of Air Effort to the "Extended Battlefield"	31-19
	Additional Guidance - RT 50	31-21
	Concentration on POL Strikes - RT 50A	31-22
32	DEPLOYMENTS AND FORCES--1966	
	1966 Force Requirements	32- 1
	NVN Force Increases	32- 7
	Adjusted 1966 and 1967 Requirements	32- 7
	Program #4	32-10
	Third Country Forces, 1966	32-12
	Republic of Korea	32-13
	Australia	32-14
	New Zealand	32-15
	The Philippines	32-16
	Republic of China	32-17
	Thailand and Spain	32-19
	Other Suggestions for Third Country Forces	32-20
33	THE WAR ON THE GROUND--STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS-1966	
	The US Strategy is Challenged	33- 1
	The Honolulu Meeting Goals	33- 3
	The JCS Strategic Concept	33- 3
	Carrying Out the Strategy--Combat Operations	33- 5
	Increased Pressure in I CTZ	33- 8
	II CTZ	33-12
	III CTZ	33-13
	The Delta - IV CTZ	33-15
	The Military Situation in RVN - Late 1966	33-18

Chapter		Page
34	ARC LIGHT - MARKET TIME - GAME WARDEN 1966	
	ARC LIGHT	34- 1
	Decentralization of Control	34- 1
	Decreasing Reaction Time	34- 2
	Additional Efforts to Enhance ARC LIGHT	34- 2
	Forward Basing	34- 3
	The Sortie Rate	34- 6
	Evaluation of ARC LIGHT	34- 7
	MARKET TIME	34-10
	GAME WARDEN	34-11
	Naval Component Command for COMUSMACV	34-14
35	BORDER AREA PROBLEMS AND THE BARRIER	
	Cambodia	35- 1
	Laos	35- 6
	ARC LIGHT Operations in Laos and NVN	35- 8
	Operations In and Near the DMZ	35-11
	The Anti-infiltration Barrier	35-21
36	OPERATIONS AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM, JULY 1966- JANUARY 1967	
	RT 51	36- 1
	CINCPAC's Progress Against POL	36- 2
	RT 52 Proposals	36- 3
	Disparaging Evaluations of ROLLING THUNDER	36- 4
	Enemy Air Defenses--Concern Over Air Losses	36- 6
	Status of JCS Targets--30 September 1966	36-11
	Civilian Casualties	36-11
	The Joint Chiefs of Staff Object to Secretary McNamara's Memorandum	36-12
	The SAM Threat	36-14
	RT 52 Approval	36-17
	Further ROLLING THUNDER Planning	36-22
	ROLLING THUNDER, 1966--A Recapitulation and Appraisal	36-23
	Operation SEA DRAGON	36-27

Chapter		Page
37	EXPANDING THE BASE--LOGISTIC PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS, 1966	
	The Construction Program	37- 1
	Construction Boss	37- 2
	Airfield Construction	37- 4
	Supporting Facilities	37- 5
	Ports	37- 6
	Lines of Communication	37- 8
	Supply	37-10
	Resupply	37-22
	Transfer of MAP and AID Responsibilities	37-24
38	THE GVN- 1966	
	Political Developments	38- 2
	Economic Problems	38-17
	Pacification	38-27
39	EFFORTS TOWARD NEGOTIATION - THE TRUCE PERIODS 1966	
	The Role of the United Nations	39- 3
	Conditions for Negotiations	39- 4
	Development of Public Opinion	39- 7
	Proposals and Counterproposals--March-June	39- 8
	Interlude--July-September	39-13
	New Peace Overtures	39-18
	The Manila Conference	39-21
	The Christmas and New Year Truce Periods--1966-1967	39-26

PART III (1967-1968)

40	ACTION ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT	
	Operation MARIGOLD	40- 1

Chapter		Page
40	ACTION ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT--Continued	
	Appeal to U Thant	40- 8
	Operation SUNFLOWER	40-10
	The JCS Role.	40-13
41	ROLLING THUNDER GAINS MOMENTUM - FEBRUARY-JUNE 1967	
	The Bombing Resumes	41- 1
	RT 54	41- 2
	RT 55 and the MIG Threat.	41- 5
	RT 56	41- 8
	The Hanoi Thermal Power Plant	41- 9
	The Bombing is Restricted	41-10
42	LAUNCHING THE GENERAL OFFENSIVE: OPERATIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, JANUARY-MAY 1967	
	General Westmoreland's Concept of Operations for 1967	42- 1
	The Antagonists	42- 2
	ARC LIGHT	42- 4
	CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY	42- 5
	Operations in II CTZ.	42- 7
	The Enemy Counterblows.	42- 8
	Reinforcement of I CTZ.	42- 9
	General Westmoreland Requests Additional Forces	42-12
43	THE DEBATE OVER ESCALATION	
	The JCS Views on Westmoreland's Request	43- 1
	Free World Countries as Sources of Additional Forces	43-13
	Counterproposals by OSD - The DPM of 19 May.	43-14
	JCS and Service Views of the DPM and Related Issues.	43-17
	The Revised DPM of 12 June.	43-20
	The Presidential Decisions.	43-23

Chapter		Page
44	ROLLING THUNDER AT ITS ZENITH: OPERATIONS AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM, JULY 1967 - MARCH 1968	
	The Original ROLLING THUNDER 57 Package	44- 1
	Strikes in the Buffer Zone	44- 3
	Operations Against the Ports	44- 6
	The Recurring MIG Threat	44- 9
	The Suspension is Lifted	44-11
	The Bombing Slackens	44-13
	ROLLING THUNDER Pro and Con	44-17
45	MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH, JUNE 1967 - JANUARY 1968	
	General Westmoreland's Summer Plans	45- 1
	Summer Operations in III CTZ	45- 2
	Summer Operations in II CTZ	45- 3
	Summer Operations in IV CTZ	45- 4
	Summer Operations in I CTZ	45- 5
	The Enemy Offensive Along the DMZ	45- 5
	Actions to Strengthen USMACV	45-11
	Enemy Pressure on the Cambodian Border	45-13
	Reinforcement of Free World Military Assistance Forces	45-15
	The Barrier and Other Anti-Infiltration Programs	45-16
	Logistics	45-28
	The Situation at the End of 1967	45-33
46	PACIFICATION AND NATION-BUILDING--1967	
	From Military Directorate to Constitutional Government	46- 1
	Efforts to Control Inflation	46- 7
	Pacification and Revolutionary Development	46-10
	Improvement in the RVNAF	46-12
	Year-End Assessment	46-16

Chapter		Page
47	THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC DISSENT	
	Public Opinion Turns Against the War. .	47- 1
	The San Antonio Speech.	47- 6
	The SEA CABIN Study	47- 8
	The Search for Peace Continues.	47-11
	Operation Quick Results	47-12
	Operation Reassurance	47-14
48	THE TET OFFENSIVE	
	The Holiday Ceasefires.	48- 1
	The Attack and Its Repulse.	48- 7
	The Aftermath	48-12
	The Siege of Khe Sanh and Its Anti-climax.	48-17
49	A NEW DEPARTURE IN POLICY	
	Emergency Reinforcement of COMUSMACV. .	49- 1
	Strategy Debated.	49- 8
	Program 6 for COMUSMACV	49-15
	The Policy Decision	49-19
	The President's Speech of 31 March 1968.	49-23
50	DE-ESCALATION AND THE QUEST FOR TALKS	
	Implementation of the Bombing Restrictions	50- 1
	Hanoi's Positive Response: Further Restrictions on Military Operations .	50- 6
	The Search for an Acceptable Talk Site.	50- 9
	Increasing Enemy Threat and the Question of Expanding ROLLING THUNDER.	50-12
	Agreement on Paris as a Site for Talks.	50-15
51	STRENGTHENING THE RVNAF	
	RVNAF Force Levels Before Tet	51- 1
	The Tet Offensive and Its Effects . . .	51- 3

Chapter		Page
51	STRENGTHENING THE RVNAF--Continued	
	US Presidential Decision to Shift Major Portion of War Effort to GVN.	51- 6
	Long-Range Objectives: Initial JCS Plans	51- 7
	The Modernization and Expansion of the RVNAF in Two Phases	51-11
	Development of Phase I Plans.	51-13
	Planning for Phase II	51-16
	RVNAF Effectiveness in 1968	51-21
52	THE COURSE OF THE WAR AFTER TET	
	Changes in Command: Washington, Saigon, Honolulu.	52- 1
	Friendly Forces Resume the Offensive. .	52- 2
	The Second Enemy Attack, May 1968 . . .	52- 6
	The Harassment of Saigon, May-June 1968	52-10
	Interlude, June-August 1968	52-13
	Evaluation of the ARC LIGHT Campaign. .	52-19
	General Wheeler's Visit to South Vietnam, July 1968.	52-21
	The Enemy's Third Offensive, August 1968	52-23
	Aftermath of the Enemy Defeat	52-29
	Military Operations After 1 November 1968.	52-34
	Political Development and Pacification.	52-42
	US and FWMAF Force Levels	52-52
	Logistics in 1968	52-58
53	THE PARIS NEGOTIATIONS: FIRST PHASE	
	Evolution of the US Negotiating Position.	53- 1
	Opening of the Paris Talks.	53- 7
	Impact of the Enemy's May Offensive . .	53-11
	The False Dawn of Hope.	53-16
	Deadlock.	53-17

Chapter		Page
54	THE PARIS NEGOTIATIONS: END OF THE BOMBING CAMPAIGN	
	The Diplomatic Thaw	54- 1
	The Tentative Washington-Hanoi Agreement	54- 6
	The White House Meeting of 29 October .	54- 8
	Difficulties with the GVN	54-10
	The President's Announcement of 31 October	54-13
	President Thieu Falls into Line	54-16

Appearing at the end of Part I

MAPS

I Orientation Map - RVN

II Orientation MAP - NVN

Appearing at the end of Part II

MAPS

I Orientation Map - RVN

II Orientation Map - NVN

III Enemy Infiltration Routes - 1965-1966

IV ROLLING THUNDER Route Packages - NVN

V Northern NVN (with sanctuary areas)

VI ROLLING THUNDER Armed Recce Boundaries through RT 51

VII Ground Operations, RVN - 1965

VIII Ground Operations, RVN - 1966

IX MARKET TIME Patrol Areas

X SEA DRAGON Operation Areas

Appearing at the end of Part III

MAPS

I	Orientation Map, RVN
II	Orientation Map, NVN
III	Enemy Infiltration Routes - 1967
IV	ROLLING THUNDER Route Packages, NVN
V	Northern NVN (with sanctuary areas)
VI	ROLLING THUNDER Armed Recce Boundaries through RT 54
VII	Ground Operations, RVN - 1967
VIII	Ground Operations, RVN - 1968
IX	The DMZ and Khe Sanh Area
X	MARKET TIME Patrol Areas
XI	SEA DRAGON Operation Areas

CHARTS

A	Chain of Command, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
B	The Government of South Vietnam
C	US Military Casualties in Southeast Asia
D	US Armed Forces in the RVN
E	RVN Armed Forces
F	Free World Military Assistance in the RVN
G	VC/VNA Personnel Strength in the RVN
H	North Vietnam Personnel Infiltration into the RVN

INTRODUCTION

It is reasonable to assume that, after the surrender of France in 1954, the Viet Minh came away from the Geneva Conference believing that they need only wait until the elections projected for 1956 to extend their control over South Vietnam (SVN). The Soviet Union and Communist China would certainly applaud the event, and the United Kingdom and France, as signatories to the Geneva Agreements, would be bound to accept it. Only SVN, and possibly the United States, might stand in the way, and the Viet Minh probably judged that neither would provide a formidable obstacle.

The Viet Minh could feel reasonably confident that the United States would not use its military forces to alter the outcome of the elections. The United States had already refused to commit forces at the side of France in 1953-54. Moreover, the chaos that was almost certain to prevail in SVN in the mid-fifties would virtually preclude intervention by the United States. There was even less to fear from Government of Vietnam (GVN) resistance, for there was no doubt that the experienced Viet Minh army could march through SVN at will.

In the months following Geneva, Viet Minh cadres that had been left behind in SVN worked assiduously to prepare the people in the countryside for the election of 1956. Employing propaganda and coercion, they attempted to insure at least a substantial minority vote for a communist slate. In the north the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) imposed on the body politic a totalitarian government which, among other things, inevitably delivers a majority of ninety plus percent in any and all votes sponsored by such a government. Thus the combination of a procommunist minority vote in the south and an overwhelmingly communist vote in the north would almost certainly have assured victory for the DRV at the polls. But the DRV had not counted on Ngo Dinh Diem.

After the Geneva Conference SVN was plunged into a period of such economic, political, and social chaos that many informed observers predicted it would enjoy only a short life. Even the United States, which had become the principal supporter of the GVN, wavered in its determination to continue providing the assistance essential to the

In 1960, the last year of the Eisenhower Administration, the Viet Cong (VC) ignited the carefully prepared tinder of war. Escalatory actions fueled the blaze until ambush and battle had to be expected in every corner of South Vietnam. Eventually the struggle would preoccupy US policymakers and closely engage world attention, with virtually every aspect of the conflict publicly reported and explored. A number of foreign nations other than the United States would become involved in the conflict, some communist states on the side of NVN and some free nations on the side of SVN, some in direct roles and some in indirect ones.

For the United States, 1960 was the opening stage of a whole new war that would eventually entail human and material levies that exceeded those of the Korean conflict. A less tangible but deeply felt cost of this new war would be the so-called "crisis of conscience" that divided the American people over the political and moral justification of US participation in the struggle. This division would influence the conduct of the war and seriously threaten the very purposes that had inspired and sustained the US commitment to SVN and the rest of Southeast Asia.

the DRV may have viewed developments in SVN with great alarm; not only would Vietnam remain divided for the foreseeable future, but a free and prosperous RVN would invite comparison with North Vietnam (NVN), and perhaps eventually threaten the survival of the communist state.

The DRV evidently decided that it could not wait; it decided on a calculated aggression against SVN, to take by force what it had been denied politically. The principal instrument of this aggression was guerrilla or insurgency warfare, designed to overthrow the GVN and to replace it with a regime that would unite with the DRV under one flag.

To this end, beginning in 1956, special efforts were made to build a communist infrastructure in SVN. Communist cadres were expanded by infiltration from the north and by local recruitment. New political and military organizations were developed. Supplies and arms were brought in clandestinely. Propaganda and political indoctrination were stepped up. Coercion and terror became almost commonplace. Small-scale hit-and-run attacks, against lines of communication, villages, public installations, and small military units became more frequent. Taken together, the many small wounds thus inflicted slowly drained hope, energy, and resolve from a people already weary of war.

The guerrilla war of 1957-1959, though not of great magnitude, played havoc with the social, political, and economic rehabilitation of the countryside. Equally regrettable, Diem felt impelled to exercise steadily more authoritarian attitudes and measures. The result was the loss of some earlier gains, a general deceleration of progress, and an erosion of confidence in the GVN. In effect the guerrilla war sapped the convalescing nation of the strength desperately needed to recover from the devastation of earlier years and to build on the progress achieved from 1955 to 1957.

To most observers the damage inflicted by enemy guerrilla activities from 1957 to 1959 seemed to indicate the current strength and fullest reach of the communists. Disposed to expect success, American officials saw reason to project an ultimate fading away of the insurgency. Few if any appreciated that the period was actually one of communist buildup for a showdown. Accordingly, little thought was given to anticipating the conditions and contingencies that would follow an eruption of the guerrilla war.

survival of South Vietnam. But, to the astonishment of friend and foe alike, Premier Ngo Dinh Diem in the short space of two years proceeded to achieve a remarkable degree of political stability, economic progress, and social rehabilitation.

In 1955, Diem defeated the divisive and dangerous sects. The loyal army thrashed the forces of the sects so thoroughly that they never again posed a serious threat to the government. The benefits of this victory were manifold: it assured continued US support; it reinforced Diem's hand in his turbulent but vital negotiations with the French; it contributed to a substantial expansion of his public following and prestige; it removed the grip of the self-serving sects from the public and governmental sectors; it made Diem the recognizable, as well as the recognized, leader of the land; and it gave him the time and means he needed to start the repair of the physical, social, and psychological damage wrought by the Indochinese war.

From 1955 to 1957 the situation in SVN grew more hopeful; indeed prospects were almost bright. The people of SVN deposed the Head of State, Bao Dai, and created the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Diem became the respected, if not loved, leader of his people. The army underwent successive improvements and remained loyal. And of the many other internal problems, some were solved, some were being grappled with, and the solution of others was on the drawing boards. Of course, the general situation did not yet inspire unrelieved optimism. However, given the resiliency and intelligence of the Vietnamese people, the natural endowments of the land, an extended period of peace, and continued US assistance, there was reasonable hope that SVN would eventually emerge as a prosperous and free nation in Southeast Asia.

From the start Diem was determined that SVN would not participate in the north-south general elections on reunification. SVN had not been a party, nor had it even pledged adherence, to the Geneva Agreements. On the contrary, Diem had vigorously denied that they were binding on his government. For its part, the United States in effect played "hands off," neither encouraging nor discouraging Diem in his stand. The United States, Diem, and the DRV were all apparently convinced that the elections, in reality a plebiscite, would end in a victory for the DRV. In the end Diem proved immovable. Despite pressure from the Geneva Conference participants, and the loud and vehement protests of the DRV, the elections were not held. Bitterly disappointed,

Chapter 1

THE FINAL YEAR OF THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION

US Policy

The problem of resistance to communist expansion in Southeast Asia had been one of the continuing concerns of the Administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Taking office in January 1953, the Eisenhower Administration had been in control during the final year of major US financial and material support to the French effort in Indochina. Following the defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, it had brought the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) into existence and had continued US assistance to the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN). Throughout the period US policy toward Southeast Asia had been subjected to frequent review and restatement by the National Security Council.

At the beginning of 1960, the final year of the Eisenhower Administration, the current statement of US policy toward Southeast Asia was contained in NSC 5809. Its controlling thought lay in the declaration that "the national security of the United States would be endangered by Communist domination of mainland Southeast Asia, whether achieved by overt aggression, subversion, or a political and economic offensive." Accordingly, the United States would seek to prevent the free nations of Southeast Asia from passing into or becoming economically dependent on the communist bloc; persuade them that their best interests lay in greater cooperation and stronger affiliations with the rest of the free world; and help them develop stable, free, representative governments with the will and ability to resist communism.

The NSC statement observed that "at present overt aggression and militant subversion are less likely than an intensified campaign of Communist political, economic and cultural penetration." Nevertheless, should overt aggression occur in the area, the United States would invoke the UN Charter or the SEATO Treaty or both. Subject to request for assistance by any mainland Southeast Asian state willing to resist the communist attack, the United States would take necessary military and other action if Congress approved or, in extremity, if the President deemed the action necessary.

In case of an "imminent or actual Communist attempt to seize control from within and assuming some manifest local desire for U.S. assistance," the United States would take "all feasible measures to thwart the attempt, including even military action after appropriate Congressional action."

The policy committed the United States to assisting the development of a strong, stable, and constitutional government in South Vietnam, so that it might provide "an increasingly attractive contrast" to conditions in the communist zone to the north. At the same time, US assistance to South Vietnam would be directed toward building up armed forces capable of safeguarding internal security and of offering limited initial resistance to external attack. The ultimate goal was peaceful reunification of a free and independent Vietnam under anticommunist leadership.[1]

For some years, South Vietnam had been the recipient of a larger amount of US assistance than any other mainland Southeast Asian nation, although the value of the annual aid deliveries was declining. Including the commitments for FY 1960, the United States had provided a total of over $1.5 billion in economic and military aid to South Vietnam.[2]

The apparent results of the US effort were gratifying. In a report to the National Security Council in August 1959 the Department of Defense presented the following picture:

> South Vietnam is now a going concern politically, a pivot of U.S. power and influence in Southeast Asia, and a deterrent to communist aggression in Southeast Asia, an effective example of American aid to a friendly regime, a symbol throughout Asia of successful defiance of a brutal communist threat by an indigenous nationalistic government. Having averted almost certain disaster a few years ago, the United States

1. (TS) NSC 5809, 2 Apr 58, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48) (2) sec 38.

2. (U) AID Rpt, "US Foreign Assistance 1 July 45-30 June 62"; (U) State-Defense-ICA, "A Summary Presentation, MSP, FY 1960," Mar 59; AID S&R Div.

now has a valuable and strategic asset in Southeast Asia.[3]

The Tay Ninh Incident

Early in the new year, however, any complacency US and GVN officials may have felt about the status of internal security was shattered by the Viet Cong. In the first hours of 26 January 1960, a force of about 300 Viet Cong attacked the command post of a South Vietnamese Army regiment near Tay Ninh, a provincial capital northwest of Saigon near the Cambodian border. Using small arms, explosive charges, and fire bombs, the Viet Cong inflicted over 70 casualties, destroyed five buildings, and escaped with a large haul of arms and ammunition. Their own losses were negligible.[4]

This attack, the largest staged to date, gained additional symbolic importance for the Vietnamese people by occurring on the eve of Tet, the Lunar New Year holiday. The further unfolding of events marked it as having signaled the beginning of a new phase, in which the Viet Cong added direct assaults on GVN security forces to their existing program of terrorism, selective assassination, and small hit-and-run attacks.[5]

Even as the GVN moved to appoint a board of inquiry to investigate the Tay Ninh incident, the US Army Attache in Saigon reported that increased VC strength had been detected in southwestern Vietnam, resulting from infiltration through Cambodia. The Attache thought it was now reasonable to expect a rise in VC activity. Washington officials expressed themselves as "shocked" by the magnitude of the Tay Ninh attack; they asked the US Country Team in Saigon to assess its implications.[6]

---

3. (S-NOFORN) Rpt, DOD to NSC, "Status of the Military Assistance Program," 14 Aug 59, JMF 4060 (14 Aug 59).

4. (S) Msg, USARMA Saigon CX-9 to ACSI, 27 Jan 60, DA IN 279039.

5. (S) Msgs, Saigon 3380 and 3337 to State, 30 Jan and 6 Feb 60.

6. (S) Msg, USARMA Saigon CX-9 to ACSI, 27 Jan 60, DA IN 279039; (S) Jt State-Def Msg, State 1339 to Saigon, 28 Jan 60.

The survey conducted by the Country Team convinced its members that the situation in South Vietnam had actually been worsening steadily since about August 1959. The monthly rate of assassinations and kidnappings had risen substantially, beginning in September. Viet Cong armed cadre in the southwest had increased from the 2,000 estimated at the end of 1959 to 3,000 at the time the Country Team reported in early March. The Viet Cong were operating in larger groups, and VC tactics now included "rather frequent and daring" attacks on GVN security forces. Captured documents indicated that the Viet Cong were engaged in a drive to overthrow the GVN during 1960.

The Country Team found serious faults in the GVN defense effort. Government officials had seemed unwilling to recognize the existence of a state of "internal war" and had failed to take the necessary measures, such as the establishment of a unified operational command. GVN military operations were chronically slow in starting and poorly coordinated in execution. To US observers it was clear that these disabilities stemmed in large part from the status of the civilian province chiefs, who were outside the regular military chain of command but in control of the local paramilitary forces that often had an important role in the planned operations.

The government received little support in the rural areas. While noncommitment to the GVN's purposes and programs was more common than opposition, the attitudes of the rural population were strongly conditioned by fear of the Viet Cong, resentment toward local GVN officials, and economic difficulties following from a decline in the price received for the rice crop. Without the support of the people of the countryside, the US report said, it was unlikely that the GVN could solve the security problem.

But the Country Team took encouragement from the fact that the Tay Ninh incident and the continuing VC depredations of January and February had awakened President Ngo Dinh Diem to the seriousness of the situation. He had moved to combat it, directing the armed forces of the Republic (RVNAF) to concentrate on antiguerrilla training and tactics and the enforcement of maximum security at all military posts. Diem had also ordered a slowdown in the implementation of certain unpopular programs and a check on the performance of local officials, and he had appointed military officers as assistant province chiefs.[7]

7. (S-NOFORN) Desp, Saigon 278 to State, 7 Mar 60.

After the Tay Ninh attack in January the VC offensive gathered momentum. Assassinations for the first five months of the year totaled 780, almost twice the number for 1958 and 1959 combined. Concentrating at first in the southwest, the Viet Cong stepped up their attacks on village and hamlet officials, plantations, construction projects, and military and security forces. They were also reportedly organizing underground or irregular troops in certain villages. In May, VC operations fanned out to the southeast and the north; Kien Phong and Zone D, north of the Mekong, were reported areas of "lessening government control."[8]

The Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front

By 1960 the Viet Cong were organized politically and militarily from the national level down through military regions, provinces, districts, villages, and hamlets. There were five major base areas that had been under continuous VC control since the Indochina War and that remained virtually unmolested by GVN forces. The Viet Cong had almost complete freedom of action within the boundaries of these areas, which were used for storage and distribution, training and equipping of forces, and rest and rehabilitation.

Trained cadres were infiltrated from North Vietnam, mainly ethnic southerners from an estimated 90,000 who had gone to North Vietnam after the division of the country in 1954. They came to assume duties within a VC military force structure that was organized into three categories: 1) the main force battalions, composed of infiltrated and locally-raised regulars, relied on to carry out most major operations; 2) regional units, operating within their home provinces; and 3) local militia, mustered only for particular missions and returning to farming during intervals between operations.[9]

Captured documents revealed some of the objectives and techniques of the Viet Cong. Their goal was to incite a general uprising by feeding on the Diem regime's "repressive" policies, creating a revolutionary situation that would give them the opportunity to seize power. The means to this end

---

8. (C-NOFORN) Desp, Saigon 34 to State, 20 Jul 60; (S-NOFORN) Desp, Saigon 37 to State, 25 Jul 60.

9. (S-NOFORN) DIA, SIS-1031-65, Oct 65; (S) SNIE-10-62, 21 Feb 62.

could be political, military, or a combination of both, with the use of force dependent on the situation at the moment. The Viet Cong expected to progress through a preparatory stage, in which guerrilla operations, assassinations, and kidnappings of GVN officials would spread disruption and demoralization. At the same time the communists would present a highly idealistic program to the people, seeking a broad base of support. In the next phase, general revolution and direct assault on government forces would follow, leading to the overthrow of the GVN. Moving to an all-out use of force, the Viet Cong during this stage might elect to show less concern for the well being of nongovernment civilians and might strive for alienation of the people from a government that could not protect them.[10]

Radio Hanoi announced on 20 December 1960 that a National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) had been formed. This was the political arm of the Viet Cong, the means of spreading propaganda and political indoctrination during the preparatory stage. The NLF proclaimed a ten-point program, in which the first point was the following:

> 1. To overthrow the disguised colonial regime of the U.S. imperialists and the dictatorial Ngo Dinh Diem administration, lackey of the United States, and to form a national democratic coalition administration.

Further points included the election of a new National Assembly through universal suffrage, improvement in living conditions and education, land reform, autonomy for minorities, and equality of the sexes. The phraseology of the NLF document suggested a considerable period of separate government for the South before reunification with the North. Reunification was to be gradual and by peaceful means, through negotiations and discussions. The ten-point program also called for a foreign policy of "peace and neutrality," under which South Vietnam would "refrain from joining any bloc or military alliance." At the same time, however, the prospective government would oppose "all forms of enslavement by the imperialists" and

---

10. Dept of State, A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam, Dec 61.

would "support the national liberation struggles of peoples in various countries."[11]

The Limitations of the GVN

The grievances of the people that the Viet Cong and NLF sought to exploit often had real substance. Despite the undeniable progress of its early years, Diem's regime had not been successful in giving the bulk of the South Vietnamese reason to identify their personal fortunes with its political cause. The administrators that Diem posted to the countryside were often corrupt. They were seldom natives of the areas to which they were assigned, a fact that made them "foreigners" to the provincial peasantry. Land policies, admirable in concept, were notably weak in execution and frequently operated to the benefit of absentee landlords rather than those who actually tilled the soil. Further, as the GVN increased the severity of the measures used to combat the Viet Cong, it necessarily imposed hardships on the innocent as well. By the very act of attempting to protect the people of the countryside the government complicated the problem of gaining peasant support.

To provide some measure of land reform and to give the rural population better protection, the GVN had initiated a program of agrovilles, or "prosperity and density centers." The first center was established in March 1960. The program involved relocating the peasants to chosen sites, with the government pledged to provide cash incentives, assistance in constructing new homes, and improved facilities.

The communists apparently recognized that relocation and concentration of the population represented a real challenge to their plans for subversion in the rural areas. If "guerrillas are fish, and the people are the water in which they swim," the Viet Cong were in danger of being cut off from the medium in which they must live. They reacted by making the agrovilles a principal target for attack. As a further handicap, the execution of the plan by the GVN had grave faults. The peasants were often resettled in unsuitable areas and compensated insufficiently. Administrative

11. Committee Print, "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam" (2d rev. ed.), S. Com on Foreign Relations, 89th Cong, 2nd Sess (1966), pp. 290-294.

talent to operate the program effectively was lacking. As a result, the agroville effort was short-lived. By the end of 1960, with the high hopes for its success unfulfilled, the program was allowed to lapse.[12]

A crucial factor in the GVN's failure to gain widespread popular support was the character of South Vietnam's leader, Ngo Dinh Diem, and the administration he headed. A US intelligence assessment in 1959 stated that although Diem was respected for his courage, dedication, and integrity, he remained to most Vietnamese an "austere and remote figure" who had not generated much popular enthusiasm. His regime was essentially authoritarian, with only the facade of representative government. Its features were a strictly circumscribed National Assembly, an undeveloped and subordinate judiciary, and an executive branch composed of "little more than personal agents" of Diem. Power and responsibility were exercised by a small circle consisting mainly of relatives, the most prominent being Diem's brothers, Nhu and Can. Diem's personal political party, the Can Lao, "structured like the Kuomintang or a communist party," was one of the important control mechanisms.

This highly centralized regime had provided "resolute and stable" direction to national affairs but had alienated many of the country's intellectuals and had inhibited the growth of free political institutions. In the 1959 assessment US officials concluded, however, that dissatisfaction among the people was tempered by enjoyment of a relatively high standard of living, the GVN's paternalistic attitude toward them, and the lack of a "feasible alternative" to the Diem regime.[13]

US Programs

In South Vietnam the United States maintained military and economic assistance programs aimed at developing a viable economy and government and at building armed forces capable of assuring internal security and providing limited initial resistance to aggression from the North. In describing the military effort to a Senate subcommittee in July 1959,

12. Milton E. Osborne, Strategic Hamlets in South Viet Nam (1965), pp. 23-25.
13. (S) NIE-63-59, 26 May 59.

the Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (CHMAAG), Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, said that the United States was telling the Vietnamese to "come on and learn what we are trying to teach you so we can get out and go home." In its report, the subcommittee praised General Williams for running a program based on a long-range plan, with progressive development designed to "work the American military advisory group out of a job in Vietnam." The subcommittee was not as favorably impressed with the nonmilitary aid program, which had no "intelligible framework" or specific goals against which to measure progress.[14]

The provisions of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 imposed serious handicaps on achievement of the objectives of the US military assistance program. They barred the introduction of any foreign military personnel beyond the number present in South Vietnam on the effective date of the agreements. They also prohibited any reinforcement in the form of equipment, with a specific ban on introduction of jet engines. War materials destroyed, worn out, or used up after the cessation of hostilities might be replaced, but only on the basis of "piece-for-piece of the same type and with similar characteristics."[15]

The policy of the US Government provided that its activities "should not violate limitations imposed by the Geneva Accords." Accordingly, US military personnel in South Vietnam were limited to the 692 already present in the MAAG and in the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM), plus the 44 military personnel assigned to the Embassy--a total of 736. This added to the difficulty of improving the quality of the RVNAF, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed in 1959 as being low in capability and combat readiness.[16]

---

14. Hearings, The Situation in Vietnam, State Dept Organization and Public Affairs Subcom of S. Com on Foreign Relations, 86th Cong, 1st Sess (1959), p. 118. "U.S. Aid Program in Vietnam," Report by same Subcom, 86th Cong, 2nd Sess (1960), pp. 8-9.

15. Committee Print, "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam" (2d rev. ed.), S. Com on Foreign Relations, 89th Cong, 2nd Sess (1966), pp. 41-42.

16. (S) ISA, "Country and Regional Programming Guidance," 1 Aug 59; (C) Memo, ASD(ISA) to SecA et al., "FY 1961 MAP Programming Instructions (U)," 5 Aug 59. (S) JCSM-368-59 to SecDef, 4 Sep 59, JMF 4060 (14 Aug 59). Although separate

There were also difficulties in working with the International Control Commission (ICC), set up to monitor compliance with the Geneva Agreements and composed of representatives of India, Poland, and Canada. In mid-1959 the US Ambassador in Saigon, Elbridge Durbrow, reported that the ICC took the view that subversion and sabotage within South Vietnam were not covered by the Geneva Agreements and that the GVN had failed to link subversion to sources in North Vietnam. In addition, the Commission viewed US activities in South Vietnam with disfavor. At the ICC meeting on 27 June, for example, the Commission agreed to postpone consideration of the legality of the presence of the US MAAG, but it questioned the continuation of TERM. The ICC recommended that TERM be phased out as soon as possible and asked the GVN to provide "final information" on its withdrawal.[17]

For the next ten months, the United States and the GVN nursed the MAAG and TERM problems through the ICC. The United States hoped to increase the MAAG by the number of spaces vacated when TERM was eliminated. In February 1960 the GVN formally notified the Commission that it had requested the United States to expand the MAAG from 342 to 685 personnel to meet the increasing threat of North Vietnamese military buildup and VC subversion. The GVN, using an argument long advocated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Department of Defense, insisted that the increase would not violate the spirit of the Geneva Agreements, since the number of foreign military advisors would still be below the 888 present in South Vietnam when the accords were signed. When the ICC finally took favorable action on the MAAG ceiling on 19 April, Ambassador Durbrow called the decision a "stunning diplomatic defeat for the DRV /the 'Democratic Republic of Vietnam'--North Vietnam/." TERM liquidated its activities by the end of 1960, but the number of US military personnel in South Vietnam remained approximately the same.[18]

---

from the MAAG, TERM was under CHMAAG's control. Its functions were recovery and outshipping of excess US MAP equipment, restoring and preserving US equipment in the hands of the RVNAF, and improving Vietnamese logistic capabilities.

17. (C) Msgs, Saigon 24 and 90 to State, 2 and 11 Jul 59.

18. (C) Msgs, Saigon 1458 and 1534 to State, 24 and 31 Oct 59; (S) Msg, Saigon 2525 to State, 27 Feb 60; (C) Msg, Saigon 3060 to State, 23 Apr 60.

GVN Forces

At the end of 1959, the RVNAF was composed of about 145,000 men, just under the 150,000-man force authorized to receive US military assistance support. The Army (ARVN) had been reorganized in 1958-1959 into a seven-division force under three corps headquarters, at the urging of the US MAAG. Although this organization had not yet been provided with the coordinated and centralized control that they hoped for, US officials considered that the South Vietnamese armed forces had a "marginal capability to accomplish their missions of maintaining internal security against Communist inspired insurgency and of providing limited initial resistance to full-scale invasion from North Vietnam."[19]

In addition to the regular military forces, South Vietnam had a Civil Guard, supported by the United States to an authorized level of 50,000. The Civil Guard was intended under normal circumstances to provide for the internal security of the country while the regular military establishment concentrated on the conventional threat from outside the country. There was also a 40,000-man Self Defense Corps designed to provide protection to the villages of South Vietnam, composed of local people trained and armed for the task.[20]

Up to the Spring of 1960 little had been accomplished in training the regular forces for counterinsurgency operations, and it was recognized that the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps were very poorly trained, equipped, and organized. To remedy some of the inadequacies, by January 1960 the assignment of MAAG advisors down to the level of infantry regiments and separate artillery, armored, and marine battalions had been authorized. The advisors were not to participate directly in combat operations or accompany RVNAF units on operations near the national boundaries. The United States Operations Mission (USOM) had started a program of retraining and reequipping the Civil Guard. A further step was under consideration, the sending of US Army Special Forces teams to act as advisors on antiguerrilla tactics.[21]

---

19. (S) FY 1962 MAP Presentation, Vietnam.
20. (S) Msg, Saigon 3412 to State, 10 Jun 60.
21. (S) Jt State-Def-ICA-CIA Msg, State 28 to Saigon, 7 Jul 59.

In this last matter the Chief of Staff, Army, took the initiative, addressing a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 March 1960. General Lyman L. Lemnitzer believed that the "critical situation" in South Vietnam required definite action. He agreed with CINCPAC that an antiguerrilla capability could be developed within the regular armed forces by changing the emphasis in training from conventional to antiguerrilla warfare, but he felt that additional support in specialized fields was warranted and could be introduced overtly as part of the absorption of TERM by MAAG. The Army, he said, was prepared to offer CINCPAC Special Forces mobile training teams, including communications elements, psychological operations advisors, civil affairs advisors, and a language-qualified counterintelligence and combat intelligence training team. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to the proposal and dispatched the offer to CINCPAC on 30 March, with a request for his views on training assistance, delivery of materiel, and any additional requirements he thought necessary to insure the internal security of South Vietnam.[22]

On 21 April CINCPAC submitted a request for three Special Forces detachments of ten men each and three intelligence officers. These 33 personnel, together with three psychological warfare specialists from PACOM, were phased into South Vietnam in May. There they set up a Counterinsurgency Training Program to train Vietnamese as ranger cadres.[23]

CINCPAC, Admiral Harry D. Felt, recommended also that the Civil Guard be transferred to military control. This was finally accomplished at the end of 1960 when Diem, at the urging of US advisors, removed the Civil Guard from the Department of Interior and placed it under the Department of Defense. There it became a MAAG responsibility.[24]

During the first half of 1960 the United States agreed to modest increases in equipment for the RVNAF, particularly

---

22. (S) JCS 1992/791, 30 Mar 60; (U) Note to Control Div "JCS 1992/791," 25 Mar 60; (S) Msg, JCS 974802 to CINCPAC, 30 Mar 60; JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60).

23. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 210017Z Apr 60, DA IN 1892, JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1960, pp. 162-163.

24. (S) Ltr, CINCPAC 00212 to JCS, 26 Apr 60, Encl to JCS 1992/798, 3 May 60, JMF 9060/3360 (27 Apr 60). (C) Msg, Saigon 1260 to State, 9 Jan 61.

helicopters. President Diem had asked for much more, but CINCPAC was not satisfied that the GVN was using the resources it already possessed to best advantage. Early in April Admiral Felt recommended against providing all that the GVN asked.[25]

Diem based his requests for aid on the claim that his country was under the threat of both conventional attack and guerrilla warfare. He said that meeting these threats required two different sets of tactics, training, and organization. Whereas the corps-division organization was properly designed to counter invasion, it was inappropriate to the more immediate danger, the VC guerrilla campaign. Early in 1960 Diem had decided that the fastest way to develop a large, well-trained antiguerrilla force was to recruit 10,000 volunteers from the veterans of the Indochina War. The veterans would be formed into companies or platoons and attached to Civil Guard or regular units to train their comrades in actual operations. Had the United States allowed him the 170,000-man force level he had asked for two years earlier, Diem added, he would now have enough effective units to protect the people and continue conventional training as well.

To implement his plan to raise a force of special antiguerrilla fighters, or commandos, with US support, Diem now returned to the idea of raising the 150,000 MAP force ceiling to 170,000 men. The change was unanimously opposed by US officials. In talking to the South Vietnamese President on 12 February, Ambassador Durbrow "frankly" disagreed. There were sufficient security forces in the country already, he said, if they could be properly trained in antiguerrilla operations. There were also financial considerations. Because of "congressional cuts and other reasons," the Ambassador said, "the country team had suggested a military budget of $165 million of which the United States could contribute only about $124 million."[26]

US military representatives backed the Ambassador completely. CHMAAG explained the drawbacks of the commando scheme to Diem on 20 February, and CINCPAC took the same line. Admiral Felt noted that the British in Malaya and the Filipinos in the Huk campaign had developed an antiguerrilla force within the regular organization. He also stressed the

25. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to OSD and JCS, 020430Z Apr 60, JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60).
26. (S) Desp, Saigon 251 to State, 12 Feb 60.

importance of paying "equal attention" to the economic, political, and psychological aspects of the counterinsurgency problem.

Ambassador Durbrow, in arguing against the force increase, likewise emphasized the importance of winning the confidence of the people. To Washington he cabled that Diem was "moving in all directions at once" without any plan to use what he had on hand to meet the "deteriorating internal situation," while citing that situation as justification for seeking the 170,000-man force level.[27]

Ignoring American advice, Diem proceeded with his plans. On 24 February he issued the directive for the formation of the commando units, and by the end of May the ARVN was reported to have conducted training for 47 companies, using the companies' own officers as instructors. Two Civil Guard companies were also training as commando units. By June 7,935 commandos had been added to the RVNAF strength of 144,706, and their number was rising steadily.[28]

By agreement with the MAAG, the GVN had always maintained RVNAF strength somewhat below the 150,000-man level authorized for MAP support. Three months after starting the commando program, however, Diem had raised the level of his regular armed forces above the approved ceiling and seemed to be aiming for a Civil Guard of 56,000. This of course collided with the US policy of trying to reduce aid to South Vietnam, and it confirmed Ambassador Durbrow's opinion that Diem was still disposed primarily to the use of force to win control of the countryside. The time had come, the Ambassador said, to put teeth into the US approaches to the GVN on the force-level question. In a message to Washington on 10 June he recommended that the United States take steps to reduce the RVNAF to 144,000 and the Civil Guard to 50,000 and to "regularize" the commandos

---

27. (C) Msg, CINCPAC to OSD, 142355Z Mar 60, AF IN 43393, (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CHMAAG, 140459Z Mar 60; (S) Msg, Saigon 2622 to State, 10 Mar 60; JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60).

28. (C) Msg, CINCPAC to OSD, 142355Z Mar 60, AF IN 43393, JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60). (S-NOFORN) Desp, Saigon 37 to State, 25 Jul 60. (S) Msg, Saigon 3412 to State, 10 Jun 60.

within those levels. The Embassy and the MAAG now parted company on the question of the force level. General Williams wanted the United States to support the full authorized level of 150,000 men rather than 144,000.[29]

Later in June Diem gave way for the moment, agreeing to bring his forces down to 150,000 and to integrate the commandos into the ARVN. As of 31 July the RVNAF strength was reported at 151,973, showing some reduction from the earlier 154,000. Pressure to increase the level to 170,000 soon resumed, however, with the MAAG now siding with the GVN. Ambassador Durbrow was not convinced by the MAAG's case for a 20,000-man increase. He reported that CHMAAG had cited a need for sufficient forces to permit rotation of combat troops without disturbing the four divisions in central Vietnam, which should not be rotated because of their familiarity with defense plans against external attack. The Ambassador argued that external aggression seemed "fairly remote," but guerrilla war was a present fact. Besides, to increase the force level would encourage Diem's tendency to use force to solve his difficulties and would contribute to his government's financial problems as well. The Ambassador believed that what the GVN really needed was a better trained Civil Guard to assist and relieve the ARVN and more political and psychological actions by Diem to win the confidence of the people.[30]

The Ambassador's efforts were directed at fulfilling the conditions President Eisenhower had attached to the initial offer of US aid, in his letter to Diem on 23 October 1954. The United States was willing to assist the GVN "in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means." But the US offer was contingent upon "performance on the part of the Government of Viet-Nam in undertaking needed reforms."[31]

In mid-September 1960 Ambassador Durbrow recommended that the United States propose the following measures to Diem:

1. Remove three controversial government figures by sending them to diplomatic posts abroad, the three being

---

29. (S) Msg, Saigon 3412 to State, 10 Jun 60.
30. (S) Msg, Saigon G-79 to State, 25 Aug 60; (S) Msg, Saigon 539 to State, 5 Sep 60.
31. Dept of State Bulletin, XXXI (15 Nov 54) pp. 735-736.

the head of the secret intelligence service, Tran Kim Tuyen, and Diem's brother, Nhu, and the latter's flamboyant and outspoken wife.

2. Appoint a full-time Minister of Defense (currently Diem held the post himself) and tighten up adherence to the chain of command at all levels.

3. Appoint one or two members of the opposition to the cabinet.

4. Disband the Can Lao party, or at least open its activities to normal public scrutiny.

5. Permit the National Assembly more initiative, including the right to investigate and to question all executive officers except the President.

6. Require all government officials to declare their property and financial holdings.

7. Relax control over the press and other media.

8. Adopt a series of measures to help the peasants, including price increases for rice, pay for corvee labor, and subsidies for agroville families.

Some of these measures were drastic, the Ambassador said, but in his opinion drastic action was called for to avert a coup or a collapse. The United States should support Diem as the best available leader, but, if his position continued to deteriorate because of failure to adopt reform measures, the United States should begin to consider alternative courses and leaders.[32]

Ambassador Durbrow presented his proposals to Diem on 14 October. The President received most of them impassively, remarking that they conformed generally with his own ideas but that the VC insurgency made it difficult to put them into effect. Diem took the suggestion of sending M. and Mme. Nhu abroad more grimly; they were loyal supporters, and opposition to them, he said, was part of the communist plot to overthrow his government. Nevertheless the Ambassador had a "hunch"

32. (S) Msg, Saigon 624 to State, 16 Sep 60.

that he had made some progress toward inducing Diem to "save himself and Vietnam" by "regaining his people."[33]

Meanwhile the MAAG had resumed its efforts to secure an increase in the RVNAF force level. On 19 October Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr, who had succeeded General Williams as CHMAAG on 1 September, recommended to CINCPAC that the force level be raised to 170,000. Admiral Felt concurred on 29 October.[34]

Negotiations with the GVN on this matter were interrupted when, at 0300 on 11 November, a paratroop brigade under Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi launched an attempted coup d'etat with an attack on the presidential palace. The coup collapsed the following day, but US-GVN relations were strained by the incident. Diem and Nhu were reportedly bitter over what they felt was a lack of US support during the crisis. US and GVN officials also differed regarding the implications of the abortive coup. A GVN spokesman insisted that the revolt had "no political impact," but the State Department thought that it revealed a serious lack of support for Diem's policies and reemphasized the need for dramatic action to strengthen the regime's appeal to the people.

Diem's disappointment with "some Americans" and his reluctance to unify security forces under a single command were doubtless reinforced by the coup, making US efforts at military and political reform more difficult than ever. Nevertheless, as soon as passions in Saigon had cooled, Ambassador Durbrow resumed his advocacy of reform. On 4 December he repeated his advice against granting Diem the 20,000-man increase. To do so without his having relaxed controls, effected reforms, and begun efficient use of available forces would not save the day, but it would increase Diem's already strong instinct to rely on force. The Ambassador was willing to go along with an increase, but only in exchange for prior reforms. If Diem did not take the steps necessary to increase his popular support, Durbrow thought

---

33. (S) Msg, Saigon 802 to State, 15 Oct 60; (S) Desp, Saigon 157 to State, 15 Oct 60.

34. (S) Msg, Saigon 882 to State, 23 Oct 60. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CHMAAG, 290412Z Oct 60, JMF 9155.3/3410 (18 Jan 61).

the United States should "undertake the difficult task of identifying alternate leadership."[35]

Since Washington officials were reluctant to use the force increase as a bargaining counter to obtain political reforms, the Ambassador tried presenting the two issues separately and on their own merits. In reply, Diem took the line that it was useless to effect reforms and to build factories, roads, and bridges unless these things and the people could be protected.[36]

Late in December Ambassador Durbrow's opposition to the force increase gave way in the face of the worsening situation in neighboring Laos, which convinced him there might well be a need for additional anticommunist forces in Southeast Asia. On 29 December he withdrew his opposition to any increase in the RVNAF "deemed appropriate" in Washington. Two days later the State Department cabled its opinion that for the present the Embassy had pushed as far as possible for "liberalization." Washington officials were now ready to study promptly the question of the 20,000-man increase upon receipt of the Country Team's basic Counterinsurgency Plan (CIP), then being prepared in Saigon.[37]

The Counterinsurgency Plan

The evolution of the CIP had begun in March 1960. As has been recounted, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 30 March offered CINCPAC certain Army Special Forces assistance for the struggle in Vietnam and had asked for his views on additional requirements for materiel and training. At a PACOM conference in mid-April, a study on counterinsurgency operations in Laos and Vietnam was prepared, which later provided the basis for the Saigon Country Team's CIP.

CINCPAC sent the study to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 April. He stated that the GVN's main problem was to gain

---

35. (S) Msg, State 782 to Saigon, 12 Nov 60; (FOUO) Msg, Saigon 1098 to State, 18 Nov 60; (S) Msg, Saigon G-219 to State, 19 Nov 60; (S) Msgs, Saigon 1143 and 1151 to State, 1 and 5 Dec 60.

36. (S) Jt State-Def Msg, State 862 to Saigon, 9 Dec 60; (S) Msg, Saigon 1216 to State, 24 Dec 60.

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 1231 to State, 29 Dec 60; (TS) Msg, State 961 to Saigon, 31 Dec 60.

permanent control of the population. This could be done only through a well-coordinated military, psychological, socio-economic campaign aimed at winning the confidence of the people and their cooperation with the GVN and its security forces. The basic difficulty in Vietnam, Admiral Felt believed, was not the lack of antiguerrilla training for the ARVN, but the lack of centralized control of counterinsurgency operations. To remedy this, CINCPAC proposed that the United States encourage the GVN to adopt a national emergency organization to integrate civil and military resources under centralized direction for the conduct of antiterrorist operations and to develop coordinated national plans for the progressive reduction of communist influence. The essential military requirement was a well-trained regular military and paramilitary establishment. This need could best be satisfied by putting all security forces under the GVN Department of Defense and assigning the MAAG primary responsibility for their training.[38]

Admiral Felt warned that the communist insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam threatened the very existence of these nations and the security of all Southeast Asia. The United States and the governments of the two countries must recognize the emergency nature of the situation, direct their full resources to counterinsurgency operations, and be prepared to support the additional expense and effort, perhaps for a protracted period. In South Vietnam, CHMAAG should concern himself primarily with supplying advice on the conduct of operations and providing counsel, training, and support for the development of the regular military establishment, militia forces, psychological and civic actions, intelligence networks, and communications capabilities.

On 6 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that they concurred in CINCPAC's basic recommendation that the United States urge the governments of South Vietnam and Laos to mount a concerted effort against the insurgents, adopting a national emergency organization to integrate civil and military resources for the purpose. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that "the U.S.

---

38. (S) Ltr, CINCPAC 00212 to JCS, "Counterinsurgency Operations in South Vietnam and Laos (U)," 27 Apr 60, Encl to JCS 1992/798, 3 May 60, JMF 9060/3360 (27 Apr 60). (S) Msg, CINCPAC to OSD, 272243Z Apr 60, DA IN 3891.

Government provide sufficient material and budgetary support to insure the successful accomplishment of these emergency campaigns."[39]

At the end of June Admiral Felt provided a draft outline plan for counterinsurgency operations by the GVN and the specific steps the US Government should take to develop and promote the plan. He recommended that the outline plan be forwarded to the Country Team in Saigon for further development, after which it would be reviewed in Washington, presented to the GVN, and, if accepted by Diem, supported by the United States to the full extent of South Vietnam's ability to receive and use US assistance.[40]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC's recommendations and on 30 August forwarded the plan to the Secretary of Defense. After discussion and approval within the Departments of State and Defense, it was transmitted to Saigon in mid-October, to be developed in sufficient detail to provide a basis for computing the US support requirements.[41]

The Country Team dispatched the completed CIP to Washington on 4 January 1961. The plan had three objectives: 1) to suppress and defeat the communist guerrillas while maintaining a capability to meet overt aggression; 2) to establish political stability, improve economic conditions, and instill a sense of unity among the people; and 3) to interdict aid flowing to the insurgents across South Vietnam's borders.

To accomplish these objectives the plan outlined a series of actions to be taken. In the political field the tasks were to increase popular support for the GVN, correct the causes of political dissatisfaction, and publicize North Vietnam's role in the insurgency. The economic tasks were to improve living conditions while contriving methods of financing the essential activities of the government,

---

39. (S) JCSM-232-60 to SecDef, 6 Jun 60 (derived from JCS 1992/814), JMF 9060/3360 (27 Apr 60).

40. (S) Ltr, CINCPAC 00331 to JCS, "Counterinsurgency Operations in South Vietnam (U)," 30 Jun 60, Encl to JCS 1992/821, 8 Jul 60, same file.

41. (S) JCSM-382-60 to SecDef, 30 Aug 60 (derived from JCS 1992/838); (S) N/H of JCS 1992/838, 20 Sep 60; same file. (S) Jt State-Def Msg, State 658 to Saigon, 18 Oct 60, JMF 9155.3/3410 (18 Jan 61).

including implementation of the CIP. Psychological measures would be employed to improve relations among the people, the GVN, and the RVNAF. The most important security tasks were to institute centralized and coordinated control of military operations and planning, develop intelligence and communications networks, and establish an adequate border and coastal patrol system.

The plan developed by the Country Team represented a departure from the position Ambassador Durbrow had previously held. The "force basis . . . to cope with insurgency" now included the 20,000-man increase so long sought by President Diem, as well as provision for expanding the Civil Guard. Further, the prime objective was now to suppress the communists by force, recognizing that the VC guerrillas offered the greatest immediate threat to the GVN. Governmental stability might be expected to follow from "the eradication of insurgency," and the existing Diem government, however short it might fall of the ideal, must be accepted as the available instrument for defeating the Viet Cong. Ambassador Durbrow's covering message indicated that he still had reservations concerning the force increase. The CIP itself, however, clearly leaned toward the MAAG-Diem position that protection should have priority over reform.[42]

The programs proposed in the CIP were among the first items considered by the new administration of President John F. Kennedy. On 18 January, CINCPAC had summarized CHMAAG's arguments for a 170,000-man RVNAF in a letter to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and had recommended approval of the increase as a separate action. Admiral Felt's letter was referred to the Joint Staff on 26 January, but already the matter had gone through ISA channels to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. In company with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, he had "accepted the desirability" of MAP support for the higher force level on 23 January. The following day, Ambassador Durbrow sent a strong endorsement of CHMAAG's request for $12.7 million to support the CIP Civil Guard program. President Kennedy, after meeting with the Secretaries of State and Defense on 28 January, approved the expenditure

42. (S) Desp, Saigon 276 to State, 4 Jan 61, JMF 9155.3/3360 (4 Jan 61) sec 1A.

of $28.4 million for the force increase, as well as the $12.7 million for the Civil Guard.[43]

The CIP itself also won quick approval at higher levels. The views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not formally solicited. Nevertheless, on 9 February they informed the Secretary of Defense that they approved the plan in principle, subject to "revision of support requirements for military personnel, equipment, and logistics that detailed review by the Services concerned may indicate is necessary or desirable." This submission did not catch up with the fast-moving plan. Six days earlier the Secretaries of State and Defense had approved the CIP and had so notified the Ambassador in Saigon.[44]

The speedy handling of the CIP reflected an alert concern on the part of the Kennedy Administration for the need to preserve Southeast Asia from communist encroachment. Apart from a more ready disposition to commit funds to the purpose, however, the policy being followed showed no marked difference from that of the Eisenhower Administration. The joint State-Defense message approving the CIP had informed Ambassador Durbrow that the US commitment was for the FY 1961 portion of the plan only. Further, although the immediate purpose was to defeat the insurgents, the GVN must also "move on the political front towards liberatization." Success required carrying out the "entire plan," the political, economic, and social measures as well as the military. If the Ambassador found that the GVN was not fulfilling this requirement, he should inform Washington and make recommendations "which may include suspension of the US contribution."[45]

---

43. (S) Ltr, CINCPAC 0041 to JCS, "Increased Force Level for RVNAF (U)," 18 Jan 61, Encl to JCS 1992/908, 26 Jan 61; (S) Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, "US Support for Additional Military Forces in Vietnam and Thailand," 25 Jan 61, Encl to JCS 1992/911, 28 Jan 61; (S) 1st N/H of JCS 1992/911, 2 Feb 61; JMF 9155.3/3410 (18 Jan 61). (S) Msg, Saigon 1313 to State, 24 Jan 61.

44. (S) JCSM-62-61 to SecDef, 9 Feb 61 (derived from JCS 1992/917), JMF 9155.3/3360 (4 Jan 61) sec 1. (S) Jt State-Def-ICA Msg, State 1054 to Saigon, 3 Feb 61.

45. (S) Jt State-Def-ICA,Msg, State 1054 to Saigon, 3 Feb 61.

Ambassador Durbrow, accompanied by General McGarr, presented the CIP to Diem on 13 February 1961. As instructed, he made it clear that the GVN was expected to absorb the local currency (piaster) costs of the plan, that certain "fundamental political actions" were contemplated, and that the plan was to be carried out in all its aspects. As expected, President Diem questioned the GVN's ability to raise enough piasters to support the plan. He also complained about rumors that the United States, under its new leadership, was no longer supporting him. The Ambassador replied that the CIP recommended concrete measures for raising piasters and that the $40 million MAP commitment was a tangible sign of US support.[46]

Already, on 6 February, President Diem had announced a program of reforms looking toward a "more adequate readaption of our institutions to the needs of the present situation." This included rearranging the government departments, adding an elected youth member to village councils, decentralizing some provincial powers to lower levels, and encouraging citizen participation in GVN programs through advisory economic aid and cultural councils. Although these measures were mainly administrative, Ambassador Durbrow reported that they were at least steps in the direction he had been urging.[47]

While the Ambassador continued to encourage Diem to "move on the political front," CHMAAG pressed for adoption of the CIP's military provisions. On 6 March General McGarr called on Diem for this purpose, giving the President a written analysis, in French, of the GVN's counterinsurgency effort to date. He told Diem that the GVN concept of static security combined with offensive sweeps was too defensive. President Diem was convinced that the current operations, based on the "lines of strength" concept developed by his brother Nhu, was offensive in nature; it became defensive only when there was a lack of troops to implement it. Diem said that he had "ordered his troops on the offensive against the VC and that they had done this with good results." General McGarr reported, however, that "MAAG's reading is that this is largely wishful thinking." CHMAAG believed that the emphasis on manning blockhouses and pillboxes and on

---

46. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1366 and 1367 to State, 13 Feb 61; (S) Desp, Saigon 351 to State, 14 Feb 61.
47. (U) Msg, Saigon 1348 to State, 7 Feb 61.

guarding other fixed installations had caused the troops to go "on the defensive mentally." Tactics that employed mobile striking forces under a comprehensive offensive plan were needed.

Taking up a familiar theme, General McGarr urged that military commanders be given full control of operations within their regions. President Diem insisted that the military commanders already had this authority. "However, it has been the observation of the MAAG advisors . . . that the Province Chief has far too much autonomy in the military area and often circumvents the senior military officer's exercise of his command authority."

Diem also said that he was considering placing the Field Command in complete charge of military operations throughout the country in both peace and war. General McGarr thought this would be "eminently satisfactory provided it is actually implemented." Currently the Field Command was a planning headquarters during peace and became operational only in case of war. CHMAAG wrote that he had "often tried to persuade the President to officially recognize that a state of war exists here now, but for political reasons, this has not been done."

Diem explained that all but six province chiefs were now military men and that they were often better informed and more able than the military commanders.

> The tenor of Diem's remarks were consistently favorable to the Province Chiefs as opposed to the purely military commanders and there is little doubt of his sympathy for and confidence in the former. This, of course, gives warning of inevitable future problems in the actual implementation of command and control, regardless of the expected unity of command edict. The problem is now, and will continue to be the direct and personal contact of Province Chiefs with the President - outside the military chain of command.

In recounting this interview in a letter to General Lemnitzer in Washington, General McGarr said he had repeated for Diem the central military recommendations of the CIP: reorganization of the top command structure to insure unity of command and provide a staff capable of carrying out that concept; conduct of all military operations through this

military chain of command; and development of a national operations plan for control of counterinsurgency operations.[48]

Strains in the US Military-Civilian Relationship

Some lack of unity was also apparent among US civilian and military leaders. In a report to CINCPAC on 3 February 1961, CHMAAG said that the "civilian element" of the Country Team did not understand or accept certain considerations that seemed to him basic: the necessity of gaining military superiority over the Viet Cong before political reform could have any meaning; the absolute necessity of an RVNAF force increase to contain the insurgency; the dependence of anti-guerrilla training on a firm foundation of basic military training; the long lead time required to train new forces; and the ever-present threat of attack from North Vietnam.[49]

Having encountered a disposition by State Department officials in both Washington and Saigon to question whether or not the CIP gave sufficient emphasis to developing anti-guerrilla units as against regular forces, General McGarr on 27 February addressed a letter to the Director, Far East Region, in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA). After an extended analysis of the factors that had been considered in reaching a military judgment regarding the proper balance within the RVNAF, CHMAAG expressed the hope that "opposite numbers in State" might become convinced that "we of the military here are professionally trained in the complex business of warfare - all kinds - and that continual defense by MAAG against overly simplified civilian solutions can be not only time consuming . . . but dangerous militarily."[50]

A proposal of the type General McGarr apparently had in mind was contained in a State Department message to Saigon on 1 March. After stressing the high priority that US foreign policy gave to success in South Vietnam, it said that the President was concerned about the ability of the country to

48. (C) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 13 Mar 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60-Jul 61.
49. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 3 Feb 61, Encl to JCS 1992/928, 8 Mar 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (24 Jan 61).
50. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to RADM Luther C. Heinz, OASD(ISA), 27 Feb 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60-Jul 61.

resist VC pressures during the 18-24 months before the CIP began to take effect. The message then suggested a number of steps that might be taken without awaiting GVN approval of the full plan. They included giving higher priority to activating the 21 ranger companies in the plan and adding 40 more ranger companies while reducing the infantry regiments proportionately.[51]

CHMAAG was not receptive to these suggestions. General McGarr wrote the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that carrying them out would be "counterproductive," in that it would confuse and retard GVN actions that were just getting under way. He hoped that Department of Defense officials would not be "stampeded" into going along with the State Department view.

> What we need now is time to implement our present sound plans with the GVN - not directives to make major changes. It must also be understood that neither MAAG or the Ambassador can direct the GVN to follow our recommendations - we can only work through persuasion and advice.[52]

Although in this instance CHMAAG's views received considerable backing from Ambassador Durbrow, a more fundamental divergence remained. General McGarr set it forth in a letter to the Chairman on 22 March. Under Executive Order 10893, 8 November 1960, US Ambassadors were assigned "affirmative responsibility for the coordination and supervision over the carrying out by agencies of their functions in the respective countries." In South Vietnam, General McGarr said, the Ambassador was discharging this responsibility in a way that resulted in his "exercising significant control over our military operations here to include force structure, and the method of conducting operations even down to the tactics of these operations." The Ambassador accomplished this by requiring Country Team coordination of all actions--a procedure, General McGarr said, that involved "continued questioning of our professional judgment."

> I have repeatedly been faced with the problem of securing Country Team approval of

51. (S) Msg, State 1115 to Saigon, 1 Mar 61.
52. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 3 Mar 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60-Jul 61.

actions in the purely military field only to find these plans and proposals thwarted or delayed - not for purely political or economic reasons, which would be more understandable - but often on purely military grounds as interpreted by nonmilitary men. This is accomplished by "coordinating" military professional opinion out of a Country Team paper . . . .

In such circumstances General McGarr had more than once felt compelled to express his views to Department of Defense officials through military channels, fulfilling the responsibility he believed he had to provide his military superiors with his "considered, unadulterated military opinions." In three such instances, Ambassador Durbrow had taken official notice of CHMAAG's action as being a contravention of the Ambassador's authority.53

Important backing for General McGarr's viewpoint appeared later in March. On orders of Secretary McNamara, Lieutenant General T. J. H. Trapnell had been sent to survey the military situation and US programs in Southeast Asia. After returning to Washington, General Trapnell submitted a report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 March. One of his recommendations carried the heading, "Military Matters to be Decided and Directed by DOD Through Military Channels."

General Trapnell observed that the concept of overall policy coordination and integration through the Country Team was sound in normal situations. In the special circumstances in South Vietnam, however, Country Team review had "sometimes delayed, thwarted, or precluded military plans or recommendations of Chief MAAG which he, in his considered professional opinion, felt were necessary in the best interests of the US in furthering US goals." General Trapnell believed that when deterioration of internal security made military considerations as important as they were in South Vietnam, "the Country Team concept of control and coordination under the Ambassador should not apply and that pure military matters should be the responsibility of the senior US officer in the country

53. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 22 Mar 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60-Jul 61.

concerned. Military directives should not come through the Ambassador for his review but directly through military channels . . . ."[54]

In commenting on General Trapnell's list of recommendations on 31 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary of Defense to initiate a study of this problem. They recognized that its resolution would involve interdepartmental discussion and might ultimately require Presidential approval. Secretary NcNamara subsequently informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) was taking up the matter with the Department of State.[55]

An approach made to the State Department on 7 April was described in a later OSD report as an "abortive effort." The Department of Defense representatives addressed only the possibility of sending a joint State-Defense message to Saigon that would stress the need for rapid reporting of military information through military channels, "including information relating to divergences of view which might produce delays in required actions." They found the spokesman for the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs "adamantly opposed to any communication which could be construed or misconstrued as a challenge of the Ambassador's 'absolute' authority and responsibility for supervising all US activities in the country."

OSD officials concluded that to press the State Department further on this or any other aspect of the problem would bring the definition of the Ambassador's authority contained in Executive Order 10893 into question. When worked out in November 1960 after long interdepartmental discussions, that Executive Order had been regarded as containing the best provisions obtainable from the Department of Defense point of view. To reopen the question now "would serve no useful purpose and might, in fact, be highly counter-productive." But OSD officials did not, in consequence, turn a blind eye to the problem.

> Legal advisors in State and Defense agree that authority for direct communication between program chiefs abroad and their respective agencies already exists. Thus, there is no

54. (S) Memo, LTG T. J. H. Trapnell to CJCS, "South Vietnam," 28 Mar 61, Encl to JCS 1992/937, 28 Mar 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (28 Mar 61).

55. (S) JCSM-202-61 to SecDef, 31 Mar 61 (derived from JCS 1992/942); (S) 1st N/H of JCS 1992/942, 14 Apr 61; same file.

actual prohibition against the use of military communication channels by the Chief MAAG in Viet-Nam for any information that he cares to transmit. Discussions with officers who recently visited Viet-Nam, however, reveal that current procedures established by the Ambassador have the effect of strongly inhibiting the free flow of military information and views from the Chief MAAG through military channels. The Ambassador requires that he "coordinate" all communications emanating from the official Embassy family, regardless of channel used or addressee.

While the legal aspects of the problem had real substance, investigation had suggested that an unsatisfactory personal relationship between the Ambassador and the incumbent and previous CHMAAGs was also a factor, and this offered a promising avenue to resolution. Mr. Frederick E. Nolting had already been designated to succeed Ambassador Durbrow in mid-May, and he was expected to appear in Washington for orientation briefings in late April.

Optimum prospects of enhancing the ability of the Chief MAAG to perform his mission more effectively lie in establishing close rapport with the new Ambassador. If Mr. Nolting fully understands, prior to his departure for his new post, the true nature of the military emergency in Viet-Nam and the desirability of treating the counterinsurgency aspect of the situation as an essentially military operation, he will likely appreciate the need for entrusting to the Chief MAAG a considerable measure of delegated responsibility in military matters.

The OSD report recommended that Secretary McNamara, General Lemnitzer, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) participate in the orientation conversations with Ambassador-designate Nolting, and also that General McGarr be recalled to Washington to take part. They should stress that the effectiveness of US support to the counterinsurgency effort would be enhanced if the following two objectives were achieved:

1. The Chief MAAG is delegated a considerable measure of responsibility for decisions in military matters and for providing military advice

to Vietnamese Armed Forces relative to counter-insurgency operations, providing the actions and programs of the Chief MAAG are completely in consonance with broad policy guidance furnished by the Chief of Mission.

2. The Chief MAAG is able to communicate on an unrestricted basis directly with the Unified Commander and the DOD through military channels, providing the Ambassador is kept informed of all communications sent and received through these channels.[56]

On 21 April the Secretary of Defense requested that General McGarr fly to Washington "for urgent high-level consultations on US policy and actions re Vietnam," arriving not later than 25 April.[57] The available records do not indicate to what extent the recommended orientation conversations with Ambassador Nolting were carried out. General McGarr's recall for consultation appears to have been related mainly to a major reassessment of US policy in South Vietnam then in progress. It was the first of several that were to occur during the Kennedy Administration.

---

56. (S) No sig [ASD(ISA) ?], "Report: Relationships between the Chief MAAG and the Ambassador/Country Team in Viet-Nam," n.d. [prior to 18 Apr 61], OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 60-Jul 61.

57. (S) Msg, JCS 994578 to CINCPAC and CHMAAG, 21 Apr 61, same file.

Chapter 2

REASSESSMENT: KENNEDY'S PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR VIETNAM

In late 1960 and early 1961, despite a notable increase in violence in Vietnam and increased concern by the United States, the communist threat to South Vietnam did not loom large as a world problem. Looking back, Vietnam was conspicuous by its absence as a campaign issue in the Kennedy-Nixon contest of 1960. The focus of attention in Southeast Asia was Laos, and when President Eisenhower briefed the President-elect just before the inauguration, he spoke at length of Laos, but reportedly did not even mention Vietnam.[1]

Related to both these problems, however, was the new President's long-standing interest in the threat posed by communist insurgent movements, the relevance of which was strongly underscored by a speech that Premier Khrushchev made on 6 January 1961. Under the policy of peaceful coexistence, Khrushchev said, general and local wars must be avoided at all costs. But he made an exception for "wars of national liberation" that involved an effort to throw off the domination of a "colonial" power. "We recognize such wars and are helping and will continue to help the peoples fighting for their freedom . . . . Communists fully and unreservedly support such just wars and march in the van of the peoples fighting wars of liberation."[2] Thus the Soviet Union could avoid direct confrontation with the United States while supporting communists all over the world who were striking at the foundations of governments in newly-independent and developing nations. President Kennedy believed strongly that the way to combat these communist tactics was to increase limited war capabilities and special skills in guerrilla warfare. From the start of his administration he took a personal interest in the training of US Special Forces and pressed the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to expand and refine antiguerrilla training. As the President expressed it:

---

1. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (1965), p. 320.

2. Quoted in Richard P. Stebbins, The United States in World Affairs, 1961 (1962), p. 64.

> This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin--war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration instead of aggression; seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him . . . . It requires a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of military training.[3]

This type of insurgency sought to impose an ideological and political system by applying irregular warfare methods, using both guerrilla tactics and political action. According to one White House advisor of the period, President Kennedy never forgot Mao Tse-tung's warning that guerrilla actions must fail "if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, cooperation and assistance cannot be gained."[4]

Reports on Vietnam in Early 1961

Almost immediately after his inauguration the President was informed about the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. Early in February he read a report by Brigadier General Edward Lansdale, USAF, an Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, who had gone to South Vietnam in January and returned discouraged by what he saw there.

General Lansdale had been a friend and advisor of President Magsaysay during the Huk rebellion in the Phillipines. [redacted] and was a close friend of President Diem. He had been appointed a Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense in 1957. President Diem made a personal request that General Lansdale be sent to South Vietnam for consultation, and Lansdale visited there for two weeks at the beginning of January 1961. According to one White House advisor, Lansdale's report "shocked" President Kennedy.

---

3. Speech at West Point graduation, 6 Jun 62, quoted in Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation (1967), p. 411.
4. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 342.
5. (C) Msg, Saigon 1599 to State, 12 Apr 61. After an interview with Diem on 11 April 61, Joseph Alsop told the US Ambassador that Lansdale was the only American Diem liked and that Diem thought it too bad Lansdale was not ambassador since he understood Asians and was one of the best US experts in

General Lansdale was alarmed by the progress of the Viet Cong, who appeared to be closer to seizing control of South Vietnam than reports reaching Washington had indicated. In his report to the Secretary of Defense on 17 January 1961, he said South Vietnam could be kept free, but it would require a changed US attitude, hard work, patience, and a new Vietnamese spirit.

General Lansdale reported that Ambassador Durbrow was out of favor with the GVN. He suggested that Durbrow be replaced by someone who could influence Asians and make the Country Team function harmoniously. Lansdale also recommended the replacement of USOM Chief Gardiner, whom the Vietnamese regarded as "a nice man who has fallen asleep in our climate." General Lansdale also stated that the MAAG's potential was not being realized. US advisors needed to move out of "snug rear areas" and earn their way into positions of influence with the Vietnamese in the field.

Ngo Dinh Diem, said Lansdale, was still the only Vietnamese with enough ability and determination to be an effective President. His brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was the strongest influence on Diem, but not the only one. If the United States did not like Nhu, it should "move someone of ours in close," but this someone would have to propose better solutions than Nhu and merit Diem's confidence.

Lansdale recommended that the United States recognize Vietnam as a "combat area of the cold war," send better people to South Vietnam, send the MAAG deeper into the field, and back Diem to the hilt until another strong executive could replace him legally. "We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend. This will make our influence effective again."[6]

---

antiguerrilla warfare. (U) Biog, AF Office of Info. (U) DOD Press Release No. 1441-63. (S) Msgs, DEF 976200 to CINCPAC, 262326Z Apr 60, and CINCPAC to OSD, DA IN 4110, 282059Z Apr 60; JMF 9155.3/4060 (15 Feb 60). Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p. 419

6. (S) Rpt, Lansdale to SecDef and DepSecDef, "Vietnam," 17 Jan 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam. On 2 Feb. W. W. Rostow gave the President Lansdale's report on Vietnam. Arthur Schlesinger reports: "Kennedy read it in Rostow's presence and said, 'This is the worst yet.' Then he added, 'You know Ike never briefed me about Vietnam.'" Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 320. Ambassador Durbrow was replaced by Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., on 15 Mar 61. If Lansdale's memorandum had any effect on this decision, we have no evidence of it.

There was no immediate action on General Lansdale's memorandum. In February and March negotiations on the Laotian situation occupied the center of attention in Southeast Asia. Evidence continued to mount, however, of deteriorating conditions in the Indochinese peninsula generally.

Lieutenant General T. J. H. Trapnell, a former CHMAAG Indochina, was sent to survey conditions in Southeast Asia in March at the direction of the Secretary of Defense.[7]

There was nothing new in what General Trapnell reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff later in the month on the weaknesses of the GVN's counterinsurgency operations: lack of adequately trained and equipped forces, poor intelligence, open borders, a defensive concept of operations, poor leadership, and fragmentation of command by Diem. Trapnell also echoed CHMAAG's complaints about over-control of military matters by the Country Team, lack of Defense Support funds for the 20,000-man increase requested for the RVNAF, and a possible reduction in MAAG strength.[8]

Roger Hilsman reports that President Kennedy all but decided to send General Lansdale as the new US Ambassador to South Vietnam, but the suggestion "raised a storm in the Pentagon, where Lansdale was viewed as an officer who through his service with CIA had become too 'political.' Since there was, of course, a certain amount of truth in the charge, McNamara was persuaded and Lansdale was put aside." He continues that Durbrow clearly had to be relieved because he had been required to bear so many messages of disapproval from the US that he had not been welcome at the presidential palace in Saigon for several months. Following the November 1960 coup, things had gotten even worse, since Diem believed, wrongly, that Durbrow had known of the plans for the coup in advance, but had not warned the regime. Nolting, a career foreign service officer, was considered ideal for the job of restoring good relations with Diem and attempting to influence him toward measures that would bring his regime wider support within Vietnam and make it politically easier for the US to give him the aid he requested. Hilsman, To Move a Nation, pp. 419-420.

7. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 Mar 61; (TS) CM-133-61 to LTG T. J. H. Trapnell, 14 Mar 61; OCJCS File 091 Laos (2). Trapnell was in Vietnam 21 Mar, Laos 22-23 Mar, Bangkok with CINCPAC 24 Mar, saw Rusk in Honolulu 25 Mar, and briefed the JCS at the Pentagon on 27 March.

8. (S) Rpt, Trapnell to CJCS, "South Vietnam," 28 Mar 61, Encl to JCS 1992/927, 28 Mar 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (28 Mar 61).

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved Trapnell's recommendation that the United States finally give its full support to the CIP, and requested the Secretary of Defense to "initiate such further action as may be required" to carry it out. They also opposed any decrease in MAAG strength, noting instead the possible need for an increase. They sent recommendations for increase in MAP support to CINCPAC for comment and directed him to expedite delivery of certain materiel already approved, including 24,000 M1 carbines.[9]

On 11 April 1961, after receiving CINCPAC's comments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the Secretary another memorandum on the Trapnell report. In accordance with CINCPAC's views, they recommended Defense Support for the 20,000-man increase in Vietnamese forces, MAP support for a 68,000 man Civil Guard beginning in FY 1962, and MAP POL support for the Civil Guard.[10]

MAP support and Defense Support funds for the 20,000-man increase still depended on an agreement concerning the CIP, a matter the Embassy and the MAAG continued to view through different colored lenses. On 15 April the Country Team reported to Washington that some progress had been made by the GVN in meeting the conditions set by the United States for full support of the CIP programs, but a number of important objectives were yet to be achieved: the GVN 1) had not given its field command control of military operations and had not activated corps logistical commands; 2) had not appointed a chief for the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO); 3) had not effected the reorganization and decentralization of government announced in February; and 4) still seemed to prefer pressing for more Defense Support to making the financial reforms necessary to raise the money locally.[11]

To CHMAAG, however, the "significant" and "rather impressive" accomplishments of the GVN constituted an "acceptable degree of agreement" on the military side of the CIP. He realized that the United States was not going to get complete acceptance, or even all it would like, and that the "real pay-off" would lie in the GVN's performance. He felt, however, that the Country Team should not "unduly attempt to force GVN

---

9. (S) JCSM-202-61 to SecDef, 31 Mar 61 (derived from JCS 1992/942), same file.

10. (S) JCSM-228-61 to SecDef, 11 Apr 61 (derived from JCS 1992/951), same file. The Embassy had recommended support for the CG in (S) Msg, Saigon 1444 to State, 8 Mar 61.

11. (S) Msg, Saigon 1606 to State, 15 Apr 61.

acceptance of other parts of the plan (political and economic) by claiming failure to 'get enough' military commitments."[12]

As Ambassador Durbrow saw it, Diem was dragging his feet on the CIP. The Ambassador questioned whether Diem really intended to carry out the essential elements of the plan that he had accepted in principle. The indications were that he had reverted to his "basic belief": "Give me the men and arms and I can lick the VC." Nevertheless the Ambassador believed that enough had been accomplished to proceed with MAP procurement for the 20,000-man increase, but without "tipping our hand" to the GVN. He hoped to use his "one remaining lever" to insure that Diem did not "place all emphasis on the military aspects of the insurgency and ignore the political factors."[13]

Meanwhile, the military situation, aggravated by the critical developments in Laos, grew worse. After a relative lull from September 1960 to March 1961, the Viet Cong attacks were renewed in earnest. Incidents and casualties increased. The MAAG estimated the strength of the hard-core Viet Cong at 12,000, up from 9,800 at the end of 1960. An estimated 58 percent of the country was under "some degree of communist control or influence." Diem had recalled 6,000 reservists to active duty, but claimed he could call no more for lack of funds. A National Intelligence Estimate reported that in South Vietnam the internal security problem had reached "serious proportions." Discontent prevailed among the intellectuals and was increasing in the army. The odds favored a noncommunist coup attempt in the next "year or so."[14]

On 13 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that the "distinct possibility" of a political settlement in Laos made it necessary to consider countermeasures

---

12. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 15 Apr 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

13. (C) Msg, Saigon 1599 to State, 12 Apr 61. (S) Msg, Saigon 1606 to State, 15 Apr 61.

14. (S) Memo for Record on COL Flesch's visit to Vietnam 31 Mar-7 Apr 61, I-13678/61, 12 Apr 61, OASD(ISA) File 333 Vietnam. (S) Rpt, "Outline Chief MAAG Vietnam," n.d., OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (28 Apr 61). (TS) Ann A to Draft Program of Action, 26 Apr 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam. (S) NIE 50-61, 28 Mar 61. Diem was reelected on 9 April to a new five-year term by a majority of over 80%. United States in World Affairs, 1961, Chronology.

to the military disadvantages that would arise from such a settlement; these disadvantages might include "intensified counterinsurgency problems" in Thailand and Vietnam.[15]

To the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lemnitzer, who was in Saigon early in May, the situation in Vietnam had reached a critical state. The problem, he said in a message to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was clear and simple: Did the United States intend to take the necessary military action now or

> do we intend to quibble weeks and months over details of general policy, finances, Vietnamese Gov't organization, etc., while Vietnam slowly but surely goes down the drain of communism as North Vietnam and a large portion of Laos have gone to date?[16]

A Program of Action for Vietnam

Already concerned by the gravity of the reports being received, the President had turned to the Secretary of Defense on 20 April, the day after the failure of the Bay of Pigs venture, and asked him to provide within a week an appraisal of the communist drive to dominate Vietnam and a series of recommendations to prevent it. Mr. McNamara delegated the job to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell Gilpatric, who set up an interdepartmental task force under the leadership of General Lansdale.[17]

Within the week 20-26 April 1961 the task force put together a draft "Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam." Since it was impossible to develop a detailed program in such a short time, Mr. Gilpatric proposed making periodic refinements on the basis of specific recommendations from the field by General Lansdale, who would proceed to Vietnam immediately after presidential approval of the program. The new program was

---

15. (TS) JCSM-242-61 to SecDef, 13 Apr 61 (derived from JCS 1992/953), JMF 9155.2/3100 (30 Mar 61). For day-to-day details of the Laotian crisis see (TS) Hist Div, "Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crisis."

16. (TS) Msg, CJCS to JCS, 080639Z May 61, DA IN 111134, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

17. (TS) Memo, SecDef to DepSecDef, 20 Apr 61, Encl to JCS 1992/965 JMF 9155.3/9108 (20 Apr 61).

designed to build on existing programs and include as much of the CIP as could be agreed on by both the United States and the GVN. Primary emphasis for the time being would be placed on solving the internal security problem, but military measures would be accompanied by strong political-economic measures.[18]

After a series of refinements at NSC meetings and decisions by the President, a list of 33 approved actions was forwarded to Saigon on 19 May as the Presidential Program for Vietnam. Its objective was "to prevent Communist domination of Viet-Nam by initiating, on an accelerated basis, a series of mutual supporting actions of a political, military, economic, psychological, and covert character, designed to create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society and to keep Viet-Nam free."

Even before the final approval of the Presidential Program, the basic decision had already been made. During the first week in May it had been determined that the first US political action, or "first commandment," as Ambassador Nolting later styled it, would be to "Seek to increase the confidence of President Diem and his government in the United States by a series of actions and messages relating to the trip of Vice President Johnson," who went to South Vietnam on 11 May.

The rest of the political provisions of the program were to: 1) attempt to strengthen Diem's popular support within Vietnam by "reappraisal and negotiation," under the direction of the Ambassador; 2) negotiate without commitment, on a new bilateral arrangement; 3) negotiate to improve Vietnam's international relations, especially with Cambodia; 4) strengthen border-control arrangements with Cambodia; 5) plan with the GVN the effective use of outside aid; 6) examine the diplomatic "setting" for a possible commitment of US forces; 7) assess the political implications of an increase to 200,000 men in the RVNAF; and 8) obtain the recommendations by Ambassador Nolting on any necessary reorganization of the Country Team.

---

18. (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to Pres, "Program for Action for Vietnam," 27 Apr 61; (TS) Draft, "A Program of Action to Prevent Communist Domination of South Vietnam," 26 Apr 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

The economic proposals included a series of "impact" projects in the field of rural development coupled with assistance in making the best use of available resources. To this end the United States would send to Vietnam "a group of highly qualified economic and fiscal experts . . . to work out a financial plan on which joint US-GVN efforts can be based." The group would also discuss with GVN officials a long-range economic development program and assess the economic implications of a force increase to 200,000.

Psychological measures were designed to bolster public confidence in Diem, document and publish accounts of communist infiltration and terrorism, and exploit the rehabilitation of Viet Cong taken prisoner by the RVNAF.

Specific military measures approved were:

1. MAP support for a 170,000-man RVN force.

2. An initial increase in the MAAG of about 100, from the current 685.

3. MAAG support and advice for a Self Defense Corps of 40,000.

4. MAP support for the entire 68,000-man Civil Guard.

5. Installation of a radar surveillance capability.

6. MAP support for the South Vietnamese junk force.

7. Activation of a special staff element in the MAAG to concentrate on border control.

8. Establishment of a Combat Development and Test Center to develop new techniques for combatting the communist guerrillas.

9. Provision of civic action mobile training teams (MTT's) to assist the ARVN in health, welfare, and public works projects.

10. Deployment of a US Special Forces group to accelerate GVN special forces training.

11. Assessment of the military utility of a further increase in the RVNAF to 200,000.

12. A full examination of the size and composition of forces that would be desirable in the event of a commitment of US forces to Vietnam.

The Program of Action would increase US aid to an estimated $301 million in FY 1962, consisting of $161 million in Defense Support and $140 million MAP.[19]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had commented twice on the draft Program of Action, first on 28 April, when they endorsed the military section of the first draft. On 9 May they approved the military actions in the final draft, "subject to later revisions in detailed implementation that may prove desirable or necessary after CINCPAC and CHMAAG, Vietnam, have had an opportunity to comment and advise as to their implementing action." Details on troop deployments and training detachments, they said, should be decided only after recommendations by CINCPAC. They also recommended deleting from the program a reference to British participation.[20]

To coordinate the Program of Action on a continuing basis, the Lansdale task force had suggested a presidential task force directed by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, with General Lansdale as operations director, and including members from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, State Department, ICA, CIA, USIA, and the White House Staff. This arrangement would have, in effect, given the Department of Defense the dominant voice in the development of US policy in Vietnam. Understandably, the State Department found the proposal unacceptable, and submitted a revised draft that moved the proposed task force firmly back under State Department control. The State draft also eliminated an immediate trip to Vietnam by Lansdale and proposed that refinements in the program be made instead upon recommendations from "the Ambassador in the field." As finally approved by the President, an interdepartmental Task

19. (TS) NSAM 52, 11 May 61, Encl to JCS 1992/991, 16 May 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 3, pt 1. (TS) Msgs, State 1423 to Saigon, 20 May 61; 1432, 23 May 61.

20. (TS) JCSM-238-61 to SecDef, 28 Apr 61 (derived from JCS 1992/970), JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-312-61 to SecDef, 9 May 61 (derived from JCS 1992/980), same file, sec 2 for paper; sec 3, pt 1 for memo. The President, in a letter to President Diem, had already promised cooperation with the GVN in planning the most effective use for the "welcome assistance" of the British.

Force Vietnam was established in the Department of State with Sterling J. Cottrell, recently CINCPAC POLAD, as director and Chalmers B. Wood, the Department's Vietnam desk officer, as executive. General Lansdale was made Deputy Director of the new task force. Ambassador Nolting was directed to set up a counterpart (Task Force Saigon) to the Task Force Vietnam in Washington, to include the Country Teams and any special missions that might be sent to Vietnam in connection with the Presidential Program.[21]

The Johnson Visit

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson's arrival in Saigon on 11 May marked the beginning of the US attempt to rebuild a relationship of confidence with Diem. He delivered a letter that the President had signed on 8 May giving Diem in "broad outline" the Presidential program. The President said he was sending Vice President Johnson to visit Vietnam personally "to give you my warmest greetings, to witness the valiant struggle of your people against communist aggression, and to assure you" that the United States would give more than moral support. He added that he understood certain of the proposals in the CIP "may not entirely reflect your own judgment." Nevertheless he had been able to approve MAP support for the 20,000-man increase and was ready to consider a new joint effort, including a further increase in the force level and the other points in the proposed program.[22]

In reply, on 15 May, Diem applauded these "wise and farsighted" proposals, many of which, he reminded the President, he had been advocating himself for four years or more. He was gratified, too, by Vice President Johnson's "gracious gesture" of asking for his suggestions, "particularly as we have not become accustomed to being asked for our own views as to our needs."[23]

---

21. (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to Pres, 21 May 61, Encl to JCS 1992/975, JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 1. (TS) NSAM 52, 11 May 61, Encl to JCS 1992/991, same file, sec 2. (C) Msg, State 1387 to Saigon, 12 May 61.

22. (TS) Ltr, Pres to Diem, 8 May 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

23. (TS) Ltr, Diem to Pres, 15 May 61, Encl to (TS) JCS 2339/1, 8 Jun 61, JMF 9155.3/5420 (15 May 61). Diem's formal reply to the proposals of the Presidential Program was delivered to Washington on 12 June by Nguyen Dinh Thuan, SecState for the Presidency in Charge of Security Coordination. Dept of State Bulletin, XLV (3 Jul 61), p. 28.

Despite Diem's sarcastic tone, Ambassador Nolting felt that the purpose of the Vice President's visit, to reassure Diem and the Vietnamese people of American support, had been "excellently served" and the results were "all that we could have hoped for." He was convinced that Diem's confidence had been greatly increased. But to those in Washington who felt that reform was as vital to the counterinsurgency effort as increased military might, the rest of the Ambassador's appraisal must have been disappointing. The "general expectation" left with Diem, he said, was that additional aid would be forthcoming. Notwithstanding the Vice President's stress on economic and social measures, Nolting thought Diem would be inclined to put the main emphasis on the "military side." In the joint communique, the Ambassador reported, Diem had watered down language calling for more rapid "social, political, and economic liberalization measures." As for any change in his methods of organization and operation, Diem would probably insist on governing "in his own manner."[24]

The joint communique issued at the end of the Vice President's visit announced that the two governments had reached a "large measure of agreement" on the means to accomplish their joint purpose. The communique then listed some of the measures agreed to in principle, including the expansion of the RVNAF and MAP support for the entire Civil Guard. Diem had also agreed that a group of US and Vietnamese economic and fiscal experts would meet in Vietnam to work out a financial plan on which to base the new joint effort.[25]

On his return from Southeast Asia, Vice President Johnson recommended "a major effort to help these countries defend themselves." He reported, however, that US combat involvement was not only unnecessary but undesirable at this time. President Diem had categorically rejected consideration of the question of introducing US combat troops. The South Vietnamese leader had said he wanted foreign troops only in case of overt aggression, explaining that their introduction otherwise would mean the end of the Geneva accords. He made it clear, however, that his remarks applied only to combat troops. He indicated that as many military personnel as needed could be brought in for training and advising GVN forces.[26]

---

24. (S) Msg, Saigon 1748 to State, 15 May 61.
25. (U) Joint Communique, 13 May 61, Dept of State Bulletin, XLIV (19 Jun 61), 956-957.
26. (S) Msg, Saigon 1743 to State, 15 May 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 3, pt 1.

In accordance with one of the provisions of the Presidential Program and in response to events in Laos, there had already been some consideration of sending US troops to South Vietnam. On 27 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCPAC to be prepared to land troops in southern Laos, South Vietnam, and Thailand in case Vientiane fell. On the following day, in response to Mr. Gilpatric's request for approval of the military section of the Program of Action, the Chief of Staff, Army, had recommended the deployment of a US infantry division (minus two battle groups) and other measures in addition to those recommended in the program. The NSC had discussed the question, but had taken no action, and after a cease-fire had been agreed to in Laos on 3 May, the decision was made that no troops would be sent to Vietnam prior to the opening of the Geneva conference on Laos. A few days later, however, the Deputy Secretary of Defense had solicited JCS views on the desirability of sending a US force to South Vietnam.[27]

Although CINCPAC opposed commitment of US forces at this time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 May recommended that Diem be encouraged to request the immediate deployment of US troops, "to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos, which would then require deployment of US forces into an already existing combat situation." The force should be sufficient to 1) provide a visible deterrent to DRV or Chinese Communist action; 2) release South Vietnamese forces from static defense positions for counterinsurgency action; 3) assist in training the Vietnamese forces to the maximum extent possible consistent with their mission; 4) provide a nucleus for the support of any additional US or SEATO operations in Southeast Asia; 5) indicate the firmness of US intent to all Asian nations. Their recommendation did not undergo further consideration because of President Diem's decision against the intervention of US troops.[28]

---

27. (TS) CSAM-324-61, 28 Apr 61, JMF 9155.3/9180 (27 Apr 61) sec 1. (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 8 May 61, Encl to JCS 1992/979, 8 May 61, same file, sec 2. (TS) Memo for Record, COL Levy, 5 May 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam. COL Levy was JCS Representative on the Task Force Vietnam.

28. (TS) JCS 1992/983, 9 May 61; (TS) JCSM-320-61 to SecDef, 10 May 61 (derived from JCS 1992/983), JMF 9155.3/918((27 Apr 61) sec 3, pt 1.

On 29 May Dr. Eugene Staley, Research Director of the Stanford Research Institute, accepted the chairmanship of the financial mission proposed in the Presidential Program and agreed to by Diem. This Special Financial Group (SFG), working with the Country Team and under the policy guidance of the Ambassador, would consider the costs of "supporting the armed forces and civilian services needed to maintain security and other major program objectives" and recommend means of paying for them, together with necessary economic and financial reforms.[29]

After preliminary discussions in Washington the SFG went to Saigon on 19 June. There it met with its South Vietnamese counterpart for about three weeks and produced a joint report for Presidents Kennedy and Diem. The SFG briefed Diem on 11 July and on 20 July Dr. Staley presented his report to the Task Force in Washington.[30]

The Staley Report was based on three "central considerations": 1) security requirements, for the time being, had to come first; 2) military operations without economic and social programs would not achieve lasting results; and 3) it was in the joint interests of the US and the GVN to achieve a self-sustaining economy and a free and peaceful society in Vietnam. The "developing situation" in Laos indicated an urgent requirement for a further increase in the RVNAF. After consulting their respective military authorities, the joint SFG had adopted for economic planning purposes two alternative force levels. Under alternative A, which assumed no increase in insurgency and a holding of the line in Laos, the force level would rise to 200,000 in 1962 and remain there. Under alternative B, which assumed an increase in VC insurgency and de facto communist control of Laos, the force levels would rise to 200,000 in 1962 and to 278,000 by 1965.

The joint SFG estimated the additional costs for the military portion of the program from July 1961 through December 1962 at $42 million for the United States and 3.7 billion piasters for South Vietnam. Total additional costs for the entire program--military, emergency, economic, and long-range development--for the same period were estimated at

29. (S) Msg, Saigon 1828 to State, 1 Jun 61.
30. (U) Dept of State Bulletin, XLV (3 Jul 61), p. 28. (S) Msg, Saigon 46 to State, 12 Jul 61. (S) Minutes, TFVN Mtg, 20 Jul 61, Vietnam Working Group Files, Dept of State.

$85.5 million and 6.5 billion piasters. Despite outside assistance, there was an urgent need for "an additional supply of local currency to cover the increase in piaster expenditures." This money, the SFG had decided, should be raised by tax reform, exchange reform, and borrowing, but there was some doubt that such measures would increase revenues to the amount required.

The economic proposals of the Staley Report were divided into two parts, an emergency action program and a long-range development program. The emergency program dealt with information and communications, agrovilles and land development, rural medical programs, civil administration in rural areas, and the youth corps. Longer range programs included the improvement of agricultural productivity, economic and social services to the rural population, and the creation of a stronger industrial base.[31]

The Deputy Secretary of Defense sent the Joint Chiefs of Staff a copy of the Staley Report on 26 July. The report was already under "active consideration" at the White House, and because of time limitations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff restricted themselves to the military question of the proposed force increase. On 21 June they had already recommended a force level of 200,000, subject to a "continuing assessment of demonstrated GVN and RVNAF capabilities." In the meantime CHMAAG had reported that the 170,000 level would be reached by the end of 1961 and had requested immediate approval of the 200,000 level so that the increase could begin in January 1962.[32] After a briefing by Dr. Staley on 2 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended immediate approval of an increase in the force objective up to 200,000 to begin in January 1962, and periodic assessments during the buildup to "ascertain the requirement for these additional forces." Addressing the question of an eventual increase to 278,000, the Joint Chiefs

---

31. (S-GP 1) JCS 2343/7, 27 Jul 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (26 Jul 61).

32. (S-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 26 Jul 61, Encl to JCS 2343/7, 27 Jul 61; (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/9, 31 Jul 61; (S-GP 4) Msg, CHMAAG 1139 to CINCPAC, DA IN 135658, 290525Z Jul 61; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-422-61 to SecDef, 21 Jun 61 (derived from JCS 2339/6), JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 3.

recommended that the force level remain at 200,000 (9 division equivalent), based on CINCPAC's view that a 15-division force was unnecessary.[33]

On 4 August the President pledged US support for an increase in the RVNAF to 200,000 men, accepting the assumptions of the Staley Report. He set three conditions for the increase, however: there should be 1) a mutually agreed upon, geographically phased strategic plan for bringing the Viet Cong under control; 2) an understanding on the training and use of the 30,000 additional men; and 3) regulation of the rate of increase to insure efficient absorption.

Any decision on an increase beyond 200,000 would be postponed until 1962, while the buildup of the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps to agreed levels would be expedited. "Within the limits of available funds," the US Government would provide the necessary external resources for the Presidential Program. The South Vietnamese should be strongly urged to generate more piasters, reform taxes, and establish a single and "realistic" rate of exchange. The Ambassador was directed to make it clear that the United States considered a higher exchange rate indispensable, but to assure Diem that an increased piaster yield would not be used as justification for reducing US aid. USOM was directed to review the emergency social action proposals as well as those programs already under way. The Ambassador should urge Diem to create more effective machinery for long-range planning. He should also try "discreetly" to get Diem to use the program for maximum political advantage, for instance by employing noncommunist political oppositionists in the civic action program. President Kennedy wanted to be informed of matters requiring his attention "so that they may receive his immediate consideration."[34]

As an attempt to get the Vietnamese to reform their fiscal and monetary policies and to bring about a dramatic mobilization of Vietnamese resources for the war against the Viet Cong, the Staley mission was hardly an unqualified success. The GVN agreed not to increase its foreign reserves,

---

33. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-519-61 to SecDef, 2 Aug 61 (derived from JCS 2343/9), (TS) JCSM-518-61 to SecDef, 3 Aug 61 (derived from JCS 2343/5); JMF 9155.3/9105 (26 Jul 61).

34. (S-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to JCS, 18 Aug 61, Encl to JCS 2343/16, 21 Aug 61; JMF 9155.3/9105 (26 Jul 61). (S) NSAM 65, 11 Aug 61, Encl to JCS 2343/13, 14 Aug 61; JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 4. (S) Msg, State 140 to Saigon, 4 Aug 61.

to prohibit luxury imports, and to raise the exchange rate from 45-1 to 60-1. This, said Dr. Staley in his presentation to the Task Force, was an improvement, but not enough. It soon became clear that the GVN would continue to be more amenable to aid than advice, and that policy would be made not by pronouncements in Washington, but by hard day-to-day negotiations between the two governments.[35]

The actual increase in the RVNAF now began to take place, reaching 152,600 by 15 July, 157,000 by 15 August, and 169,800 by the end of October. Concurrently, the CG and SDC also grew. The CG reached a level of 65,000 men and the SDC 52,000 by 15 August. As the RVNAF approached the 170,000 level, the question arose whether or not the GVN had satisfied the President's requirements for a further increase. On 30 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported to the Secretary of Defense that the rate of increases had been agreed upon with the GVN, and there was general agreement on the priority of activation of units; but GVN officials had not produced a national strategic plan for bringing the Viet Cong under control, and it was questionable whether they would do so before the deadline. Diem, who did not interpret the three points in the President's decision as conditions to the force increase, was planning to go straight ahead toward 200,000. Although the United States should have "reasonable satisfaction" on these points, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it was undesirable to halt or delay the progressive build-up of GVN forces. But the United States should continue pressing at "highest levels" for a national counterinsurgency plan.[36]

Already CHMAAG was assuming the 200,000 level would be approved and had asked for an additional 5,000-man allocation on 17 November to give him flexibility in working out the force structure. This allocation was approved in January 1962. Thus from the middle of 1961 to the beginning of 1962 the approved RVNAF force level jumped from 150,000 to 205,000 and US MAP from a proposed $49.3 million to $101 million.[37]

To authorize higher force levels was relatively easy but to turn these additional men into efficient fighters

---

35. (S) Minutes, TFVN Mtg, 20 Jul 61, Vietnam Working Group Files, Dept of State.

36. (S) Status Rpts of the President's Program, 15 Sep 61; 27 Oct 61; JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 1A. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-821-61 to SecDef, 30 Nov 61 (derived from JCS 2343/48), same file, sec 5.

37. (S) Msg, MAGPO 4012 to CINCPAC, DA IN 174456, 17015Z Nov 61: (TS) JCSM-28-62 to SecDef, "Increase of GVN

was another problem. Training of these forces, especially the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps, was hampered by a lack of facilities and trained leaders. Special Forces training suffered from a lack of qualified candidates and the reluctance of the GVN to release existing Special Forces for retraining or to detach committed regular units for Special Forces training. Some of these deficiencies were met by increasing the size of the US MAAG.

The increase in the number of US military personnel in South Vietnam to aid the buildup contemplated in the Presidential Program was small at first. By 10 November 1961 the initial authorized increase of 100 in the 685-man MAAG had not yet been completed. In all, there were about 900 US military men in South Vietnam, including US personnel sent to help carry out other military aspects of the Presidential Program, such as the provision of radar surveillance facilities, civic action teams, and a center to test new techniques of guerrilla warfare. In contrast, a little over one month later (after the Taylor Mission and further decisions on US assistance), the MAAG had a strength of 1,124 men. Including support units of various types, the United States then had a total of 2,275 military personnel in South Vietnam.[38]

Border Control

One aspect of the South Vietnamese insurgency that was to have more and more emphasis as time went on was the problem of infiltration from North Vietnam, which in 1961 came mostly through Laos. Estimating that the Viet Cong were infiltrating into the RVN at the rate of about 700 a month, some US officials recommended breaking off the Geneva Conference on Laos, and using both local and, if necessary, US forces, to clean out the communist forces in southern Laos.[39]

Forces (U)," 13 Jan 62 (derived from JCS 2343/67), same file, sec 5.

38. (TS) CINCPAC Command History, 1961, pp. 33, 174. (TS GP 3) SM-1394-61 to SecDef, 20 Dec 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (28 Nov 61). (S) Status Rpts of the President's Program, 13 Oct; 27 Oct; 10 Nov; JMF 9155.3/9105 (27 Apr 61) A.

39. (S) Minutes, TFVN Mtgs of 22 & 26 Jun 61, Vietnam Working Group Files, Dept of State.

The argument for attacking the problem of Vietnam by preventive action in Laos gained support from the seeming hopelessness of trying to seal the Laos/RVN frontier. In August, asked by Mr. McNamara for their comments on the border-control aspect of the Presidential Program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not encouraging. The MAAG's concept of relying on border patrols and intelligence would help, they said; but aerial surveillance was handicapped by difficult terrain, vague boundaries, and a lack of aircraft. Two weeks later the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that the United States could cut the flow of communist support to the Viet Cong substantially if it chose to intervene openly. They believed, however, that such action would probably provoke open Chinese Communist countermeasures.[40]

By the fall of 1961 the problem of border control had assumed such proportions that the United States began consideration of stronger and broader measures. Early in October the Deputy Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their views on two concepts calling for the employment of SEATO forces in border control. One would put SEATO forces on the 17th parallel to free the ARVN for offensive operations; the other would put them at the greatest possible number of entry points along the entire South Vietnamese frontier. The Joint Chiefs of Staff found neither feasible. Any concept for the defense of Southeast Asia that did not include Laos, they said, was militarily unsound. "What is needed is not the spreading out of our forces throughout Southeast Asia but rather a concentrated effort in Laos where a firm stand can be taken saving all or substantially all of Laos which would, at the same time, protect Thailand and protect the borders of South Vietnam." They recommended intervention in Laos or, if that was considered politically unacceptable, deployment of a SEATO force of about 11,000 (one division) to South Vietnam, concentrated initially in the high plateau region around Pleiku. This would free some South Vietnamese forces for offensive action against the Viet Cong and would secure an especially vulnerable border area. These

40. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-529-61 to SecDef, 9 Aug 61 (derived from JCS 2343/8), 9 Aug 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 4. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-583-61 to SecDef, 24 Aug 61 (derived from JCS 2343/15), 24 Aug 61, same file, secs 4 and 5.

recommendations were shelved because the United States Government decided to continue to seek a negotiated settlement in Laos.[41]

On 8 November CHMAAG submitted to CINCPAC an elaboration of his patrol bases plan, calling for 25 bases on the western border of South Vietnam, each one consisting of two or more companies of ARVN, rangers, or trained Civil Guards. CINCPAC approved the plan and on 4 December President Diem did also, but by the end of the year the GVN still had not released 5,000 Rangers needed to put the plan in operation. However, 3,000 Montagnards had been recruited and were in training at the beginning of 1962 for patrol work in the northern part of the country.[42]

Aggressive patrolling action on both sides of the Laos border was the key to the plan. Full use would be made of ambush, especially at night, using all standard and experimental harrassing agents that might prove effective and could be supplied. Mobility and flexibility would be important, with Rangers, ARVN elements, and Civil Guards operating out of patrol bases. Rangers would operate in the more rugged border areas, blocking known crossing points and trails. Less active areas would be manned by the ARVN and Civil Guard.

At the first Honolulu meeting in December 1961, Secretary McNamara stated that the border control plan impressed him as a very important phase of operations in South Vietnam, and he urged immediate action. General McGarr warned against expecting too much of any border control program, pointing out that while it would reduce infiltration, it could not place a tight seal along the border.[43]

The Uncertainties of Mid-1961

By the end of the summer, the ceasefire in Laos was tremely precarious, and the Viet Cong in South Vietnam had sumed the offensive.

---

41. (S) Desp, Saigon 351 to State, 14 Feb 61. (S) Status Rpt of the President's Program, 13 Oct 61, JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 1A. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 5 Oct 61, Encl to JCS 2343/24, 6 Oct 61; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-716-61 to SecDef, 9 Oct 61 (Derived from JCS 2343/25); JMF 9155.3/9105 (5 Oct 61).

42. (S-GP 4) MAAG, "Plan for Reduction of Border Infiltration," 5 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2343/41, 16 Nov 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (8 Nov 61). (TS) CINCPAC Command History, 1961, pp. 182-183.

43. (TS-GP 2) Rpt, Honolulu Conference, 16 Dec 61.

In August the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent Brigadier General William A. Craig to Southeast Asia with a team to survey the areas in Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam where US troops might be located if SEATO Plan 5, for intervention in Laos, were put into effect. General Craig reported that Laotian leadership, logistics, training, discipline, and morale were all poor or nonexistent. The enemy was in a position to take any city or area in Laos at will. There was a strong possibility of the resumption of combat at the end of the rainy season, with the enemy concentrating on the route into the RVN through Laos. General Craig recommended that Plan 5, or "suitable variations," be set in motion so that SEATO forces could be in position by the end of the rainy season.

In South Vietnam, General Craig had found Ambassador Nolting in agreement with him that the immediate problem was "positive action in Laos." He also reported that President Diem would now accept a US brigade or division in South Vietnam as "school troops." He definitely wanted US troops on the ground "when the balloon goes up."[44]

But the United States decided against a military solution in Laos and made renewed efforts to negotiate a settlement. The situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. In mid-August an intelligence report on Vietnam described a restive political situation in the RVN. Chances of a coup had been reduced, but dissatisfaction among military officers and other government officials remained. On the fighting front there was a formidable VC hard core of more than 12,000 men, augmented by several thousand irregulars, with good intelligence and probably good morale, since few defected to the GVN. More than half of the Mekong delta as well as several areas northwest of Saigon were controlled by the Viet Cong. In those areas they collected taxes, directed the harvest, controlled the distribution of farm produce, conducted indoctrination programs, and drafted recruits. They had also begun setting up overt party organizations and local governments. The USIB judged that the combination of noncommunist disaffection and the communist political and psychological campaign being

44. (TS) Msg, JCS 1126 to Craig, 142236Z Aug 61, JMF 9050/5420 (10 Aug 61). (TS) Craig Rpt, Encl to DJSM-1259-61, 13 Oct 61, same file.

waged in the name of the National Liberation Front (NLF) was as great a threat as the VC paramilitary effort. The NLF could become the nucleus of a government set up in a "liberated" area or a replacement for the GVN in the event of a successful coup.[45]

September saw a sharp upswing in VC activity, including a successful large-scale attack at Ban Me Thuot, a provincial capital 55 miles from Saigon. The new offensive seemed to be concentrated in the central plateau where VC attacks were increasing in size and frequency. Their units were more aggressive, better organized and directed, and better equipped. CHMAAG reported what looked like a significant increase in VC capabilities on the plateau along with unconfirmed reports of a sizable DRV troop concentration in southern Laos. A J-2 report surmised that the Viet Cong had entered a new phase of operations, one in which they would use battalion-sized units organized more nearly on conventional lines. Hard core VC strength was estimated in September at 16,500. Early in October a CIA operations officer back from Vietnam reported to the Task Force Vietnam that the situation was worse than generally thought in Washington. He cited the "alarming growth" of VC strength in the last few months and a lack of cooperation by the GVN. Colonel Levy, the JCS Representative on the Task Force, also recently back from Vietnam, was not as pessimistic, but said that the United States clearly would have to do more than it was doing. The temperature of the Southeast Asian problem, which had subsided somewhat with the ceasefire in Laos in May and the onset of the monsoon, was again on the rise. And the end of the rainy season was at hand.[46]

By 22 September the State and Defense Departments had told their representatives in Saigon that the deterioration in Laos, the Viet Cong attacks in the RVN in September, and the end of the rainy season required an emergency US program. They asked for a list of actions, to be taken within 30 days, that would help prevent the establishment of a VC base on RVN territory near the Lao border, stop VC infiltration, and "maintain offensive momentum" against the Viet Cong. General McGarr thought the message indicated that State Department

---

45. (S-GP 1) NIE 14.3/53-61.

46. (S) J-2 Current Intelligence Briefs, 11, 22, 25, 26, 28, and 29 Sep 61. (S) Minutes, TFVN Mtg of 4 Oct 61, Vietnam Working Group Files, Dept of State. Another indicator of stepped-up activity was that both GVN and VC casualties were running 700-1,200 a month by mid-1961.

officials had only recently begun "reading their mail" about the situation in Vietnam. In a letter to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 12 October, he reviewed his running battles with the GVN, the British, and officials in the State Department. He condemned the "Washington civilians" who he claimed were now pressing for a timetable for victory in Vietnam. He did not want the military blamed for a situation "which is not of its own making and for which it has not been adequately supported by our country."[47]

American officials charged with helping the RVN survive in 1961 faced paradoxical difficulties. The needed increase in GVN military counterinsurgency efforts would require involving more people in a war that to many South Vietnamese seemed undesirable. Any increase in US assistance to the GVN also lent support to the charge of colonialism, which the Viet Minh had used so successfully against the French. Perhaps most perplexing of all was the problem of Diem himself, given the complex of qualities that on the one hand made him the pre-eminent leader of his country and on the other inhibited the fulfillment of his responsibilities. Americans, both civilian and military, agreed that in order to organize effectively against the Viet Cong, Diem must delegate more authority and allow more initiative to subordinates, especially to his military commanders. But Diem, both because of his temperament and in order to forestall a coup, retained all power in his own hands.[48]

The Presidential Program had been aimed primarily at improving US relations with Diem as the means of improving the performance of his government and military forces. As Ambassador Nolting put it, the "first commandment" of the program was to build Diem's confidence. The United States would be able to bring about "ameliorations and improvements" gradually, "in proportion to the confidence which he has in us and in his ability to make concessions without slipping." General McGarr had been delighted with this new approach to the Diem problem and thought the Embassy's assessment "logical and sound." But he had warned that the insurgency would not be defeated overnight and not before "the necessary degree of material support has been both received and committed to the fight."[49]

---

47. (S) Msg, State-Def 337 to Saigon, 22 Sep 61. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 12 Oct 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

48. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 1 Aug 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

49. (S) Msg, Saigon 70 to State, 14 Jul 61. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 15 Jul 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

Apart from the increasing size of the RVN forces during the latter half of the year, the measurable results of the Presidential Program were small. Ambassador Nolting had reported on 14 July that although the announcement of the program had probably reduced the likelihood of a coup, the net security situation appeared no better than it had been two months before. Despite some noteworthy improvements in RVNAF operations at Bonh Vinh and Kien Phong in June and July, the outlook of US officials in Saigon was uneasy.[50]

As conditions in both Laos and South Vietnam continued to deteriorate in August and September, US officials in Washington began to look for alternatives.

50. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 15 Jul 61; (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 24 Jul 61; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam. (S) Msg, Saigon 70 to State, 14 Jul 61.

Chapter 3

A NEW PHASE: POLICY AND MILITARY OPERATIONS

The intensified pace of the guerrilla war brought South Vietnam forcefully to the attention of the President in the fall of 1961. In a dramatic demonstration of what they could do, the Viet Cong on 18 September overran Ban Me Thuot, a provincial capital 55 miles from Saigon. They beheaded the province chief, captured a supply of arms and ammunition, and departed before a relief force arrived.

President Diem warned that the communists might succeed in cutting South Vietnam in half, isolating Hue from Saigon. He declared a state of national emergency and requested an increase in US aid. He also asked for US troops or at least a formal commitment to send them, "because of Laos situation." Diem specifically asked for tactical aviation, helicopter companies, coastal patrol forces, and logistic support.[1]

On 25 September 1961, in an address to the United Nations, President Kennedy singled out the situations in Southeast Asia and Berlin as the foremost threats to the peace of the world. He linked the problems in Laos and South Vietnam and made a special point of the fact that Laotian territory was being used to infiltrate South Vietnam.[2]

Taylor-Rostow Mission

On 11 October President Kennedy decided to raise the US ante in the war against the Viet Cong. He directed the introduction of the USAF JUNGLE JIM Squadron for the "initial purpose" of training South Vietnamese forces. He also ordered guerrilla ground action, "including use of US advisors if necessary," against communist aerial resupply missions in the Tchepone (Laos) area. Other decisions included planning for presenting evidence of North Vietnamese aggression to the ICC

1. Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 421. (S) Msg, Saigon 508 to State, 18 Oct 61.
2. Public Papers of the Presidents, John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 624.

and the United Nations, and preparation for publication of a report on North Vietnamese support and direction of the insurgency in South Vietnam. Before taking further action, the President decided to send General Maxwell D. Taylor, the Military Representative of the President, to South Vietnam to "explore ways in which assistance of all types might be more effective." General Taylor was accompanied by Mr. W.W. Rostow of the White House staff, Sterling Cottrell, Director of the Task Force Vietnam, and representatives of the Departments of State and Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, ICA and CIA. The group was in Southeast Asia from 15 October to 3 November 1961.[3]

General Taylor characterized the situation as serious but salvageable. The Laos negotiations had produced uncertainty in South Vietnam about the determination of the United States to defend the RVN. This feeling had exacerbated an already serious problem brought on by the recent VC offensive and a disastrous flood in the southwest. The factors had combined to create a pervasive crisis of confidence and loss of South Vietnamese national morale. General Taylor cited most of the same military problems that the United States had been trying to solve for the past two years: the absence of reliable intelligence, poor command and control arrangements, and poor mobility, all reinforcing one another, leading to a "defensive military disposition of resources and a progressive deterioration in the military position of the ARVN."

---

3. (TS) NSAM 104, "Southeast Asia," 13 Oct 61, Att to (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/30, 18 Oct 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61). JUNGLE JIM was an AF unit organized to support antiguerrilla and paramilitary operations, to train native air forces in antiguerrilla techniques, and to participate in R7D testing. The first detachment consisting of 8 T-28's, 4 SC-47's, and 4 RB-26's with about 230 men began arriving in South Vietnam on 14 Nov 61.

The State Department had sent William Jorden, a member of its Policy Planning Council, to gather evidence of DRV aggression in the RVN. He was in South Vietnam from 26 Aug to 22 Sep. His report, showing that the insurgency in the RVN was directed by Hanoi, was published as a State Department white paper on 8 Dec 61. (S) Minutes, TFVN Mtgs of 6 and 20 Sep 61, Vietnam Working Group Files, Dept of State. Dept of State Pub 7308, A Threat to the Peace, Dec 61.

The fact that there was no one of comparable rank to Taylor and Rostow from the State Dept is cited by both Roger Hilsman and Arthur Schlesinger as evidence that the SecState

across international boundaries and the direction of guerrilla war from outside a sovereign nation" a new form of aggression. He had also warned that "this is a fact which the whole international community must confront and whose consequent responsibilities it must accept. Without such international action those against whom aggression is mounted will be driven inevitably to seek out and engage the ultimate source of the aggression they confront."[5]

The basic question raised by the Taylor Report was how far the United States was willing to go to prevent the fall of South Vietnam to the communists. By 7 November the Secretary of Defense, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had agreed on a memorandum for the President proposing acceptance of the strong implication of the Taylor Report that US ground forces were necessary to sustain the small nation. Furthermore, they believed South Vietnam was important enough to justify committing US troops. They stated that the fall of South Vietnam to communism would lead to the fairly rapid extension of communist control in the rest of Southeast Asia; the strategic implications of this would be "extremely serious." They believed that short of introducing US forces on a substantial scale, the chances were sharply against preventing that fall. They were "inclined to recommend that we do commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions." In the event the commitment was agreed upon, they supported General Taylor's recommendations as the first steps toward its fulfillment. The Defense officials also concluded that "the other side can be convinced we mean business only if we accompany the initial force introduction by a clear commitment to the full objective . . . , accompanied by a warning through some channel to Hanoi that continued support to Viet Cong will lead to punitive retaliation against North Vietnam."[6]

The Secretary of Defense discussed the proposed policy with the Secretary of State, who initially agreed, but subsequently opposed sending US troops to South Vietnam. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Taylor insisted

---

5. Speech, 28 Jun 61, Dept of State Bulletin, XLV (7 Aug 61) pp. 233-238.

6. (TS) Memo, SecDef to President, "South Vietnam," 7 Nov 61; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-685-61 to SecDef, 9 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2343/36, 9 Nov 61; JMF 9155.3 (13 Oct 61) sec 1.

that a US presence was essential to save South Vietnam, the State Department view carried the day. In their joint recommendation to the President on 11 November Secretaries McNamara and Rusk recommended a clear US commitment to prevent the fall of South Vietnam, but they divided their proposals on the commitment of US forces to South Vietnam into two categories. "Units of modest size required for the direct support of South Viet-Namese military effort, such as communications, helicopters and other forms of airlift, reconnaissance aircraft, naval patrols, intelligence units, etc. . . . should be introduced as speedily as possible." They recommended, however, that the President defer the decision to send "larger organized units with actual or potential direct military missions," at least until after agreement on a Laotian settlement. Another reason for delaying this decision was to allow time to arrange for a multilateral commitment, possibly within the context of SEATO.[7]

As a result of these recommendations, a program that was to govern US policy for the next two years was approved by the President on 15 November, as NSAM 111. Ambassador Nolting was instructed to tell President Diem that the United States was prepared to join the GVN in a "sharply increased joint effort" to cope with the Viet Cong threat and the ravages of the flood if the GVN was prepared to "carry out an effective and total mobilization of its own resources." Specifically, the United States expected the GVN to take the following steps:

> a. Prompt and appropriate legislative and administrative action to put the nation on a wartime footing to mobilize its entire resources. (This would include a decentralization and broadening of the Government so as to realize the full potential of all non-Communist elements in the country willing to contribute to the common struggle.)
>
> b. The vitalization of appropriate governmental wartime agencies with adequate authority to perform their functions effectively.

7. (TS) Memo, Secys State/Def to Pres, 11 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2343/40, 13 Nov 61, JMF 9155.3 (13 Oct 61) sec 1.

c. Overhaul of the military establishment and command structure so as to create an effective military organization for the prosecution of the war and assure a mobile offensive capability for the Army.

The GVN's obligations were purposely "broadly phrased," Ambassador Nolting was told, but he was instructed to make it quite clear that the US contribution to the program depended heavily on "real administrative, political, and social reform." Diem was to come forth with changes that would be "recognized as having real substance and meaning." As in the Presidential Program, however, the details of these reforms and the manner of their negotiation with Diem were left to the judgment of the Ambassador. In any case, the decision to support South Vietnam against the communist insurgents had been made because it was considered important to US interests, and the United States prepared to deliver the goods before Diem began to deliver on his promises.

On its part, the United States would immediately take the following actions in support of the GVN:

a. Provide increased air lift to the GVN forces, including helicopters, light aviation, and transport aircraft, manned to the extent necessary by United States uniformed personnel and under United States operational control.

b. Provide such additional equipment and United States uniformed personnel as may be necessary for air reconnaissance, photography, instruction in and execution of air-ground support techniques, and for special intelligence.

c. Provide the GVN with some small craft, including such United States uniformed advisers and operating personnel as may be necessary for operations in effecting surveillance and control over coastal waters and inland waterways.

d. Provide expedited training and equipping of the civil guard and the self-defense corps with the objective of relieving the regular army of static missions and freeing it for mobile offensive operations.

e. Provide such personnel and equipment as may be necessary to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the Government and the armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.

f. Provide such new terms of reference, reorganization and additional personnel for United States military forces as are required for increased United States military assistance in the operational collaboration with the GVN and operational direction of U.S. forces, and to carry out the other increased responsibilities which accrue to the U.S. authorities under these recommendations.

g. Provide such increased economic aid as may be required to permit the GVN to pursue a vigorous flood relief and rehabilitation program, to supply material in support of the security efforts, and to give priority to projects in support of this expanded counter-insurgency program. [The Ambassador was told that this could include increases in military pay, a full supply of a wide range of materials such as food; medical supplies, transportation equipment, communications equipment, and any other items where material help could assist the GVN in winning the war against the Viet Cong.]

h. Encourage and support (including financial support) a request by the GVN to the FAO or any other appropriate international organization for multilateral assistance in the relief and rehabilitation of the flood area. (One objective here would be political objective of engaging widest possible multinational interest in and concern with GVN.)

i. Provide individual administrators and advisers for the Governmental machinery of South Viet-Nam in types and numbers to be agreed upon by the two Governments.

j. Provide personnel for a joint survey with the GVN of conditions in each of the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the

counterinsurgency program in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them.[8]

On 13 November, even before formal approval of the new program, the Secretary of Defense had directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to launch the military actions "with all possible speed." Two weeks later Mr. McNamara instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to proceed on the assumption that Diem would agree to the US proposal. In a message to CINCPAC and CHMAAG, the Secretary explained that political uncertainty about Diem "must not prevent us from going ahead full blast . . . on all possible actions short of large scale introduction of US forces. Cost considerations particularly should be secondary in your search for new approaches."[9]

On 4 December Ambassador Nolting came to an agreement with Diem on the new program, but the "specifics" Diem agreed to fell far short of the changes "having real substance and meaning" called for in Nolting's instructions. Regarding the command structure, for instance, Diem agreed only that "a reorganization of the military command structure is necessary, and the GVN will consult with the U.S. on specific measures to this end." Among the other measures agreed to were joint provincial surveys, directed "principally to military and intelligence matters"; the release of enough ranger companies to form a border ranger force for the northwest of about 5,000 men (see above, p. 3); and exclusive US command of US naval and helicopter units. There would be closer collaboration, including the participation of US personnel in operational missions, but with the caveat that "the fundamental responsibility of the GVN for the conduct of the war will not be impaired." With regard to winning public support at home and

---

8. (TS-GP 1) NSAM 111, 22 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2343/49, 25 Nov 61; (TS) Msg, State 619 to Saigon, 15 Nov 61; JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) sec 1.

9. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2343/39, 13 Nov 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) sec 1. (TS-GP 4) DJSM-1425-61 to Dir, J-1, et al., 28 Nov 61; (TS) Msg, SecDef to CINCPAC and CHMAAG, DEF 906345, 28 Nov 61; same file, sec 2.

abroad, Diem agreed to no new actions, but he cited several that had been taken in response to earlier proddings by US officials.[10]

Although Ambassador Nolting was under no illusions about this agreement, he believed that the "limited concessions" Diem was prepared to make now, and others that could be obtained "piece meal," represented "considerable headway" and justified "moving confidently ahead," as the United States had in fact begun to do. The Diem-Nolting agreement was immediately approved in Washington.[11]

The agreement was followed on the part of the United States by a flurry of diplomatic activity designed to warn the communist powers of the consequences of continued support of the Viet Cong, and to justify to the world the great increase in military assistance that the United States was undertaking. The two most important elements of the public campaign were the release of the Jorden report (see above, p. 2) as a State Department white paper entitled A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam, and a public exchange of letters between Presidents Kennedy and Diem announcing the new joint effort.

The State Department publication, in the words of the Secretary of State:

> ... documents the elaborate program of subversion, terror, and armed infiltration carried out under the direction of the authorities in Hanoi. . . . This report shows that this already considerable effort by North Viet-Nam has been accelerated sharply in recent months . . . . The pace of infiltration from the north, across the demilitarized zone, through Laos, and by sea, has been stepped up. These documents show clearly that the North Vietnamese Communists have repeatedly violated the Geneva Accords. I believe this report makes it clear that South Viet-Nam needs additional help in defending itself.

---

10. (S) Msg, Saigon 756 to State, 4 Dec 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) sec 2.

11. (S) Ibid. (S) Msgs, Saigon 754 to State, 3 Dec 61; State 725 to Saigon, 4 Dec 61.

Secretary Rusk also called on other countries to aid the South Vietnamese in their fight against aggression.[12]

The exchange of letters, published a week later, was a formal request for further aid from President Diem, and a reply by President Kennedy pledging a prompt increase in US assistance. Both letters again stressed the support and direction of the insurgency from Hanoi and North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Accords. President Kennedy based the US commitment on the official declaration in 1954 that the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security."[13]

Although the President had turned down the Taylor recommendation for a US military presence in Vietnam, the new program represented not only a great increase in US support but a deeper US commitment. An approved FY 1962 MAP of $108 million became $144 million, with economic aid raising the total for FY 1962 to $278 million. Within a year the number of US support forces generated by the new program was to surpass the figure of 8,000 combat troops envisioned in the Taylor recommendation. It would be another three years before US ground combat forces went ashore in Vietnam, but US helicopter and other support units were going into action.[14]

The Taylor program was a big step forward in US involvement in the war in Vietnam. In the CIP the United States had offered a prescription for defeating the Viet Cong with a promise of more US aid. In the Presidential Program the United States increased its aid in order to increase Diem's confidence and his freedom of action. The Taylor program reflected a deeper US commitment to win the war, but it was not unambiguous. Despite the increased commitment the President had refused to commit the United States explicitly to prevent the fall of South Vietnam, and for the time being, at least, had refused to employ US combat troops. A White House staff member at the time, Arthur Schlesinger, says the President believed the war could only be won so long as it was "their" war; if it became a white man's war, the United

12. Dept of State Bulletin, XLV (25 Dec 61), 1053.
13. Ibid., XLVI (1 Jan 62), pp. 13-14.
14. (U) Special Rpt, "US Overseas Loans and Grants, 1 Jul 45-30 Jun 64," AID, Stat & Rpts Div, p. 69.

States would lose as the French had done. But although he complained occasionally about being "overcommitted" in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia, he would not refuse to give more of the same kind of assistance that had been given in the past, if it was necessary to avoid disrupting the balance of power and security structure of the region, where so many countries had based their policies on continued US involvement. Perhaps larger considerations also affected the President's decision--the recent truculence of the USSR over Berlin and the resumption of nuclear testing may have made him feel that retreating in Asia would upset the whole world balance of power.[15]

Operations: McNamara Takes Command

The Secretary of Defense assumed personal command of the US effort in the RVN in late November 1961. In matters large and small he made decisions that, in other times, would have been taken by CINCPAC, the Service Chiefs, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a personal message to CINCPAC and CHMAAG he said, "Situation in Vietnam causing great concern here. I have consulted with JCS on creating continuous personal contact to review progress and see what more we can do within framework of present policy." He informed them he had decided to meet with them in Honolulu at Headquarters PACOM each month, starting on 16 December.[16]

Of the ten broad joint undertakings set forth by the President in NSAM 111, six were essentially military. On 27 November, Secretary McNamara charged the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop and submit to him concepts, plans, and specific requirements for carrying out the actions to accomplish these

15. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 547, who also quotes the President as follows: "They want a force of American troops. They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another." Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p. 420.

16. (TS) Msg, SecDef to CINCPAC and CHMAAG, DEF 906345, 28 Nov 61.

military aims. He also asked them to submit semiweekly status reports on RVN military actions, to be passed on to the White House.[17]

Assuming that US-GVN agreement on the new joint program would be reached by 10 December, the Secretary of Defense met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 November to decide the first specific measures in Project BEEF UP, the name given to the program in NSAM 111. Some of the measures taken by the United States were aimed at immediate ends. Others, by broadening the support base, could support contingency operations by US forces if necessary. Immediately after the 4 December agreement between President Diem and Ambassador Nolting, the buildup began. By the first of the year, largely as a result of the decisions taken on 27 November, greatly increased amounts of US equipment and numbers of military personnel were flowing into South Vietnam to implement the first three objectives of the Presidential decision: i.e., increased airlift; improved air reconnaissance, air-ground support, and special intelligence; and better coastal surveillance and control. The flow of additional men, weapons, and materiel to South Vietnam was accompanied by an increase in the size of the US MAAG, despite limitations set by the Geneva Accords. The President had approved exceeding the authorized force ceilings, without publicity, and at the 27 November meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff the Secretary of Defense had approved a MAAG strength of 1,905 men by the end of FY 1962.[18]

The three other US objectives of a military nature concerned GVN intelligence capabilities, training of paramilitary forces, and reorganization of the US military assistance operations in South Vietnam. Implementation of US plans to improve the GVN's military-political intelligence system at all levels would begin about 1 January 1962. This would include placing US intelligence personnel at all levels of the RVNAF. provided Diem gave his approval.

---

17. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to SecArmy et al., "First Phase of Viet-Nam Program," 27 Nov 61, JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) sec 2. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-814-61 to SecDef, 22 Nov 61, same file, sec 1.

18. (TS) Note to Control Div, "South Vietnam" 28 Nov 61; (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1425-61 to Director, J-1 et al., 28 Nov 61; (TS-GP 3) Talking Paper for CJCS, 4 Jan 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (21 Oct 61) sec 2.

The program of training the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps was especially urgent, because these paramilitary forces were to relieve the ARVN of static defense missions and free it for mobile offensive operations against the Viet Cong. Even before the President's November decisions the United States had greatly increased its aid to these forces, but at the end of 1961 they were still poorly equipped and few were trained. CHMAAG had reported that, of the total 68,000-man force planned for the Civil Guard, 32,000 would be trained by the end of 1962, the remainder not until the end of 1963.

The slow pace of the training program prompted Mr. McNamara to ask if using more US personnel would speed up training. General McGarr explained that getting the GVN to release men for training and a lack of facilities were slowing him up, not a shortage of US trainers. However, following Secretary McNamara's insistence that the training of these forces be hastened, CHMAAG cut the length of the training period in half, from twenty-four to twelve weeks. In this fashion, the proposed 72,000-man force could be trained by the end of 1962, using 12 Mobile Training Teams (MTT) to supplement six training centers. CHMAAG felt that the Civil Guard's training time could not be reduced further without impairing its effective employment.

By February 1962 the Civil Guard had a strength of 67,300. CHMAAG had recommended an increase in this strength to 72,000 by the end of FY 1962. President Diem, however, had said he needed 101,000 men in the Civil Guard, and General McGarr had agreed that further increases would probably be necessary as the tempo of clearing actions increased.

Although the Civil Guard was under the GVN Defense Department for training and operations, in actual practice it was assigned to province chiefs for operational employment. In operations involving Civil Guard cooperation with the ARVN, this practice put the province chief in the chain of command, an undesirable feature in the view of US officials.

The Self Defense Corps was authorized a MAP-supported strength of 49,200 but had an actual strength by February 1962 of 61,700. General McGarr had recommended a supported strength of 60,000 men while President Diem wanted 115,000. The SDC recruits, whose training was even less thorough than that of the Civil Guard, were given only a six week course, mainly designed to increase their confidence and to instruct them in firing their individual weapons. Thirty provincial training sites for training the Self Defense Corps had been completed by 15 February. Obsolete French weapons formed the principal

part of their armament, but the United States planned to furnish the Self Defense Corps with carbines, pistols, shotguns, and submachine guns under the MAP. SDC forces, however, received no weapon issue until they had been trained. In January 1962 Secretary McNamara noted that only half of the Self Defense Corps had any US arms and said that some means should be found to speed the provision of weapons for the SDC. General McGarr observed that to give them arms without training would amount to furnishing arms to the Viet Cong. Secretary McNamara nevertheless directed that 40,000 additional carbines (37,000 were already in the country) be made available from US sources. He directed at the January meeting that as additional training facilities and weapons became available, they should go first to the Self Defense Corps, then to the Civil Guard, and lastly to the ARVN.[19]

The GVN had wanted to bring in special forces troops from the Republic of China to live with and train the Self Defense Corps. On 11 November 1961 the GVN had told Ambassador Nolting it wished to import between 3,000 to 5,000 of these troops from Taiwan if the United States approved. Both McGarr and Nolting had urged prompt and serious consideration, with a view to approval, but the State Department, fearing the political consequences, had vetoed the idea.

By mid-February CHMAAG had recommended a phased expansion of the GVN force capability to a total strength of the Civil Guard at 90,000 by the end of 1964 and for the Self Defense Corps a strength of 80,000 by the same date. He believed that the ARVN, with a current strength of 186,000, should be at a level of 225,000 men by that time.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense on 13 January 1962 that all of the support actions promised Diem by President Kennedy in November and December had either been put into effect or authorized. With the machinery in motion, growing numbers of advisors and technicians and quantities of new weapons and equipment continued to swell the US investment in the RVN during January and February.

A primary concern of the United States had been to place more Americans in close contact with RVN military commanders and soldiers. Although Diem had expressed concern about

---

19. (TS-GP 3) Records, Honolulu Conference, Jan and Feb. 62.

giving the impression that the United States was directing the war effort, thus "giving the monopoly on nationalism to Ho Chi Minh," he had agreed to allow this increase in the advisory effort, so long as each category of advisors was cleared with him on a case-by-case basis. CHMAAG had determined that three officers and two enlisted men should be sent to each battalion, one officer and two enlisted men to each regiment. The Civil Guard was to have 12 teams of three men and 20 additional advisors in each of six training centers. Three US advisors would be stationed in each province. In the field of Special Forces training, one of growing importance, five teams totalling 68 men would be assigned, most of them with the mountain tribal groups operating as border control elements. At Honolulu on 15 January, the Secretary of Defense directed that these advisors be sent to RVN as soon as possible.[20]

By 10 February 1962 the MAAG had 1,622 men and officers in the RVN and other military units and support agencies had 3,441, for a grand total of 5,063. The projected strength total for Americans in RVN by the end of June 1962 stood at 8,326 with 3,418 in MAAG and the remainder to serve in the other military units and agencies.[21]

The New Command

In November 1961 the President had also decided that the new program would require a new command "to organize all US bits and pieces in South Vietnam . . . ." Consequently, the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to recommend a command structure and a commander, who would report directly to them. CINCPAC objected to this arrangement, however, on the grounds that Southeast Asia should be treated as a strategic entity and that US contingency plans were geared to the area as a whole. Supporting CINCPAC's position, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended on 22 November a subordinate unified command similar to those in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, with access to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense through CINCPAC.[22]

---

20. (TS-GP 3) Record, Honolulu Conference, 16 Dec 61 and 15 Jan 62.

21. (TS-GP 3) SM-192-62 to SecDef, 14 Feb 62, (hereafter cited as "Rpt Project 'Beef-Up' 14 Feb 62"); JMF 9155/9105 (28 Nov 61) sec 2.

22. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 141212Z Nov 61; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2343/38, 13 Nov 61; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-812-61 to SecDef, 22 Nov 61, (derived from JCS 2343/46); JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Nov 61).

In January 1962 the Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendation. He asked them to nominate a commander for the subordinate unified command as soon as possible, approving four-star rank for the commander. The President approved the terms of reference for the new commander, who was given direct responsibility for all US military policy, operations, and assistance in South Vietnam. He was also granted authority to discuss both US and GVN military operations directly with President Diem and other GVN leaders, and given responsibility for advising the GVN on all matters relating to the security of South Vietnam and to the organization and employment of the RVNAF and of counterinsurgency or other paramilitary forces.

On 3 February Ambassador Nolting reported that President Diem had concurred in the establishment of the new command. To avoid giving the impression that the United States had taken over the direction of the war effort, however, Diem insisted that it be made clear that a civilian remained the head of the US mission in South Vietnam. According to the final State-Defense agreement on the functions and command relationships of the new command, the US Ambassador was responsible for "political and basic policy matters," but if a difference of view existed, both the Ambassador and the military commander were free to communicate their positions to Washington through their separate channels for decision. Each was responsible for keeping the other fully informed, especially on all high-level contacts with the GVN, major military matters, and pending operations. The title of the new command was US Military Assistance Command (USMACV). CINCPAC was authorized to establish, effective 8 February 1962, this subordinate unified command, which would "exercise operational command over all US military forces in Vietnam, including MAAG, South Vietnam." General Paul D. Harkins, USA, was designated COMUSM

Trouble with Diem

Within a week after the first Honolulu meeting in December 1961, Admiral Felt had complained that the GVN was not holding up its end of the bargain. "An important part

23. (S) Msg, Saigon 1008 to State, 3 Feb 62; (S)Msg, JCS 3180 to CINCPAC, 062339Z Feb 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Nov 61) sec 2. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1962, pp. 152-153.

of the CIP," he stated, "was the establishment of an overall military command to control the military counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam. The provision of broadened authority to the Army Field Command under General Minh was to meet this requirement." But Diem refused to delegate the appropriate authority or to permit a concentration of military forces under a single commander for fear of a coup against his regime. By thus negating the possibility of an effective command structure, he was adversely affecting military planning and operations. "Unless Diem is willing to permit his military commanders to plan for and conduct operations within clear-cut military channels, victory against the VC certainly is doubtful within a reasonable time frame," said Admiral Felt. He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to "facilitate" Department of State direction to Ambassador Nolting to induce Diem to cooperate more openly and frankly.

Diem found a supporter in General Lansdale, Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations. General Lansdale told the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 27 December that "US policy is to support Diem and he has been so informed by the President. We know that Big Minh has been outspoken about a coup. Diem certainly knows about the way Big Minh has been talking, also. Now we ask Diem to give practical control of his military forces to a man who has talked about a coup. What realistic assurances can we give Diem that the action he fears won't take place"? General Lansdale declared that the increased US military stake in Vietnam should afford some means for stabilizing the political relationships within the GVN long enough for all concerned to get on with the war.[24]

When Ambassador Nolting visited Washington early in January 1962, he met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and discussed the military problem in RVN. He stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff should not be too concerned by Diem's failure to implement the outline campaign plan (see Chapter 4); Diem had some hard military choices to make. Insofar as the Diem/Minh relationship was concerned, all the Ambassador could say was that Diem claimed to have given General Minh full authority; Minh said he had not.

---

24. (TS-GP 1) Memo, Lansdale to CJCS, 27 Dec 61, "Vietnamese Cmd. Prob.," OCJCS File 091 Korea (27 Dec 61).

The Ambassador believed that the strength of the RVNAF should level off at 205,000 men, and that the US effort should then be to strengthen the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps, and free the seven divisions of the ARVN to go c the offensive. He also believed that Washington must find some way to reduce the pressure for a quick victory in RVN, pointing out that the counterinsurgency was not the kind of a war in which such results could be expected.[25]

In spite of Ambassador Nolting's optimism about Diem, the Joint Chiefs of Staff remained seriously disturbed by the signs of disunity and lack of firm military progress. Just prior to the second Honolulu meeting on 15 January 1962, they gave the Secretary of Defense a detailed statement of their views along with some unusually strong recommendations.

After warning of the serious, specific dangers to US security that would result from the fall of South Vietnam and the mainland of Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told Mr. McNamara that, with few exceptions, all of the military actions directed as a result of the President's decision to "advise and support South Vietnam but not at this time engage unilaterally in combat," had either been implemented or authorized for implementation. "Unfortunately, our contributi are not being properly employed by the South Vietnamese Govern ment and major portions of the agreement have either not been carried out or are being delayed by Diem." So far, no militar or diplomatic efforts at any level had motivated Diem to act on US advice or to use properly the resources sent him by the United States. To the Joint Chiefs of Staff it appeared that Diem gave lip service to saving his country but took no positi action to accomplish this. He displayed an uncompromising inflexibility and doubted the judgment, ability, and loyalty of his military leaders; recent intelligence reports of coup d'etat plotting among senior RVNAF officers had tended to conf his doubts concerning the loyalty of some of his military lead

However, "if Diem goes," the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointe out,

> we can be sure of losing his strengths but we cannot be sure of remedying his weaknesses. Achievement of

25. (TS-GP 3). Talking Paper, J-3 for CJCS, "Current Actions and Requirements in Viet-Nam (U)," 4 Jan 62, w/hand-written Summary of Discussion on reverse, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (4 Jan 62).

> US objectives could be more difficult without Diem than with him. . . .the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that there is an immediate requirement for making a strong approach to Diem on a Government to Government level. If we are to assist South Vietnam, we must convince Diem that (a) there is no alternative to the establishment of a sound basis upon which both he and the United States Government can work and (b) he has an urgent requirement for advice, as well as assistance, in military, political and economic matters.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then proposed that the United States pledge to support Diem and seek to prevent his overthrow if, in turn, Diem would let his military commanders carry out the approved plans to defeat the Viet Cong, stop procrastinating, and assure that the advice and assistance from the United States was used by all echelons of the GVN. Ambassador Nolting should warn Diem that if he did not cooperate, "the United States foresees failure of our joint efforts to save Vietnam from communist conquest." If Diem cooperated and used his armed forces effectively, but "the Viet Cong is still not brought under control," the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw no alternative but to introduce US military combat units along with those of other free Asian nations.[26] The Secretary of Defense was less pessimistic about the situation in RVN, feeling that US aid and the new program had not yet had time to show their effects. On 27 January 1962 he forwarded the JCS memorandum to the President saying, "I am not prepared to endorse the views of the Chiefs until we have had more experience with our present program in South Vietnam."[27]

Coup Attempt

An abortive attempt to kill President Diem and members of his family took place in the early morning of 27 February when two dissident fighter-bomber pilots attacked the Presidential Palace in Saigon, bombing and strafing for nearly 25

26. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-33-62 to SecDef, 13 Jan 62 (derived from JCS 2343/70), JMF 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61) sec 1.
27. (TS) Memo, SecDef to the Pres, 27 Jan 1962, JMF 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61) (1).

minutes. Although they succeeded in damaging the building heavily and in wounding 16 palace officials, the pilots failed in their mission. Diem, M. and Mme. Nhu and their children were not harmed. One of the pilots was shot down and captured; the other flew to safety in Cambodia.[28]

The attack was apparently an isolated incident, not part of a larger coordinated plot. Nevertheless, Diem temporarily grounded all fighter bombers of the VNAF and forbade them to carry bombs.

The incident, although not particularly significant in itself, was part of a vicious circle whereby Diem's administrative policies engendered discontent, and fear of a coup prevented him from loosening the reins of his personal control. As time went on, President Diem's political troubles and temperament would interfere more and more, in the eyes of US officials, with efficient conduct of the war against the Viet Cong--a war that would increasingly absorb the attention and resources of the United States and would eventually make Ngo Dinh Diem himself a casualty of the struggle.

---

28. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, (Feb 24-Mar 3, 1962). p. 18616.

Chapter 4

SEARCH FOR STRATEGY

Simultaneously with efforts to build up the South Vietnamese armed forces in late 1961 and 1962, US advisors were trying to develop, and persuade the GVN to pursue, an overall strategy in the fight against the Viet Cong. The central problem was finding a way to cut off the Viet Cong from their local and outside support. Unfortunately, there was no unanimity of opinion on how best to proceed. American and South Vietnamese officials, and even the British, became involved in the debates revolving primarily around the issues of counterinsurgency training, command arrangements, regions to be emphasized in military operations, strategic hamlets, and border control.

The programs and plans developed by the United States during 1960 and 1961, embodied primarily in the CIP, had not resulted in much progress against the communist insurgency. In large part this was due to the unwillingness or inability of the GVN to carry out the provisions of the plan. Despite the increased assistance the United States was providing to South Vietnam, the United States had little positive influence on the development of GVN strategy. For example, Diem had issued directives based on the CIP that should have: 1) broadened the authority of RVNAF field commanders; 2) created corps and division tactical zones; 3) created logistic commands instead of regional commands; and 4) increased the authority of military commanders to operate within province boundaries. But these measures were put into effect with the GVN's "customary reluctance" and US officials considered them ineffectual.[1]

US Counterinsurgency Training and Planning

President Kennedy's personal interest in the problems of counterinsurgency continued to make itself felt in the innovative planning and organization of the counterinsurgency effort of the Defense Department. On 11 January 1962, the President

1. (TS-NOFORN) CINCPAC Command History, 1961, p. 170.

informed Secretary McNamara that he was not satisfied that the Department of Defense, and in particular the Army, was "according the necessary degree of attention and effort to the threat of Communist-directed subversive insurgency and guerrilla warfare. . . . The effort devoted to this challenge should be comparable in importance to preparations for conventional warfare." He instructed the Secretary of Defense to assure that this emphasis was made effective in the organization, training, equipment, and doctrine of the US armed forces. Specifically, the President directed that a general officer be designated within the Joint Staff as "the focal point" for activities dealing with problems of insurgency and guerrilla warfare, and that an Army general be assigned similar responsibilities within the Office of the Chief of Staff.[2]

Accordingly, the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) was established in the Joint Staff on 23 February 1962, with its nucleus supplied by transferring the Subsidiary Activities Division from the J-5 Directorate. Major General Victor H. Krulak, USMC, was designated to head the new agency.[3]

The formal statement of SACSA's duties, responsibilities, and authority was approved by General Lemnitzer on 12 March 1962. SACSA would assist the Director, Joint Staff, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in all matters pertaining to insurgency and counterinsurgency operations, unconventional warfare, and psychological operations, and in related special military activities, including planning, programming, resource development and allocation, and doctrinal guidance. The Special Assistant was to furnish the Director and the Joint Chiefs of Staff with independent evaluations of DOD and national policies and recommendations on strategy, organization, and doctrine in the field of counterinsurgency.

---

2. (S) Memo, Pres to SecDef, 11 Jan 62, Att to JCS 1969/287, 15 Jan 62, JMF 3360 (10 Jan 62).

3. (TS-GP 3) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, 25 Jan 62; (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Counter-Insurgency," 24 Jan 62; JMF 3360 (10 Jan 62) sec 2. (U) CM-560-62 to CSA et al., "Establishment within the Joint Staff of the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities," 23 Feb 62, JMF 5052 (17 Jan 62).

General Krulak was expected to keep himself informed on the national security aspects of politico-military developments worldwide and to identify and analyze critical areas along with programs and courses of action which the United States should follow. He would serve as the Joint Chiefs of Staff point of contact with the related activities in the Military Departments, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and other agencies of the government.[4]

Included in SACSA's duties was the provision of staff assistance to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, in fulfilling his responsibilities as a member of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency), which President Kennedy had established in January 1962. The purpose of this group was to direct and unify the US effort to aid friendly countries in preventing and resisting subversive insurgency and related forms of indir aggression. It was composed of the Military Representative of the President (General Maxwell D. Taylor), the Attorney Genera (Robert F. Kennedy), the Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs (U. Alexis Johnson), the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Roswell Gilpatric), the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (General Lyman L. Lemnitzer), the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (John A. McCone), the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (McGeorge Bundy), and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development (Fowler Hamilton).[5]

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed, however, that the degree of emphasis on counterinsurgency was excessive In mid-1962, a CIA report on the progress of the war against the Viet Cong prompted General Lemnitzer to an explicit expression of his views on the subject. The report, passed or by General Lansdale, had stated:

> It is apparent that strategic hamlet and irregular defense programs are beginning to put pressure on the Viet Cong. While these will never be handled with the optimum of coordination, planning, and political delicacy, believe the GVN is doing generally

4. (U) DJSM-366-62, 12 Mar 62, w/encl, JMF 5052 (17 Jan 62).
5. (S-GP 1) Att to JCS 1969/288, 22 Jan 62, JMF 3360 (18 Jan 62).

effective job of organizing itself to engage active participation of citizenry in their own defense. Some problems may arise from fact that this technique, which is probably best method of this type of subversive war, essentially leaves regular military out of the picture. At moment regular military is active where can find targets but believe it will be increasingly obvious that it has secondary role in subversive war. (emphasis added)

The Chairman took issue especially with the underlined portions of the statement. He said,

> Recently, I have detected efforts on the part of individuals and agencies to minimize the importance of the regular military forces of a nation in counterinsurgency operations. I have taken issue with such approaches on every occasion when the opportunity presented itself. Most of the comments along this line come from Washington where I am able to deal with the situation personally. Recently, however I find that the tendency is coming from the field.

General Lemnitzer disagreed with the implication that there were two distinct kinds of combat operations - "irregular" (or "paramilitary") operations, in which the regular military establishment had no place, and conventional operations, which were the province of the regular military, and had limited application in insurgent war. He told General Lansdale: "The reality is that they are both essential, that the range of operations in this type of conflict tends to be broader than in conventional operations, and that success depends upon the application of a fully balanced mechanism--exactly as we are seeking to do in Vietnam." He denied that the regular military forces lacked capabilities for unconventional operations. He reinforced his point in a memorandum to General Taylor: ". . . the time has come for emphasizing the virtues of wider use of this valuable regular military capability for

unconventional and covert operations, and under straightforward military auspices."[6]

Civilian and military leaders in the United States and the GVN were never able fully to agree on the nature of the war in Vietnam and the best way to cope with the admittedly virulent insurgency. One widely held view was expressed by General Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff, Army, in a speech at Fordham University in November 1962. What the United States was committed to support in Vietnam, he said, was

> military action. . . . It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military.

Others, especially in the State Department, viewed the problem in Vietnam as essentially political and economic. As the United States became more deeply involved in the conduct of the war in Vietnam these differences in approach affected the development of strategy for the conduct of the war.[7]

The Outline Campaign Plan

After the increased US commitment to South Vietnam in late 1961, the search for a feasible strategic concept to cut off support from the Viet Cong and eliminate them by military action began again in earnest. At Honolulu on 16 December 1961, CINCPAC presented an Outline Campaign Plan developed in cooperation with CHMAAG. The plan was intended as a guide to the RVNAF in implementing a geographically-phased field campaign against the Viet Cong. It was based on the reasoning that South Vietnam fell into two areas for the purpose of field operations. One area, the north and central sections of South Vietnam (I and II Corps Tactical Zones), was sparsely

6. (TS-NOFORN) Memo, BG Lansdale to SecDef and DepSecDef, "Situation in Vietnam," 4 Jun 62; (TS) Ltrs, CJCS to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 3 Jul 62; (TS-GP 1) CM-727-62 to BG Lansdale, 12 Jun 62; (TS-GP 1) CM-728-62 to GEN Taylor, 12 Jun 62; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Mar 62-Sep 62).

7. (U) Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p. 426.

populated and underdeveloped. In operations there, forces would spread thinly over wide areas, relying heavily on accurate, timely intelligence and on mobility to defeat the enemy. The other area, the southern part of the country (III Corps Tactical Zone), contained 63 percent of the population and two-thirds of the Viet Cong. Fighting there would take place in built up areas, concentrated in heavily-populated terrain where the support of the people was fundamental to success against the Viet Cong.

The strength and distribution of the RVNAF did not provide in any single tactical area "the 15-18 to 1 preponderance of forces which precedents have established as necessary for anti-guerrilla operations." Taking into account the limited resources available and the "limited pool of leadership talent," the plan envisaged establishing priorities for operations and concentrating resources at the proper time and place to defeat the enemy.

Since operations in the III Corps Tactical Zone would afford greater probability of early success than operations in the other zones, the first phase of the campaign would concentrate in that area, starting with Zone D, the VC base area northeast of Saigon. At the same time, the RVNAF would conduct border control operations and attacks against located VC bases in I and II Corps Tactical Zones. The second phase of the campaign was designed to concentrate military operations in the central and northern parts of the country, while mopping up and consolidating the rest of South Vietnam.

General McGarr had developed a detailed plan for Zone D operations. He would isolate the zone, use defoliation techniques, and conduct intelligence probes. Once this was accomplished, strong pressure would be applied around the zone perimeter, while operations were pressed deeper into Zone D to uncover strong points and to destroy the main force of the enemy. Then South Vietnamese forces would move in and secure the zone.

CINCPAC and CHMAAG believed Zone D was especially important because it was a VC command center and posed a direct threat to Saigon and the governmental structure. The morale value of securing the area would be very great. In Secretary McNamara's view, however, the Zone D operation was not a good choice to initiate the campaign because it was too complex. Indicating a strong preference for simple plans with specific, limited objectives, he directed that a plan be developed for clearing and holding a single "test" province. A smaller operation

would have a chance for early success and contribute to the Zone D operations. Secretary McNamara also believed it would be easier to persuade Diem to agree to specific courses of action than to get him to agree to "general concepts involving delegation of authority." At the January 1962 Honolulu Conference he ordered the Zone D operation cancelled.[8]

The Thompson Plan

Even as US planners labored to produce a strategy that would bring victory in the field, a British Advisory Mission in South Vietnam was trying to develop its own formula for victory. The mission was headed by the former Secretary of Defense of Malaya, Mr. R.G.K. Thompson, who had first been invited to South Vietnam by President Diem in April 1960 to give advice on counterguerrilla training and operations. The US State Department, anxious to have third-country participation in the South Vietnamese effort, had succeeded in having a provision encouraging such aid written into the Presidential Program (see Chapter 2). This had been done over the objections of CHMAAG, CINCPAC, the US Ambassador, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who feared that confusion would result from such an arrangement. When it became clear in August 1961 that the Thompson Mission was inevitable, Ambassador Nolting secured assurances from the British Ambassador in Saigon that the group would confine itself to advice on civic action. General McGarr, speaking with Diem, expressed pleasure that Diem's instructions to the British specifically excluded them from military matters. He also took the opportunity to refresh Diem's memory on the US counterinsurgency concept.[9]

The Thompson Mission arrived in Saigon at the end of September 1961. A month later Thompson submitted to Diem his first "appreciation" of the situation in South Vietnam. In the appreciation, which he also provided to General Taylor during the latter's visit to South Vietnam in October, Thompson

---

8. (TS-GP 1) Record, SecDef Conference, 16 Dec 61, JMF 9155.3/ 9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 1. (S-GP 4) Rpt of CHMAAG, Vietnam, for period 2 Sep 61-8 Feb 62, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Mar 62-Sep 62). (TS-GP 1) Record, Honolulu Conf, 15 Jan 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 2.

9. (S) Msg, CHMAAG 1222 to CINCPAC, DA IN 138767, 090745Z Aug 61, JMF 9155.3/3360 (9 Aug 61). (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 9 Aug 61, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

said [redacted]

B1
A3

After reading Thompson's appreciation Ambassador Nolting told the State Department early in November that the "general thrust" of the paper was toward emphasizing the civil side of the expense of the military. This change of plans could affect not only GVN confidence in the United States, but also power relationships within the RVN, and could conceivably bring on a coup.

General McGarr took even stronger exception to the appreciation. In a letter to CINCPAC he expressed concern about Thompson's "far exceeding" his terms of reference and delving into "purely military" matters. Also, McGarr said, Thompson misjudged the extent of the insurgency and leaned too heavily on his experience in Malaya. Furthermore, he had not uncovered any problems that the MAAG and the Country Team had not already identified and begun working on. General

10. (S) Rpt, Br. Adv. Mission to Diem, "Appreciation of Vietnam November 1961-April 1962," 27 Oct 61; JCS 2339/47, 13 Dec 61; JMF 9155.3/3360 (9 Aug 61).

McGarr objected specifically to two of the five Thompson recommendations: [ ] B1 A3

Acceptance of the Thompson thesis at this juncture, he said, would cause confusion, delay, and the possible loss of Vietnam.[11]

In the meantime President Diem, apparently impressed by the appreciation, had requested and received from Thompson a plan for the pacification of the delta. [ ] B1 A

11. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 18 Nov 61, Encl to JCS 2339/47; (S) Msg, Saigon 597 to State, 5 Nov 61; JMF 9155.3/3360 (9 Aug 61).

12. (S) Memo, Br. Adv. Mission to Diem, 13 Nov 61, and (S) Ltr, Thompson to Diem, 11 Nov 61, Encl to Desp, Saigon 205 to State, 20 Nov 61; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

In his comments to CINCPAC on the delta plan, CHMAAG continued in a medical vein. In the case of the Thompson mission, he said, "we have a doctor, called in for consultation on a clinical case, actually performing an amputation without consulting the resident physician" and without assuming responsibility for the patient. CHMAAG agreed with much of the Thompson plan, [redacted] General McGarr had been striving for months to get the Field Command established and to persuade Diem to delegate authority so that military units would be removed from day-to-day palace control. CHMAAG also took strong exception to Thompson's proposal that [redacted] General McGarr believed that the Saigon area and Zone D should receive first priority; the next priority should probably be given to an area to the north of Saigon where large VC units capable of establishing a base for a shadow government were operating. In general CHMAAG thought that Thompson underestimated the problem of infiltration and was too cavalier about the "military facts of life," the urgency of the situation, and the difficulty of getting Diem to follow through on any recommendation.[13]

On 2 December, CHMAAG sent a critique of the Thompson delta plan to Diem, setting forth the divergent views on the chain of command and priorities. By 6 December, the GVN had decided "at least at the moment" to give first priority to the Saigon area and Zone D. By this time also, Thompson had agreed to support the US position on the Field Command. Thus, for the time being the two main differences were apparently resolved in favor of CHMAAG. It soon became evident, however, that on the question of priority of operations Thompson had tacked rather than changed course.[14]

[redacted]

13. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 27 Nov 61, OCJCS File Vietnam.

14. (S) Ltr, CHMAAG to Diem, 2 Dec 61; (S-GP 4) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 6 Dec 61; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam. (S) Msg, Saigon 794 to State, 12 Dec 61.

[

]

By 6 January 1962 General McGarr believed that the British Advisor was coming around to his way of thinking, although he still differed with Thompson on the length of time it would take to win. [ ] General McGarr claimed that he was not "downhearted or defeatist." Without setting a time for winning, he said, "There has never been any doubt in my mind that we can and will win here--this is especially true in view of the considerable progress made during the last six months."[16]

15. (S) Ltr, Thompson to GEN Taylor, 3 Jan 62, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

16. (S-GP 3) Ltr, CHMAAG to CINCPAC, 6 Jan 62, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam.

The Binh Duong Plan - Operation SUNRISE

In mid-January CHMAAG presented President Diem with a plan for securing and pacifying Binh Duong Province, north of Saigon, which had also been mentioned by Thompson. As the Secretary of Defense had predicted at Honolulu in December, Diem found this specific plan more to his liking than the original Zone D plan, which he characterized as too "militarily oriented."

Operation SUNRISE appears to have evolved from a GVN operation which actually began in August 1961. The operation had been designed to secure three provinces, of which Binh Duong had first priority. With the refining and revision of the plan by General McGarr and General Van Thanh Cao, who was the GVN official in charge of the operation, the objective narrowed to Binh Duong only.[17]

In the first, preparatory, phase of the Binh Duong plan, local forces would conduct intelligence probes against the Viet Cong and prepare for the offensive. During the first part of the second phase, two ARVN regiments would deploy along the east side of the province to prevent the Viet Cong crossing in or out of Zone D, and would cut communications between Zone D and Tay Ninh province. The second part of phase two would aim at gaining control of population centers and LOCs in the eastern portion of the province. Once this had been done, the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps would move in and take over security. Twenty-man civic action teams would then move into villages to win the allegiance and support of the people. Once the eastern portion was under control, the two ARVN regiments would expand operations through the rest of the province. The consolidation phase would see a shift from military authority to that of the province chief, who would be responsible for mopping up operations. The entire plan called for a substantial resettlement of the population.

Talking to CHMAAG early in January 1962, Diem had estimated that the Binh Duong operations would take from eight to twelve months. He favored it over Zone D, because the ground work for "sound infrastructure" had already been

17. (C) Report, "Summary of Inspection Visit to Recently Organized Village Ban Tuong on 9 and 11 Apr 62," Encl to Ltr, GEN Harkins to CSA, 19 Apr 62, CSA File 091 Vietnam.

laid. Diem criticized the United States for pushing too fast for a military solution, and warned that he would not expect permanent results without a long-range approach. He remarked that Thompson claimed the British lost three years in Malaya by not building infrastructure and by relying on a military solution. The secret to winning, he said, was to separate the Viet Cong from the people. General McGarr ironically noted, "This has been the keystone of MAAG advice to GVN for the past eighteen months."

By the time of the January Honolulu Conference, preparations for the Binh Duong operation were well under way. After being briefed on the Binh Duong plan, Secretary McNamara asked General McGarr to submit a detailed written plan for review. He finally received it at the end of February, but by then implementation of the plan had already begun.[18]

The Hilsman Report

In February 1962, the stress on the political aspects of the struggle in South Vietnam, together with emphasis on pacification and "clear and hold," gained more support in the US Government. In the previous month the President had sent Roger Hilsman, Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, to South Vietnam to report on the situation there. While in South Vietnam, Hilsman talked with Thompson and incorporated many of his views in the report he submitted to the President on 2 February. According to Hilsman, "the President was impressed with Thompson's ideas and agreed that this was the direction we should go in developing a strategic concept for Vietnam. He told me to write the whole thing up as a formal report under that title - 'A Strategic Concept for Vietnam' -."[19]

18. (TS-GP 3) Record, Honolulu Conference, 15 Jan 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 2. (S-GP 4) "Rpt of Chief, MAAG,V, for Period 2 Sep 61-8 Feb 62 (U)," 8 Feb 62, Encl to Ltr, CHMAAG to CJCS, 6 Mar 62, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Mar 62-Sep 62). (S) Memo, Mil Asst to SecDef to JCS, "Weekly Status Report on South Vietnam Actions," 20 Feb 62 JMF 9155.3/9105 (13 Oct 61) sec 2. (S-GP 1) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, "Pacification Plan for Binh Duong Province (South Vietnam) (S)," 24 Feb 62, Encl to JCS 2343/87, 28 Feb 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (22 Feb 62).

19. Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p. 438.

With this Presidential sanction Mr. Hilsman prepared a report that ranged across the entire spectrum of RVN problems. He assessed the military and political situations and the effectiveness of the US Mission, then set forth basic principles for a strategic concept based on Thompson's ideas. Mr. Hilsman proceeded from three basic assumptions: 1) the problem presented by the Viet Cong was a political, not a military problem--or, more accurately, a problem of civic action; 2) nevertheless, an effective counterinsurgency plan must provide the people and the villages with physical security; 3) counterguerrilla forces must adopt the tactics of the guerrilla himself. Conventional military tactics were ineffective against guerrillas.

The plan that Mr. Hilsman outlined called for emphasis on the delta area and the area around Hue just south of the demarcation line. It followed the Thompson line of reasoning throughout. Essentially, there would be five separate military tasks. The first was static defense, guarding the installations necessary to keep the economy functioning. The second task "was the guts of the strategic hamlet program": pushing regular Viet Cong out of a district so that civic action teams could go to work in the hamlets, and protecting them until a solid bloc of strategic hamlets was capable of defending itself. The third task called for the regular military forces to reinforce strategic hamlets or Civil Guard units under attack, and to set up ambushes on escape routes. The fourth and fifth tasks would be to seek and destroy remaining Viet Cong and to provide permanent border protection.

Hilsman acknowledged that the ARVN would be tied down on static missions, but saw no help for it until the CG and SDC were greatly increased. He stated that, whatever their numbers, regular troops could not win the war until the villagers themselves were protected and the VC cut off from their sources of men and supplies. He pointed out that with a population of 14 million people, there was only one Civil Guard for every 210 people. The SDC was maintained at a ratio of one for every 240 people. Hilsman recommended training more of these forces by reducing their training time. At this time, CHMAAG had cut CG training time to 12 weeks and the SDC was receiving only 6 weeks training. Nevertheless, Mr. Hilsman recommended that this short training period be reduced further, with the CG training at province or district level and the SDC being trained in their own villages. He

added that more US advisors would be needed in the districts and villages to help build defenses and to train the CG and SDC.[20]

Hilsman's advocacy of the Thompson approach was followed closely by a GVN decision to proceed with the implementation of the delta pacification plan submitted to Diem by Thompson three months earlier. On 24 February, Ambassador Nolting reported that at a meeting of the NISC, President Diem had spoken favorably of the Thompson Plan for pacifying the delta. According to CIA reports, Diem told the Council he would like to see the plan executed without delay. He had ordered all necessary studies on the subject completed on a priority basis.[21]

In answer to a question from the Department of State as to the general validity of Thompson's plan, Ambassador Nolting replied, on 9 March, that the plan "accords in essence with counterinsurgency operations plan worked out and approved by Task Force Saigon." He added that all agencies represented in Saigon could therefore "be considered as concurring in the general validity of the Delta Plan approach."[22]

On 16 March, President Diem signed a special directive ordering the Thompson Delta Plan carried out in ten selected provinces between the Bassac River and the mountains. Despite its powerful backing, the Thompson Plan soon became submerged in the also new, but broader and more loosely conceived, strategic hamlet program.

The Strategic Hamlet Program

On 3 February 1962, President Diem had created an "Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets" to plan for the

---

20. (S) Rpt, Dir of Intelligence and Research, Dept of State to GEN Taylor, "A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam," 2 Feb 62, OCJCS File Admin 1962.

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 1084 to State, 24 Feb 62. (S) Msg, CAS Saigon 16722 to CIA, 9 Apr 62, Encl to Ltr, Asst to CIA, to Dep SecDef 16 Apr 62. JMF 9155.3/3700 Apr 62.

22. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1159 to State, 9 Mar 62; 429, 16 Apr 62.

coordinated establishment of strategic hamlets. Regional and provincial committees were also created. Diem appointed his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, to head the Committee and give the strategic hamlet program priority over all other programs.[23]

No US official strongly disagreed with the hamlet program, which was already under way at this time on a local basis. The only significant difference between the program that the GVN carried out and the program US representatives advocated was that the United States had urged that the program include priorities for the establishment of strategic hamlets, while the GVN proceeded generally to locate and build hamlets without reference to a rational plan. Despite this difference the United States agreed to support the strategic hamlet program on 13 April 1962 at a meeting between the US Inter-Agency Province Rehabilitation Committee and the GVN Inter-Ministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets.[24]

---

23. (S) Msg, Saigon 1031 to State, 10 Feb 62. In his latest revised guidance to MAAG advisors on counterinsurgency on 10 Feb 62, General McGarr had spelled out his concept of what he termed the "Secure Village." Within a village complex several hamlets would be located. In most major respects, this concept and that forwarded by Hilsman to the President were identical. But it is obvious that at this time no precise definition of just what constituted a "strategic hamlet" had been developed. (C) Report, CHMAAG Guidance Papers to Field Advisors on Counter-Insurgency," Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations, Fourth Revision, 10 Feb 62; JCS Hist Div files. Original planning, such as that done by Thompson and McGarr saw the strategic village as an area comprising several strategic hamlets and protected as a single complex, but the term "strategic village" tended to be replaced by "strategic hamlet" until it finally disappeared from use. When General Taylor sought an exact definition of a strategic hamlet two years later he was told by the MACV J3 that a hamlet was "an organized subdivision of a village consisting of a group or part of a group of dwellings and the people who live in them. It is the smallest population unit in the civil government organization." (C) Memo, MACV J-3 to GEN Taylor, "Definitions and Criteria Pertaining to Hamlets," 12 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (May 1964).

24. (C) Msg, Saigon A-289 to State, 27 Apr 62. The CJCS called the strategic hamlet program a static defense concept; he feared it would not be backed up with military operations to keep the VC off balance in the rest of the country.

There were approximately 16,000 hamlets and 2,000 villages in South Vietnam. A CIA report on the status of the program in early April said

> there are an estimated 530 defensive hamlets throughout the country. The effectiveness of their defenses varies considerably, and positive civic action has taken place in relatively few. An additional 600 are now being constructed and Ngo Dinh Nhu's Committee is speaking of developing 6,000 to 10,000 by the end of 1962. One hurdle there is financing, which some elements would like to be met by Americans.

A typical village cost about $12,000 to build.[25]

A first-hand assessment of the strategic hamlet program was made by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, who visited the RVN in mid-May 1962. They inspected military activities in the field and visited the area of Operation SUNRISE and other strategic villages and hamlets. It was plain to the visiting officials that the resettlement process being employed by the GVN involved some forced movement and regimentation. They were nevertheless

CINCPAC noted that this was especially necessary in the northern part of the country. (TS-GP 1) Rpt, Honolulu Conference, Feb 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 3.

25. (S) Msg, CAS Saigon 16722 to CIA, 9 Apr 62. Considerable confusion arises in attempting to justify statistics on numbers of hamlets (strategic, defensive, or otherwise) completed as of specific dates. This is apparent throughout the entire period of the program, and undoubtedly stems from the inaccurate reporting system within the GVN, and different interpretations of just what constituted a "completed strategic hamlet" or, for that matter, "a strategic hamlet." The CIA figure of 530 defensive hamlets completed by 2 April is, for example, at variance with a report of the US Embassy which stated that the GVN had claimed 750 strategic hamlets completed before the end of 1961, three months prior to the official beginnings of the strategic hamlet program. (C) Msg, Saigon A-88 to State, 9 Aug 62, forwarding Rpt, Manfull to CINCPAC for POLAD, "Strategic Hamlet Program-Status Report," 9 Aug 62 (hereafter cited as "Manfull Report").

satisfied with the progress of the SUNRISE project. They believed that the strategic hamlet program promised solid benefits and might well be the key to success of the pacification program. It would provide physical security for the villagers from the communists, preclude extortion by the Viet Cong, promise a certain tranquility and improved economic and living conditions, and greatly impede the Viet Cong from living off the land and gathering information on the GVN.

Mr. McNamara and General Lemnitzer were not, however, blind to certain weaknesses in the strategic hamlet program. The persons resettled had not been given adequate reasons why they should leave their homes and fields and surrender some of their liberties, there were too few competent GVN administrators to operate the communities properly, and construction methods were neither efficient nor standardized. But these flaws seemed to be on their way to on their way to correction through training in a National Academy for Strategic Hamlets, opening 17 May.

Mr. McNamara and General Lemnitzer also noted two other deficiencies that would require special effort and attention by the United States because of their magnitude and complexity. First was the problem of training GVN paramilitary forces to stand up to the Viet Cong in the hamlet areas so that regular military forces could be freed for offensive missions. As of May 1962 there had been virtually no replacement of ARVN units by Civil Guard or Self Defense Corps units, nor did such replacement appear imminent. The second deficiency was the lack of a communications network to relay intelligence and to report VC attacks in the countryside quickly and reliably. Communications in South Vietnam were planned from the metropolitan level to the district and from the district to the village. The hamlet, where the problem of subversion was most acute, had not been linked into the communications systems. Secretary McNamara asked the Ambassador and General Harkins for a plan that would provide radios down to the hamlet level.[26]

By May, however, it became apparent that the GVN was letting its enthusiasm for the strategic hamlet program get

26. (TS-GP 1) Rpt, "Visit to Southeast Asia by the Secretary of Defense, 8-11 May 1962," JMF 9150/5420 (14 May 62) sec 1.

out of hand. At a meeting of the NISC in mid-May, the decision was made to "incorporate the Delta Plan into Strategic Hamlet program." This seemed to mean the abandonment of the concept of pacification in priority areas first in favor of constructing strategic hamlets in every part of the country. Disturbed by this drift, the Secretary of State on 22 May cabled Ambassador Nolting that "From here it appears strategic hamlets essential part victory over VC but concept of doubtful value if abstracted from whole fabric Delta Plan. Particularly concerned that Nhu may try to set up too many strategic hamlets too fast. See grave danger VC may knock over number inadequately equipped and defended strategic hamlets . . . . Believe here that success in guerrilla conflict depends on rational plan applied steadily over long haul." He urged Ambassador Nolting to encourage the GVN strongly to hold to the Delta Plan.

Before the July Conference in Honolulu General Harkins met with President Diem on 18 July and stressed the importance of having a coordinated plan for carrying out the strategic hamlet program. Diem countered with the familiar plea that what he really needed was more money. In his turn General Harkins indicated that stronger US support might be forthcoming after preparation of a sound plan. Although such a plan was not prepared by the time of the July Conference, US officials decided that financial support from the United States was essential to the success of the strategic hamlet program. Secretary McNamara was informed that the Country Team was developing an add-on to the FY 1963 MAP budget of $4 million for the construction of 1,500 additional hamlets, to be funded partially by MAP and partially by AID.[28]

A few days later, however, the Country Team revised upward its estimate of the needs for the strategic hamlet program. It now recommended that the materials for a total of 5,000 hamlets be funded in FY 1963. Originally AID had agreed to finance the defensive construction part of the hamlet kits. But early in August, AID stated that in view of the very small amount of Supporting Assistance (formerly known as Defense Support) funds

27. (S) Msgs, State 1367 to Saigon, 22 May 62; Saigon 1504 to State, 23 May 62.

28. (S) Memo for Record, COMUSMACV, 31 Jul 62, "Meeting at Gia Lang Palace, Saigon--18 July 1962," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Mar 62-Sep 62).

it had requested in its budget, it could not help pay for either the 1,500 kits at $13 million or the 5,000 kits at $42 million. AID asked that the Department of Defense take up the entire funding for the kits, and immediately allot $13 million for the first 1,500.[29]

On 11 August Secretary McNamara approved the AID request that the Department of Defense undertake the entire funding of the first 1,500 hamlet kits; ten days later he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to start the review necessary to determine whether or not the other 3,500 kits were actually needed, and if so, whether or not these kits should be funded by MAP. Following CINCPAC's advice, on 22 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary approve the funding of 2,000 of the additional hamlet kits called for by the Country Team. At the same time, however, they recommended that he make strong representations to the Secretary of State that the construction portion of the costs entailed be assumed by AID.[30]

In August the GVN finally established a national program for the development of strategic hamlets. South Vietnam was divided into four major priority zones which, in turn, were divided into priority sub-zones. Within these priority sub-zones there was a further priority breakdown by province. Reporting to Mr. McNamara on the new program on 28 August, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that selected priorities did not appear to be based on the degree of control by the Viet Cong or GVN or on the current province rehabilitation operations such as Operation SUNRISE.[31]

[redacted]

29. (C) Memo, ASD(ISA) to SecDef, "Funding of Strategic Hamlet Kits, Vietnam," 9 Aug 62, JMF 9155.3/3700 (16 Apr 62).

30. (C) Memo, DepASD(ISA) to CJCS, "Funding of Strategic Hamlet Kits, Vietnam," 21 Aug 62, Encl to JCS 2343/149, 27 Aug 62, JMF 9155.3/3700 (16 Apr 62). (C) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 082356Z Sep 62. (C) JCSM-734-62 to SecDef, 22 Sep 62, JMF 9155.3/3700 (16 Apr 62). The requirement for 2,100 kits was later reduced to 1,050 because of slippage in deliveries. (U)-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1962.

31. (S) SM-917-62 to SecDef, "GVN Strategic Hamlet Program," 28 Aug 62, Encl to JCS 2343/155, 5 Sep 62. Although the Tabs giving details of GVN Program are unavailable in JCS files, information contained in (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J-3 2495 to JCS, 8 Sep 62, strongly indicates that the priority for "clear and hold" operations and agreed US/GVN support of Strategic Hamlet Program were: (1) Eleven Delta Provinces around Saigon, (2) Ten Coastal Provinces, (3) Ten Border Provinces, (4) Eight remaining Provinces; JMF 9155.3/3700 (16 Apr 62). The US Inter-Agency Committee for

Also in August the US Embassy Counselor for RVN Political Affairs, Mr. N. L. Manfull, reported that the strategic hamlet had become the GVN's major counterinsurgency effort "outside the purely military field." More and more the concept was being expounded as a "national philosophy" by GVN officials. More and more it absorbed their thoughts and energies, and received the support of the central government.

The chief architect and theoretician of the program was President Diem's brother, Nhu. According to Manfull, Nhu saw the program not only as a temporary security measure, but also as the primary means of carrying out a "personalist revolution" in the countryside, reforming and democratizing local administration, replacing bureaucrats and local interest groups with younger, more progressive personnel, and altering the existing social structure to conform to modern needs. Nhu envisaged the program as basically a local "self-help" undertaking, with the central government providing policy, guidance, cadres, and "limited material assistance." Nhu had "turned virtually all of his personal and political efforts to seeing that his 'revolutionary' approach to the program permeated all levels of the GVN."

Manfull also stated that hamlets were being scattered throughout the RVN with areas of concentration in the coastal provinces of Central Vietnam, in the Mekong Delta, and in Darlac Province in the Highlands. The GVN had plans to tie the hamlets into district and provincial security systems to provide inter-hamlet defense; to improve the hamlet's internal organization, such as its self defense forces and hamlet administration; and to make social and economic improvements. These goals had not yet even been approached. Hamlet self-defense forces remained very poorly armed, trained and supported. In the majority of "completed" strategic hamlets, Manfull reported, no aid stations, schools, markets, or other social and economic amenities existed.[32]

Province Rehabilitation concurred in the GVN priority plan as a basis for planning and utilization of US assistance in the strategic hamlet program. (C) Msg, Saigon A-110 to State, 27 Aug 62.

32. (C) Manfull Report.

Despite these faults, by October COMUSMACV considered that the overall program was progressing satisfactorily. At the Honolulu Conference of 8 October he reported that the hamlet program was proceeding particularly well among Montagnard tribesmen. President Diem, he said, was exercising better control of the program, and COMUSMACV had developed a plan to insure that US equipment was phased into each hamlet project in an orderly manner.[33]

Toward the end of 1962, General Maxwell D. Taylor, who had succeeded General Lemnitzer as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 1 October 1962, reported to the Secretary of Defense that "limited progress" was being made in the strategic hamlet program. Construction of strategic hamlets, General Taylor reported, had expanded rapidly as a form of interprovince competition with little planning and less coordination. Numbers appeared to be the prime objective. Many hamlets had been improperly constructed and were inadequately defended. Little attention had been given to the psychological, sociological, and economic preparation of the populace or to the proper qualification of administrative personnel. As a result, a basically sound idea got off to a weak start.

The GVN program approved in August included measures to overcome these deficiencies, and General Taylor stated that there was some evidence of progress. As of mid-November 1962, 10,971 localities in SVN had been earmarked for development as strategic hamlets, and 3,353 had been reported completed. These varied widely in the quality of their defenses, of the security forces guarding them, and of their administration.

"Of the entire number," the Chairman told the Secretary of Defense, "probably not more than 600 can be viewed as fulfilling the desired characteristics in terms of equipment, defensive works, security forces and, possibly most important, government." Taylor said that 1,897 strategic hamlet kits had been provided for in the current MAP/AID programs, and that properly conceived hamlets were now being built at the rate of 300 per month. With regard to the radio problem that had so concerned the Secretary during his May visit to RVN, General Taylor reported that over 1,200 village radios had been installed and that installation of hamlet radios at the rate of 1,000 per month was now beginning. Improvement in the

33. (S) Rpt, Honolulu Conference, 8 Oct 62, JMF 455.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 6.

quality of the SDC, CG, and the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) was also noted by General Taylor.

The real strength of the program, the Chairman believed, was more in "prospect than reality." During the past three months, the Viet Cong had attacked a few of the hamlets regularly, destroying defenses, stealing food, and kidnaping officials or assassinating them. Significantly, however, while strategic hamlets as a whole sustained an average of five such attacks each week, undefended rural communities were attacked on an average of nine times weekly. Analyzing the pattern of the attacks and the measure of success achieved by the defenders in beating off the attacks, General Taylor noted that there seemed to be no reason for modifying the views of General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting regarding the long-term virtues of the strategic hamlet program. He concluded:

> It is only now commencing to mature and vigorous reactions against it--both reported and forecast--suggest that the Viet Cong also perceive its potential. Certainly the current Viet Cong actions with respect to hamlets, involving terrorism, theft, murder and kidnaping are direct attacks against people. In this sense they are inconsistent with the avowed communist principle that the affection and confidence of the populace are essential to their program.[34]

In early December, Mr. Hilsman also produced an analysis of the strategic hamlet program that sketched a less favorable and less hopeful prospect. Mr. Hilsman, whose analysis was provided to the Secretary of State, said that

> despite improving the peasant morale in many hamlets particularly as the benefits of security against Viet Cong intimidation and taxation become evident, there are continuing reports that GVN officials have exacted too heavily from local resources and have not compensated the peasants for material and labor required to build the hamlets, that the peasant's ability to earn a living has declined because of the time

34. (TS-GP 1) CM-117-62 to SecDef, 17 Nov 62, JMF 9155.3/3700 (16 Apr 62).

he is required to spend on construction, and that the government has been more concerned with controlling the hamlet population than with providing services and improving living conditions.

He charged that some GVN leaders, particularly Diem and Nhu, tended to place exaggerated importance on the strategic hamlet program as the universal panacea to communist insurgency rather than as merely one means of cutting off the Viet Cong from peasant support.

Hilsman concluded that the war had not abated, nor had the Viet Cong weakened. "On the contrary," Hilsman said, "the Viet Cong has expanded the size and enhanced the capability and organization of its guerrilla force--now estimated at about 23,000 in elite fighting personnel, plus some 100,000 irregulars and sympathizers." He estimated that the Viet Cong still controlled about 20 percent of the villages and about 9 percent of the rural population, and exerted varying degrees of influence among an additional 47 percent of the villages. VC access to the peasants had not been seriously weakened by the GVN program; the Viet Cong still had good intelligence and a high degree of mobility, initiative, and striking power.35

The National Campaign Plan

As a result of the rapid military build-up in South Vietnam during 1962 (see Ch. 5), COMUSMACV believed the GVN was ready for a more ambitious campaign against the Viet Cong. Therefore, in October General Harkins devised a new plan, the National Campaign Plan (NCP), an integrated, all-out effort against the Viet Cong. The concept of the plan was not new. Sometimes called "Operation Explosion," it called for a series of coordinated political, economic, and military operations to be undertaken at an accelerated pace by each commander in his own area. This increased tempo of operations was made possible, General Harkins believed, by the success of US training and assistance efforts over the past two years.

35. (S) Memo, Hilsman to SecState, "The Situation and Short-Term Prospects in South Vietnam." 3 Dec 62, RFE 59, JCS Hist Div files.

The National Campaign Plan had four main elements: 1) to seek out and destroy VC strongholds, 2) to clear and hold areas currently dominated by the Viet Cong, 3) to build strategic hamlets in these areas and protect them from VC attack, and 4) to gain and hold the plateau and mountain areas and achieve a degree of border control by training and employing mountain tribesmen.

Before the plan could be carried out, General Harkins believed that certain readjustments in the GVN's military command structure were necessary. These involved: 1) revamping the JGS, including three service component commands, 2) creating an Unconventional Warfare Directorate to coordinate and control the special forces and irregular units, 3) eliminating the Field Command Headquarters from the command structure, 4) establishing a fourth Corps Headquarters for operations exclusively in the Delta region, and 5) assigning tactical and logistic support elements to each corps.[36]

President Diem agreed to the broad concept of the plan, and on 26 November 1962 he issued directives realigning the military command structure and streamlining the chain of command in line with COMUSMACV's recommendations.

The military effort in Harkins' outline operation plan for carrying out the NCP lay in all four corps tactical zones. To increase mobility, each division would employ an airborne battalion with airlift, supported by tactical aircraft. Each division would also keep at least one infantry battalion, with helicopter lift, on 15-minute alert to react against any target of opportunity in the division zone. Smaller units would also keep forces on alert for rapid commitment by helicopter or truck. Liaison planes would be used throughout the division zone to observe and to provide strike control for tactical air. Helicopters would patrol, carrying troops to provide a show of force and for quick use if needed. Attack

36. (S) CM-104-62 to SecDef, 12 Nov 62, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Oct 62-Jul 63). (S) CM-178-63 to SecDef, 4 Jan 63, "Honolulu Conference," Encl Rpt on Talks at PACOM, Dec 62, JMF 9155.3/3100 (19 Dec 62).

plans would be geared to intelligence on known VC locations immediately before jumpoff.[37]

Some officials in Washington, particularly in the State Department, viewed the plan as an overly ambitious undertaking, one whose success might have dramatic effects, but whose failure could be correspondingly disastrous to RVN morale. The Acting Secretary of State cabled his reservations to Ambassador Nolting, expressing fear that the new operations would divert resources and attention from province clear-and-hold plans and from the strategic hamlet program. He also doubted that the GVN was capable of such a large-scale operation, and anticipated "confusion and waste of resources." He concluded, "Fear encouraging GVN plan nationwide offensive will reinforce VN tendency conduct overlarge, over-elaborate military operations."[38]

Ambassador Nolting reassured his superiors that there was no thought of any overlarge or wasteful operations.

> General Harkins and the rest of us have fostered and watched the really formidable build-up of Vietnamese military and paramilitary capabilities over the last year, and we are very conscious of the fact that these increased capabilities have not yet been fully used. . . . There is no thought of diverting resources from clear-and-hold operations or the Strategic Hamlet Program. On the contrary a fuller employment of available forces should bring more rapid progress in overall pacification. This is not meant to be a dramatic operation but it appears timely and necessary in the near future to spur on a sustained, vigorous offensive.[39]

Implementation of the NCP was already under way early in 63, and a JCS team analysis of the plan stated:

---

37. (TS-GP 3) Rpt of Visit by JCS Team to South Vietnam, Jan 63, JMF 9155.3/3360 (1 Feb 63) sec 1. (S) CM-104-62 to SecDef, 12 Nov 62, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Oct 62-Jul 63).
38. (S) Msg, State 603 to Saigon, 14 Dec 62.
39. (S) Msg, Saigon 604 to State, 19 Dec 62.

> Operations under the National Campaign Plan are expected to result in an ever-increasing measure of control by the Government of Vietnam over its people and its territory. Since the basic concept is one of many small operations, with decentralized control, activity has been increasing in those areas where trained units have been available and where the initiative of local commanders has been most pronounced. The tempo of small scale operations has now reached 450 per month. This tempo should increase substantially in the months ahead, as the strength of South Vietnam, developed over the past year, makes itself felt. However, the successful completion of the strategies listed will take considerable time and will demand much in resolution and perseverance. There appears to be no quick or easy solution.[40]

At the beginning of 1963, the US strategic concept for victory in Vietnam was still a combination of four elements that had been cited early in 1962:

> . . . to retain control of key areas now under GVN control such as routes of communication, population centers and important economic facilities. . . . primarily accomplished by the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps. . . .
>
> . . . the progressive clearing and holding of additional portions of South Vietnam in accordance with priorities established by the country team and the GVN.
>
> . . . to destroy specifically located Viet Cong units, to eliminate the hard core regular and territorial forces, to keep the Viet Cong off balance, prevent them from achieving any further buildup and prevent them from establishing a Viet Cong government in any part of South Vietnam.

40. (TS-GP 3) Rpt of Visit by JCS Team to South Vietnam, Jan 63, JMF 9155.3/3360 (1 Feb 63) sec 1.

> . . . the reduction of infiltration and resupply of Viet Cong by land and sea. . . . [by] consolidation of small indefensible outposts into battalion sized posts from which strong patrols radiate to interdict trails and routes currently in use and to ambush and engage VC encountered.[41]

US officials were generally agreed that the strategic concept remained valid. The problem was that it had not been carried out effectively at least up to the beginning of 1963. The United States did not control the conduct of the war, and its influence on the GVN was often minimal. Nevertheless, in 1962 the GVN effort against the Viet Cong had shown improvement, and as 1963 began most US officials were cautiously optimistic about the eventual outcome of the struggle.

41. (S-GP 4) Memo for Record, MAAG, "Briefing for Mr. Bundy . . . , 1 March 1962," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (30 Mar 62).

Chapter 5

GROWTH OF US MILITARY INVOLVEMENT: 1962-1963

Concurrently with the development of a strategic concept, the buildup of RVNAF strength through US support continued during 1962. The decisions made in November 1961 continued to govern US policy and assistance and shape US involvement in the Vietnamese war well into 1963. The military buildup, which involved vastly increased quantities of materiel and increasing numbers of US advisors, saw the United States becoming more and more involved in the war effort on all levels. Participation by US personnel in military operations inevitably brought US casualties (the first came in February 1962), and national and world attention began to focus on the situation in South Vietnam. The GVN achieved a degree of success in 1962 and optimism about the progress of the war prevailed in most US official circles into 1963. This optimism prompted longer-range planning for eventual US withdrawal from South Vietnam.

The MAP and GVN Force Levels

At the beginning of 1962 GVN military forces had been authorized MAP support for an RVNAF of 205,000, a Civil Guard of 68,000, and a Self Defense Corps of 49,000 (see above Ch. 3). After the mid-January 1962 Honolulu Conference, CINCPAC asked CHMAAG to review GVN force levels. General McGarr replied in early February that the GVN needed a total strength of 395,000 well-trained and equipped troops, including the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps. He added, however, that this would have to be a time-phased buildup because a shortage of officers continued to be the factor that most limited the ability of the GVN to expand its forces.

At the 19 February Honolulu Conference CHMAAG presented his proposal for raising authorized MAP support of the RVNAF and the GVN paramilitary forces to the following levels:

	End FY 1962	Mid FY 1963	End FY 1963	End FY 1964
RVNAF	206,600	210,000	215,000	225,000
CG	72,000	77,000	81,000	90,000
SDC	65,000	70,000	80,000	80,000

Admiral Felt recommended approval of long-term force levels, stressing the need for firm planning and programming figures. All present agreed in general that the MAAG-proposed force levels were required and could be supported. Secretary McNamara stated, however, that he could not make a decision until he knew specifically how much more money these levels would require for the rest of FY 1962 and FY 1963.[1]

On 9 March 1962 the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve the MAAG-proposed force levels. They justified the increases by citing the VC expansion in RVN and in Laos; the great progress being made by the GVN in planning and conducting operations; the improved capacity of the GVN to train, maintain, and use its forces effectively; and the increased US determination to win in South Vietnam. Within a week the Department of State also concurred in the force level recommendations. On 15 March the Secretary of Defense approved support for FY 1963 force levels in SVN of 215,000 for the RVNAF, 81,000 for the Civil Guard, and 80,000 for the Self Defense Corps. Decision on the long-term buildup of GVN forces was put off for the time being.[2]

The US stake in South Vietnam had grown to sizable proportions by the middle of 1962. In terms of military assistance in dollars, over $600 million worth of equipment and assistance had been delivered from 1956 to 30 June 1962. The FY 1962 MAP was valued at $177.1 million, with the proposed FY 1963 MAP only slightly less at $166 million. CINCPAC's FY 1964-1968 MAP proposed deliveries of approximately $560 million.

1. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1962, pp. 170-171. (TS-GP 1) Record, Honolulu Conference, 19 February 1962, JMF 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 3.

2. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-179-62 to SecDef, 9 Mar 62, (derived from JCS 2343/91), JMF 9155.3/9108 (27 Apr 61) sec 6. (S-GP 3) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, 14 Feb 63, JMF 9155.3/3410 (10 Jan 63).

In addition to the MAP, AID (and its predecessor, ICA) had provided in excess of $1.5 billion to South Vietnam for improvements and new construction of roads, railroads, airports, canals, ports, electric power and distribution systems, water supply facilities, telecommunications, hospitals, schools, training facilities, and other public works and facilities.[3]

Long-Range Program

Addressing his key advisors and the responsible commanders in mid-July 1962 at Honolulu, Secretary McNamara expressed satisfaction with the buildup of US support to date. In a period of only six months the United States had made tremendous progress in strengthening the GVN. But this progress had been accomplished by short-term "crash" programs, said the Secretary, and the United States must now look ahead to a carefully conceived, long-range program for training and equipping the RVNAF, in order to phase out the US combat, advisory, and logistic support activities.

He asked the field commanders how long it would take before the VC would be eliminated as a "disturbing force." COMUSMACV estimated that this could be accomplished in about one year from the time the United States had succeeded in getting the RVNAF, Civil Guard, and Self Defense Corps fully operational and "really pressing" the Viet Cong in all areas. Secretary McNamara thereupon directed COMUSMACV to prepare a comprehensive three-year plan to provide for a gradual scaling down of his staff and forces and the development of South Vietnamese forces capable of maintaining internal security without US assistance. In the meantime, the Secretary of Defense directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to ensure that US training programs for the RVNAF, and the companion materiel programs, were in all respects adequate to support the effort in South Vietnam until December 1965 on the basis of the current scale of operations.[4]

---

3. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/139, 7 Aug 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (1 May 62).

4. (TS-GP 3) Record, Honolulu Conference, Jul 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 5. (S-GP 1) JCSM-617-62 to SecDef, 13 Aug 62, JMF 9155.3/3100 (7 Aug 62).

CINCPAC finally submitted COMUSMACV's Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam (CPSVN) on 29 January 1963. The plan detailed the special military assistance and equipment that the GVN would need to carry on an effective counterinsurgency program with very little help by US personnel after 1965. The CPSVN depended for success upon parallel development of the several mutually supporting national plans and programs of the GVN. These included the National Campaign Plan (NCP), the strategic hamlet program, and the CIDG program.

The CPSVN called for a peak armed strength for the GVN of 575,000 in FY 1964-1965. This included the CIDG at a strength of 116,000, which would be phased out as the goal of 90 percent control of the population came closer to realization. The plan also provided a balanced, residual national military strength of about 368,000.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the CPSVN to the Secretary of Defense on 7 March 1963, saying that

> the CPSVN provides an adequate basis for defining the five-year MAP and a realistic framework for integrating the efforts already being expended in related and mutually supporting nation wide programs such as the National Campaign, Strategic Hamlet and the CIDG Programs.[5]

The Secretary of Defense discussed the plan with the military commanders at the May Honolulu Conference. He believed that the CPSVN assumed an unrealistically high level for GVN forces in the post insurgency period. A country of 12 million people, he said, could not support a quarter of a million men under arms; after the insurgency had been brought under control, perhaps in FY 1965, the US investment in the GVN ought to be on the order of $50 million per year for MAP. For FY 1965 the MAP figure should be on the order of $50-75 million--all of this on the assumption that the current counterinsurgency programs proceeded satisfactorily. He directed CINCPAC to develop two alternative MAP budgets--one for about $50 million a year to take effect after FY 1965 and the second for whatever dollar figure he considered necessary before FY 1965. Secretary McNamara emphasized that the

5. (S) Rpt, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 19 Jan 63, "Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam," JMF 9155.3/3360 (25 Jan 63) sec 1. (S) JCSM-180-63 to SecDef, 7 Mar 63 (derived from JCS 2343/201), same file, sec 2.

United States was not going to let lack of money keep the GVN from winning the war against the VC. But he said that the FY 1965-1969 MAP contained in the CPSVN ($573 million) was at least $270 million higher than an acceptable program.[6]

On 11 May 1963 Admiral Felt submitted the revised CPSVN. Although the Secretary of Defense had expressed the hope that the insurgency in RVN could be brought under control as early as FY 1965, CINCPAC thought this was overly optimistic and assumed in his new plan that this could not be accomplished until mid-FY 1966. CINCPAC's new plan did not reduce the MAP figure but raised it to $585 million.[7]

The Secretary of Defense, however, had advised the Office of the Director of Military Assistance that the MAP for this period should not total more than $365 million. Subsequently the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) recommended to Secretary McNamara that a more realistic MAP for this period would amount to about $450 million.

Because of these substantially different figures, the Secretary of Defense directed CINCPAC to prepare alternative MAP plans for FY 1965-1969 using the figures of $585, $450, and $365 million respectively.[8]

On 18 July 1963, CINCPAC sent the Joint Chiefs of Staff the three alternative military assistance plans, a Joint Staff plan based on a figure of $450.9 million, and a fifth plan developed by COMUSMACV, called the Model Plan, projecting the expenditure of $400 million for FY 1965-1969. Admiral Felt recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff support COMUSMACV's Model Plan.[9]

---

6. (S) Msg, JCS 9820 to CINCPAC, 9 May 63. (S) Record, Honolulu Conference, 7 May 63, JMF 5410 (8 May 63).

7. (S) Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 11 May 63, "Revised Plans for Republic of Vietnam (U)," JMF 9155.3/3360 (25 Jan 63) sec 2.

8. (S-GP 3) DJSM-941-63 to CINCPAC, 6 Jun 63, same file. (S) Msg, DEF 928638 to CINCPAC, 27 May 63.

9. (S-GP 1) Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Jul 63, "Transmittal of FY 65-69 Alternate MA Plans for Republic of Vietnam (U)," JMF 9155.3/3360 (25 Jan 63) sec 3.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with Admiral Felt that the Model Plan appeared to be the best solution. On 27 August 1963 they forwarded CINCPAC's comparison and analysis of the five plans to Secretary McNamara, recommending that the Model Plan be approved as the basis for development of the FY 1965-1969 MAP Plan for South Vietnam. In their judgment, it provided the optimum program for the money. On 6 September the Secretary of Defense approved this recommendation as the basis for developing the FY 1965-1969 MAP for South Vietnam.[10]

Comparisons of the force levels and costs recommended in each of the plans are in the tables on the following two pages. The Model Plan had been developed on the basis that the top priority task was the neutralization of the insurgency. To accomplish that, the current organization and strength of the RVNAF would be maintained at a high level at least until mid-FY 1966. Later, through FY 1969, a high priority task would be containment of the insurgents in the four VC base areas and their gradual elimination. The Model Plan gave a high priority also to border control, especially through the use of Ranger units.[11]

More US Support

The initial US commitment of men and equipment was followed during 1962 by additional shipments of support units, specialists, and special equipment. After the January 1962 Honolulu meeting it was decided that, because of requirements in South Vietnam, CINCPAC's 100 percent readiness requirement for contingency operations in his command could be relaxed. On 17 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff told Admiral Felt that they would accept any degradation of his military posture caused by sending his men and materiel to RVN. He had full authority through his component commanders to support training and operations in RVN. He was reminded, however,

10. (S-GP 1) JCSM-640-63 to SecDef, 27 Aug 62; (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 6 Sep 63, "Approval of 'Model Plan' for Vietnam"; same file, sec 4.

11. (S-GP 1) Memo, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Jul 63, "Transmittal of FY 65-69 Alternate MA Plans for Republic of Vietnam (U)," JMF 9155.3/9360 (25 Jan 63) sec 3.

COMPARISON OF PLANS
RVNAF-MANNING LEVEL
FY 65-69
(Figures in Thousands)

	ARMY	NAVY	MARINES	AIR FORCE	RVNAF TOTAL
FY 65					
A (585)	202.5	7.0	6.1	9.9	225.5
B (450)	201.9	7.0	6.1	9.9	224.9
C (365)	147.8	7.0	6.1	9.9	170.8
J (JCS)	201.9	7.0	6.1	9.9	224.9
M (COMUSMACV)	202.5	7.0	6.1	9.9	225.5
FY 66					
A	193.9	7.0	6.1	9.9	216.9
B	193.2	7.0	6.1	9.9	216.2
C	126.9	7.0	6.1	9.9	149.9
J	154.1	7.0	6.1	9.9	177.1
M	202.5*	7.0	6.1	9.9	225.5
FY 67					
A	164.7	4.9	5.0	9.0	183.6
B	124.9	4.9	5.0	9.0	143.8
C	64.4	4.6	3.0	8.8	80.8
J	133.4	4.9	5.0	8.9	152.2
M	126.8	4.0	4.0	8.0	142.8
FY 68					
A	149.2	4.7	4.0	8.8	166.7
B	82.4	4.7	4.0	8.5	100.6
C	64.4	4.6	3.0	8.5	80.5
J	113.7	4.7	4.0	8.5	130.9
M	106.8	4.0	3.2	8.0	122.0
FY 69					
A	120.8	4.6	3.0	8.6	137.0
B	66.4	4.6	3.0	8.3	82.3
C	64.4	4.6	3.0	8.3	80.3
J	95.3	4.6	3.0	8.3	111.2
M	106.8	4.0	2.4	8.0	121.2

* ARVN to be 178,500 on 1 January 1966 (mid-FY 66).

RVNAF MAP COST
MODEL PLAN
($ MILLIONS)

	FY 65	FY 66	FY 67	FY 68	FY 69	Total
OPERATING COST						
Army/CG/SDC	86.6	69.5	23.9	20.1	20.1	220.2
Navy/Marines	4.1	3.8	1.5	1.4	1.4	12.2
Air Force	28.1	24.2	10.0	9.7	8.8	80.8
Other 1/	17.0	15.0	10.5	9.0	5.8	57.3
Sub-Total	135.8	112.5	45.9	40.2	36.1	370.5
INVESTMENT COST						
Army/CG/SDC	5.1	.5	0	0	0	5.6
Navy/Marines	.02	0	0	0	0	.02
Air Force	4.3	4.2	5.3	4.9	5.2	23.9
Sub-Total	9.4	4.7	5.3	4.9	5.2	29.5
Total	145.2	117.2	51.2	45.1	41.3	400.0

1/ Supply operations, MAAG support and OICC administrative costs. (Same as Plan A)

that he should send no organized combat units to South Vietnam.[12]

Air Augmentation

Much of the US support for the RVNAF involved provision of aircraft and crews to improve the mobility of ground forces. General Harkins believed that the three light helicopter companies deployed to South Vietnam by February 1962 were inadequate to support the "quick reaction" tactics being urged upon the RVNAF and, at the same time, to fly administrative missions for the growing US advisory group. On 28 February he requested a fourth unit and enough four-place helicopters to enable the corps advisors to commute by air throughout their sectors. By March he had received the additional airlift capability.[13]

The distances between helicopter companies in South Vietnam prevented effective massing of helicopter lift for quick reaction operations without stripping other areas of vitally needed helicopter support. With only four helicopter companies in RVN, COMUSMACV could not collocate helicopter companies with RVNAF alert-forces in a proper dispersal pattern throughout RVN. Therefore on 1 June 1962 General Harkins called on CINCPAC for three more helicopter companies, pointing out that the use of helicopters in operations was paying "good dividends". From the RVN side province chiefs and RVNAF commanders were enthusiastic and were even requesting support for CG units when helicopters were available. When two new ARVN divisions currently being trained became operational an even greater need for helicopter lift would exist. "Present troop lift capabilities have proved inadequate in I and II Corps," Harkins told Admiral Felt, "to land sufficient assault troops in one lift. Unless troops are moved in one lift, surprise is lost and the VC disappear." Airlift was especially vital in South Vietnam, General Harkins said, because of poor road nets, large areas of operation, and insufficient forces.[14]

---

12. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2935 to CINCPAC, 172121Z Jan 62 (derived from JCS 2343/71), JMF 9155.3/9105 (17 Jan 62).

13. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 280217Z Feb 62; (S-GP 3) Dec On JCS 2343/89, 2 Mar 62; (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 140712Z Mar 62; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3699 to CSA, CMC, CINCPAC, 192142Z Mar 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (31 Oct 61).

14. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, MACJ-3 283, 1 Jun 62.

Ambassador Nolting supported General Harkins' request fully. "There are many indications that present helicopter units are paying off handsomely, and more are needed." He pointed also to the need for additional mobility arising from the construction of strategic hamlets, which were sure to be the targets of increasing VC attacks. The Secretary of Defense gave his approval for the deployment of two more helicopter companies in late July.[15]

As US helicopter units became more involved in actual military operations in Vietnam, the problem of protecting them came to the foreground. After their initial surprise and confusion, the VC were learning to attack helicopters with ground fire. By the end of March 1962, Secretary McNamara expressed interest in actively countering the increasing threat to helicopter operations posed by VC ground fire, and directed that the Army investigate the problem. On 22 June the Army proposed deploying a company of armed helicopters to RVN.[16]

The Chief of Staff, Air Force, objected to the Army proposal and refused, initially, to concur. "Helicopters employed as combat escort for troop transport helicopter operations in South Vietnam would be an unwarranted and unnecessary risk," he said. He pointed out that there were enough fighters and B-26 type aircraft in RVN to provide necessary protection and close combat support for heliborne operations. They were faster, less vulnerable, and more powerful than helicopters.[17]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff eventually concurred in the Army proposal, stipulating, however, that the purpose was to conduct a field test of the Army's concepts, tactics, and techniques in escort of transport helicopters and indigenous

---

15. (S) Msg, Saigon 1554 to State, 4 Jun 62. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 092347Z Jul 62, DA IN 246370; (S-GP 4) JCSM-535-62 to SecDef, 23 Jul 62, (derived from JCS 2343/133); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepASD/ISA to D/JS, "Additional Helicopter Companies for South Vietnam," 1 Aug 62; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5515 to CINCPAC and CSA, 312309Z Jul 62; JMF 9155.3/4123 (9 Jul 62).

16. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/122, 28 Jun 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (28 May 62).

17. (S-GP 3) CSAFM-194-62 to JCS, 3 Jul 62, JMF 9155.2/9105 (28 May 62).

ground troops involved in air mobile operations. They informed the Secretary of Defense on 20 July that they regarded employment of armed helicopters as escort for transport helicopters in RVN as a defensive mission, even though the primary mission of the entire operation might be offensive in nature. Suppressive fire from armed helicopters was, in their view, self-defense within the terms of reference that guided US operations in RVN. On 26 July 1962 the Secretary of Defense approved the deployment of 15 armed HU-1A helicopters to South Vietnam.[18]

The Secretary of Defense had already directed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff begin an urgent study of the need for arming all US helicopters operating against the VC. COMUSMACV had indicated a pressing need for arming the helicopters in view of "recent VC successes against helicopters." Most of the damaging fire from the VC came from underneath the aircraft during approaches to landing zones and during take-off after discharging troops. It was not feasible to maintain suppressive fire by fixed-wing aircraft during these short periods. Firing .30 caliber machine guns from the doors of the helicopters against the Viet Cong directly beneath had not proved effective.[19]

In a preliminary evaluation, the Army judged that helicopters in combat units, such as air cavalry, should be armed; helicopters with dual purpose units, such as air mobile companies, should be armed with removable systems. Transport helicopters should not normally be armed because of the weight problem and the reduced payload. One of the most effective methods of protecting transport helicopters from enemy fire was to assign armed helicopters as escorts along the route of flight and in the objective area.[20]

At the conference in Honolulu in October 1962, CINCPAC described a growing demand for air support of the counter-insurgency operations in RVN. The Secretary of Defense stated

18. (S-GP 3) JCSM-543-62 to SecDef, 20 Jul 62; (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 26 Jul 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (28 May 62).
19. (TS-GP 3) Record, Honolulu Conference, Jul 26, JMF 9155.3/9105 (16 Dec 61) sec 5. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to OSD, AF IN 50028, 18 Jul 62.
20. (S-GP 3) JCSM-815-62 to SecDef, 29 Oct 62, JMF 9155.3/4123 (21 Jul 62).

that steps should be taken to develop a wholly adequate VNAF. He noted specifically that the number of officers in flight training should be increased. CINCPAC also recommended that the FARM GATE (formerly JUNGLE JIM) effort be increased. Since this would involve more US planes and pilots in the fighter-bomber categories and more direct US operational roles, Secretary McNamara directed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider the proposal. He stated that he was personally cool to the idea, recalling that it was contrary to the policy position taken by the President; he wished to return to the original concept--helping the South Vietnamese help themselves rather than doing it for them--as soon as possible.[21]

In line with the Secretary's instruction to present a detailed case for providing FARM GATE augmentation, on 9 November CINCPAC asked specifically for 18 aircraft and 117 USAF personnel.[22] He had started a program to increase the VNAF capability, but said it would take at least 12 months to see any significant results. "We are daily losing opportunities to destroy Viet Cong due to inability of VNAF to answer valid requests for air strikes," CINCPAC said. The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully supported CINCPAC in the matter of FARM GATE augmentation. They told the Secretary of Defense that practically all ground operations by the ARVN within the past six months had been coordinated with some air support effort. They cited the increase in the use of VNAF fighter planes from 150 sorties in January 1962 to 628 in September. The Joint Chiefs of Staff expected the demand for air support to increase in the next few months. The RVNAF would increase offensive operations; a ninth Army division would be added by the end of 1962, and the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps would expand; the two recently added helicopter companies would increase the scope of air mobile operations. The National Campaign Plan would get under way in early 1963, the CIDG and paramilitary programs were expanding, and improved weather would favor military operations supported by air. The Joint Chiefs of Staff

> have noted the continual growth of coordinated ground and air operations induced by the increasing numbers of heliborne operations and

21. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/92, JMF 9155.3/9106 (16 Dec 61) sec 6.
22. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 090340Z Nov 62.

> the steady increase of air support capabilities in SVN over the past year . . . . Prior to the influx of air support/heliborne operations, military planning on the part of the Vietnamese forces basically was isolated, noncoordinated, "do what you can" action with very little rapport between the armed forces and other elements of the GVN.

The growth of air capabilities had brought a marked improvement in military planning and its coordination with the use of all national resources. It had also given US advisors a firm entree into RVNAF planning, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted this entree continued and exploited. Although they understood the concern over direct US commitment, they felt it could ultimately be avoided by building up the VNAF. On 31 December the President approved the additional US aircraft for General Harkins' command.[23]

The bolstering of the Army and Air Force units supporting the RVN effort continued into 1963. In January CINCPAC asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to deploy various additional transport and tactical aircraft to South Vietnam. They were required, he said, to support a systematic government offensive against the Viet Cong. Most of his requests were approved and the forces deployed by mid-1963.[24]

Rules of Engagement and Restrictions on US Air Operations

In addition to dealing with the deployment of aircraft, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also established rules of engagement for US aircraft assigned to South Vietnam. The general mission of all the various types of US aircraft and air crews deployed to RVN was to train and support the RVNAF in its counterinsurgency effort. Nevertheless there were degrees of definition within this general mission. In March 1962, after American-operated radar detected unidentified aircraft over RVN, four F-102 interceptors were temporarily deployed to a base near Saigon. The arrival of these jets raised questions

---

23. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-960-62 to SecDef, 4 Dec 62; (TS) Memo, Special Asst to Pres (NSA) to SecDef, 31 Dec 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (4 Jul 62).

24. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 290023Z Jan 63; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9106 to CINCPAC, 161434Z Mar 63; JMF 9155.3/3440 (29 Jan 63).

concerning the rules of engagement under which they would have to operate. Although US planes might defend themselves against attack, only aircraft with South Vietnamese markings could intercept and destroy hostile intruders. Rather than alter the markings of the interceptors deployed to Vietnam, CINCPAC recommended the adoption of new rules of engagement.[25]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that the recent radar sightings justified a change. Following review by representatives of the Department of State and the White House, new rules of engagement were promulgated on 26 March. They permitted US planes, "where means of deviating or bringing the aircraft under control are not practically possible," to down hostile planes operating over South Vietnam. Hostile aircraft were defined as those: 1) "visually identified as communist bloc aircraft over-flying sovereign RVN territory without proper clearance . . ."; 2) observed attacking "RVN or friendly" ground installations, aircraft, or vessels; 3) detected laying mines in territorial waters; 4) seen releasing parachutes or gliders over South Vietnamese territory; or 5) declared hostile by the US Director, JOC.[26]

After receiving this authority, CINCPAC took immediate steps to avoid publicity in the event a US interceptor should shoot down an intruder. The United States would remain silent about its role in the fray, allowing the VNAF to claim credit for the kill. "To establish plausibility," a South Vietnamese T-28 was to be airborne whenever the F-102s roared skyward. This plan was never tested, for the intruders ceased operating immediately after the arrival in RVN of the F-102s. Although the US jets occasionally returned, propeller-driven ADs modified to carry radar assumed responsiblity for routine night defense.[27]

More general rules of engagement were promulgated by COMUSMACV on 24 November 1962. As a general policy, no mission was to be undertaken using US men or planes unless it was beyond the capabilities of the VNAF. In his directive

25. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230340Z Mar 62, DA IN 213993; (TS-GP 3) Memo for Record, ViceD/JS, 22 Mar 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (23 Mar 62).

26. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-220-62 to SecDef, 23 Mar 62 (derived from JCS 2343/100); (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3796 to CINCPAC, 270251Z Mar 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (23 Mar 62).

27. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1962, p. 189.

COMUSMACV reminded all US pilots and crews that "nothing shall infringe upon the inherent right of the individual to protect himself against armed attack." In the event of such an attack the individual concerned would take immediate aggressive action against the attacking force with any means available.

There were specific provisions for specific aircraft. FARM GATE aircraft could be used for combat support missions only with a combined US and South Vietnamese crew and would carry VNAF markings. C-123s would be US-marked and manned with a combined crew when on combat support missions. US Army transport helicopters might be armed and used for defensive purposes only. Armament in such aircraft would not be used to open fire upon any target. However, if the aircraft was fired upon, it could return the fire. These aircraft were to be US-marked and -manned. The same restrictions on initiating fire were placed on other combat support aircraft.[28]

While in RVN in January 1963, a JCS team reported that CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had placed additional restrictions upon rules of engagement for the armed helicopters. The helicopter must be fired upon before it could engage a target, even when an enemy target was clearly identified. FARM GATE units in South Vietnam did not have these specific restrictions but could attack identified VC targets so long as: an RVN observer was aboard, the VNAF was unable to engage the target, the aircraft carried VNAF markings, and targets were designated by RVN personnel. The team felt that the restrictions unnecessarily risked US lives and equipment and gave the enemy an advantageous option. They suggested that CINCPAC allow armed helicopters to fire on clearly identified VC targets during combat operations without being fired on first. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the recommendation and directed CINCPAC to revise the rules of engagement accordingly.[29]

---

28. (S) HQ USMACV Directive No. 62, 24 Nov 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (28 May 62).

29. (TS) Rpt of Visit by JCS Team to South Vietnam, Jan 63, JMF 9155.3/3360 (1 Feb 63) sec 1. (S) Msg, JCS 8678 to CINCPAC, 161946Z Feb 63 (derived from JCS 2343/196), JMF 9155.3/9105 (28 May 62).

Intelligence and Communications Buildup

As a further aid to the buildup of the RVNAF in the fight against the VC, one of the provisions of the Taylor program had been for the development of a joint military intelligence system. By the d of May 1962 the system was operational and was reducing dependence upon GVN resources for intelligence on the Viet Cong. Having made this much progress, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC to examine the entire program and report on what should be done to expand the use of US intelligence assets in Southeast Asia.

The review showed that the most urgent need was for intelligence on the routine activities of the Viet Cong. CINCPAC pointed out that the RVNAF was not doing much to collect intelligence on the Viet Cong and ordered more US aid placed behind this collection effort. He also recommended that US intelligence personnel coming to RVN be given training in guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency operations, and the Vietnamese language.[30]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were also concerned that the communications/electronics base in the RVN be modernized and enlarged to meet the immediate defense needs of the RVNAF in counterinsurgency operations, and to allow expansion to satisfy US needs in support of CINCPAC and SEATO contingency plans. Through the MAP the United States provided much needed equipment in 1962. A US Army Signal Battalion was also deployed to South Vietnam, to provide communications for US forces supporting the RVNAF.[31]

[redacted]

Use of Napalm

On 12 September 1962 CINCPAC had told COMUSMACV that he believed Zone D, northeast of Saigon, should be returned to top priority for operations. He warned that intelligence reports showed that Zone D was being used as a major safe haven for the VC threatening Saigon, Bien Hoa, and adjacent areas. He suggested that COMUSMACV start planning for operations that would harass and destroy the VC in Zone D.[33]

General Harkins prepared these plans and prevailed upon the RVNAF to step up its operations in Zone D. The plans called for using large quantities of napalm against well-established targets, but the VNAF lacked the necessary aircraft to deliver the napalm. CINCPAC on 11 November 1962 asked for authority to divert two C-123s for a short period in order to deliver napalm. These planes would be assigned temporarily to FARM GATE, marked with VNAF insignia, and would be employed with a minimum of three VNAF personnel aboard. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara that he approve this action "subject to the concurrence of the Ambassador." The Secretary approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation on 27 November.[34]

Opposition came from the State Department, however. Disturbed by what appeared to be plans for large-scale use of napalm and fearing adverse reaction from other nations, the Secretary of State sought from Ambassador Nolting an explanation of why the operation was necessary. Nolting replied that detailed intelligence had been used in evaluating Zone D targets; that napalm had been used extensively and effectively against the VC in the past and that its use, even in large quantities, would not provide the communists with a propaganda lever.[35]

Still not convinced, the Secretary of State told Nolting on 8 December that political considerations suggested that napalm should be limited to high priority targets that had clearly been identified as VC installations. He directed, "in future, plans for using large amounts napalm in any one

33. ([illegible]-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1962, p. 152.
34. ([illegible] GP 4) CM-136-62 to SecDef, 26 Nov 62; Msg, JCS 7573 to CINCPAC, 27 Nov 62; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 62-Jul 63.
35. (S) Msg, State 569 to Saigon, 1 Dec 62; Msg, Saigon [illegible] to State, 4 Dec 62.

operation to be cleared with Department." The Ambassador objected strenously to the order that use of "large amounts" of napalm be cleared with the State Department. Nolting said "COMUSMACV feels that restraints already imposed are making it difficult enough to carry the war to the heart of the enemy and tend to set up inviolable sanctuaries where the VC can take a breather. . . . we feel discretion in this important matter should be left with Task Force Saigon."[36]

Secretary Rusk modified his earlier instructions to a degree, notifying Nolting on 21 December that he could use his discretion, but requesting that the State and Defense Departments be advised in time to approve in advance any operations which, in his judgment, were of a size or type likely to have "significant political repercussions."[37]

Political Developments in 1962

On 4 April 1962 the US Ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, proposed to the President a revision of US policy in Southeast Asia, focusing on seeking a political solution to the problem of communist penetration of RVN through neutralization of that country. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reply to this proposal urged that the current US policy of fighting the VC threat should be "pursued vigorously to a successful conclusion." They stressed that the various measures approved for implementation in support of US policy in RVN had not been in effect long enough to test their effectiveness. They believed that any reversal of US policy could have disastrous effects, not only upon the US relationship with RVN, but with the rest of the allies of the United States, especially those in Asia.[38] The Bowles proposal apparently was not seriously

36. (S) Msg, State 567 to Saigon, 8 Dec 62; (S) Msg, Saigon 598 to State, 15 Dec 62.
37. (S) Msg, State 598 to Saigon, 21 Dec 62.
38. (S-GP 3) JCSM-282-62 to SecDef, 13 Apr 62 (derived from JCS 2343/108); (S-GP 4) Memo, ASD/ISA to D/JS, "US Policy Toward Vietnam (U)," 10 Apr 62, Att to (S-GP 1) JCS 2343/105, 11 Apr 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61).

considered by the President, although a similar solution was being actively sought in Laos. Agreements on the neutralization of Laos were finally reached at a 14-nation conference in Geneva in July 1962.

To cope with the new situation in the area, on 16 June 1962 the Secretary of State set up an interdepartmental Task Force to coordinate US activities in Southeast Asia. The group was headed by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, W. Averell Harriman, and included representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CIA, AID, and USIA. The purpose of the new Task Force was to develop programs to carry out established US policy with respect to individual countries in Southeast Asia; coordinate, guide, and follow closely the execution of those programs to insure maximum cooperation and expeditious completion; and develop new policy recommendations which would further US objectives in these countries. Task Force Southeast Asia took over the jurisdiction of the former Task Force, Vietnam; its Chairman, Sterling Cottrell, had been appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs and would be Deputy Chairman of Task Force, Southeast Asia. Two main working groups would serve the Task Force: one, a Thailand-Laos-Cambodia-Burma Working Group under Mr. Henry Koren and the second, a Vietnam Working Group under Mr. Ben Wood.[39]

As the scale of US involvement in Vietnam continued to increase through the early months of 1962, authorities in Washington were compelled to answer a mounting volume of criticism at home and abroad. In response to Republican charges that the United States was practically being involved in war without the consent of Congress, President Kennedy repeatedly explained the purposes and the limits he had tried to prescribe for US action in South Vietnam. American troops were not there to engage in combat, he said, but primarily for "training and transportation"; they were, however, authorized to use firearms when necessary for self-protection. By March, they were also accompanying South Vietnamese flyers on combat missions and using helicopters to ferry South Vietnamese troops into action. The first two GI deaths were reported on 8 April, and the Pentagon warned that there would be others. "But we cannot desist in Vietnam," the President said as he expressed his regret at these inevitable casualties.

---

39. (C) Ltr, SecState to CJCS, 16 Jun 62; (C) Ltr, Under SecState to CJCS, 21 Jun 62; JMF 9150/9105 (16 Jun 62).

There were also complaints from communist quarters, where it was contended that US actions violated the 1954 armistice agreement on Vietnam, amounted to an "undeclared war," and urgently required discussion on the international level. To such objections, US authorities replied that the root of the problem was not the action of the United States but the "illegal and aggressive activity" directed from North Vietnam. Any international discussions, the United States insisted, must start from this basic fact. As an initial step in this direction, the United States was endeavoring without much success to persuade the tripartite International Control Commission on Vietnam (established by the 1954 armistice and comprising an Indian Chairman together with one member each from Canada and Poland) to let the world know the facts concerning communist machinations against South Vietnam's integrit

Allied governments had also to be reassured about US intentions. This was all the more true because increased US aid to South Vietnam was being matched by an apparent increase in Chinese Communist encouragement to North Vietnam, a state of affairs that raised the possibility of an "escalation" into large-scale war involving the great powers. Great Britain and France had thus far maintained an attitude of somewhat disapproving aloofness concerning US actions in South Vietnam, and in general gave the impression that despite their membership in SEATO, they did not particularly favor a strong stand against communist advances in Southeast Asia.[40]

In June 1962 the ICC for Vietnam finally issued a report concluding that

> there is evidence to show that armed and unarmed personnel, arms, munitions and other supplies have been sent from the Zone in the North to the Zone in the South with the object of supporting, organizing and carrying out hostile activities, including armed attacks, directed against the armed forces and Administration of the Zone in the South. . . . there is evidence to show that the PAVN [People's Army of Viet-Nam] has allowed the Zone in the North to be used for inciting, encouraging and supporting hostile activities in the Zone in the South, aimed at the overthrow of the Administration in the South.

---

40. The United States in World Affiars, 1962, pp. 195-196.

The Commission also concluded that

> the Republic of Viet-Nam has violated Articles 16 and 17 of the Geneva Agreement in receiving the increased military aid from the United States of America. . . . The Commission is also of the view that, though there may not be any formal military alliance between the Governments of the United States of America and the Republic of Viet-Nam, the establishment of a U.S. Military Assistance Command in South Viet-Nam, as well as the introduction of a large number of U.S. military personnel beyond the stated strength of the MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group), amounts to a factual military alliance, which is prohibited under Article 19 of the Geneva Agreement.

On balance, the ICC finally concluded, "Fundamental provisions of the Geneva Agreement have been violated by both Parties, resulting in ever-increasing tension and threat of resumption of open hostilities."[41]

Communist propaganda now began to develop the themes of neutralization and "national unity" on the Laotian pattern as the ideal solution for Vietnam as well. The expanding military strength of the VC had been accompanied by the political growth of the National Liberation Front (NLF). On 1 January 1962 a component of the NLF known as the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) was established. The reason for the emergence of this openly communist element within the Front is unclear, for the NLF was obviously striving to develop a program that would win as wide a Southern audience as possible.

The NLF held its first formal congress from 16 February to 3 March 1962. The congress endorsed a program that elaborated on the NLF declaration of 20 December 1960 (see Ch. 1), demonstrating a continuing sensitivity to the strong regional sentiment in the South and the special conditions existing there, an emphasis symbolized in the Front's adoption

41. (U) Command Paper 1755 "Special Report to the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference on Indo-China," (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), pp. 7, 10, quoted in George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam (1967), p. 130.

of a different flag from that of the North. The program once more called for the "correct implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements." It viewed reunification as a step for the distant future and one that would have to reflect the interests of the South Vietnamese as well as those of Hanoi. The 1962 program also underscored the previous emphasis on a neutralist foreign policy for the South.

The neutralization of Laos in the summer of 1962 strengthened the NLF's interest in a similar settlement for South Vietnam, one that presumably would provide, as in Laos, for a coalition government as well as for neutralization. The NLF's advocacy of such a solution was publicized on 20 July 1962, the eighth anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Agreements of 1954. On that day the Front issued "four proposals for national salvation": 1) an end to US "acts of armed aggression" and withdrawal of all US military personnel from South Vietnam; 2) a cessation of hostilities and restoration of peace in South Vietnam through a "settlement of internal affairs by the South Vietnamese themselves"; 3) the establishment of a government made up of representatives of "parties, sects and groups belonging to all political tendencies, social strata and classes, religions and nationalities existing in South Viet Nam"; 4)

> . . . a foreign policy of peace and neutrality, [to] establish good relations with all States, first of all with the neighbouring countries, refrain from joining any military bloc, refuse to all countries the right to set up military bases on its territory, receive economic aid from any country without political conditions attached. A badly-needed international agreement will be quickly concluded to enable the powers from different camps to guarantee respect for the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and neutrality of South Viet Nam which is ready to form a neutral zone together with Cambodia and Laos, three States enjoying full sovereign rights.

For President Diem and his US supporters, however, neutralization under a coalition government was not a conceivable answer to South Vietnam's problems. Its only effect, in their view, would be to pave the way for communist rule in South as well as North Vietnam. They therefore gave no encouragement to the peace efforts of Prince Sihanouk of

Cambodia, whose idea it had been to gain international support for the guarantee of a neutralized zone composed of Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos.[42]

US authorities did not know how far, if at all, the communists' new emphasis on neutrality and coalition governments might reflect a reappraisal of the military outlook in South Vietnam, where the US buildup had by this time reached a total of about 10,000 men. Nor was it clear as yet how far the Viet Cong might be taking advantage of the new situation in Laos to increase the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam by way of Laotian territory.

Progress Reports

The full head of steam that many US officials believed would sweep the GVN to victory over its shadowy enemy had been largely achieved by late 1962. At the end of 1962 South Vietnam had over 400,000 men under arms; 204,000 in the RVNAF, 75,728 in the Civil Guard, 95,922 in the Self Defense Corps, and some 25,000 in the CIDG. Aiding them were 11,295 US military personnel. Of this number 301 were in MACV Headquarters, 3,065 in the MAAG; the remainder served in various support units.

By the last months of 1962 many US observers were interpreting the signs in RVN as encouraging and were prophesying the defeat of the VC. The strength of the GVN military and paramilitary forces, in terms of numbers of men and units and in terms of hardware, could be measured with fair accuracy. The degree of support available to these forces from US advisors and units, the state of training, even morale, could be assessed by logical means. But the answer to the question of whether or not they were winning could not be found in statistics on the size of GVN military forces. There were no confrontations of opposing forces with a clear victory for one side or the other. As the counterinsurgency had to be fought with unorthodox political and military methods, so did progress toward victory have to be measured by unorthodox or at least unusual standards. US officials had devised "indicators," by means of which they hoped trends in the counterinsurgency could be evaluated. Among the indicators used for any given period were the following: 1) GVN offensive operations of

42. Kahin and Lewis, The United States in Vietnam, pp. 132-137.

having diminished somewhat the intensity of their activity . . . might have been expected to lose fewer rather than more of their arms.[43]

The Wheeler Report

In January 1963 the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a team headed by the Chief of Staff, Army, to RVN to evaluate the prospects for a successful conclusion of the war in a reasonable period. They asked for specific appraisals of the effectiveness of existing military programs to meet US objectives in the RVN. Included in the review were the command and control arrangements of US and GVN military forces, the effectiveness of US and VNAF aviation, the quality and validity of military intelligence, and the readiness of plans to meet contingencies in the area. The team's point of reference was General Taylor's report of November 1961.

General Wheeler's team found the RVNAF much improved since early 1962. The ARVN had improved its planning procedures, and its commanders were consulting US advisors and showing greater understanding of the value of supporting air operations. Most operations now took place at lower echelons; 26 percent were of company size and 58 percent of platoon size. Much progress had been made in solving the problem of freeing regular units for pursuit of the Viet Cong. The team reported that six or seven of the average division's nine battalions were usually free for such operations, their static tasks having been assumed by the CG and SDC. The VNAF, the VNN, and the South Vietnamese Marines had shown similar improvements in planning and operations during the year.

The CG and SDC had also increased in size and ability. However, General Wheeler said he "noted with sympathy" General Harkins' generally unsuccessful efforts to persuade the GVN to give up its concept of holding many SDC units in small, isolated posts. "This inheritance from the French provides tempting, lucrative targets for the Viet Cong."

More important than strength increases was the improved state of training of the RVNAF and the paramilitary forces.

43. (S-GP 1) Rpt, SACSA to JCS, 1 Feb 63, "Facts Bearing on the Progress of the Counterinsurgency in South Vietnam," JMF 9155.3/3360 (31 Dec 62), sec 1A.

battalion size or larger, 2) GVN small unit operations making actual contact with VC, 3) incidents of VC terrorism, sabotage

[redacted]

GVN-controlled areas. The VC were short of medical supplies and ammunition. Defections to the GVN had grown steadily during the year from about 75 per month in January to a peak of 215 in December 1962. The level of VC offensive activity had diminished from a peak of 1,900 incidents in March 1962 to 1,340 in December, while VC casualties had risen from 1,900 a month in January to 2,750 in December.

The principal adverse indications were the continuity of VC strength in spite of their sizable reported losses, the growing numbers of Chinese Communist weapons appearing in VC hands, and the increased size and sophistication of the VC communications system. It could not be ignored that the improved GVN intelligence system was uncovering VC elements that had been in South Vietnam all the time. Nevertheless, the team decided, there was still reason to conclude that the conscription base of the VC was substantial, particularly in the Delta, and the infusion of cadre, leaders, technicians, and materiel from outside the country continued at a significant rate.

> These indications show that the communists are engaged in a slow, though perceptible, increase in effort. This suggests that the headquarters in Hanoi is not yet persuaded that the Americans are any different from the French; and that if they will but respond to our efforts with a determined reaction from outside the official battle areas, we will ultimately lose our confidence and our resolution.

The JCS team reported that while President Diem fully understood the interlocking nature of the military-economic-political relationships involved in the counterinsurgency effort, many of his subordinates did not. As a result, all of the US-GVN programs were not advancing abreast. But here also, the US advisory effort was bearing fruit. In the clear-and-hold operations, for example, efforts were now being made to have seed and fertilizer at hand to allow RVN farmers to exploit their newly liberated fields. Strategic hamlets were being encouraged to elect their own hamlet chiefs, thus removing one common target of VC propaganda. Schools for civil administrators were being conducted to raise the standards of province, district, village, and hamlet governments. The village and hamlet radio system was functioning for intelligence, administrative and emergency warning. "These developments," the team noted, "mark a small beginning in weaving the military solution into the nap of the politico-economic situation."

More than any other factor, the strategic hamlet program was credited with bringing the GVN and the people into closer touch. Not only did the JCS team believe that the program was providing security and isolation from the VC, it was the vehicle by which the GVN could carry forward a political, economic, and social revolution. "In 1962," the JCS team reported, "this program was instrumental in bringing an additional 500,000 people under the control of the government." Nevertheless, and in spite of elections being held throughout the hamlets and with US advisors on civic action and economic development going down into the provinces, democracy, in the team's view, could not be legislated in RVN, and the political development program would prosper only if the GVN achieved results in improving the living conditions of the people and in satisfying their basic aspirations. The RVN farmer, even when liberated, was still encumbered with countless restrictions by the GVN. "Until he is freed of these, the Viet Cong will continue to have volunteers from a disgruntled fringe of the society."

The JCS team praised the efforts of the US Country Team under Ambassador Nolting's leadership. This group was slowly causing the GVN to "reach the people, and the people are beginning to reach the government." American advisors seemed to have the confidence of Diem. "All-in-all, this attitude at the very top of the government represents a vast change from the aloofness and suspicion with which American advisors were received by senior Vietnam officials a year ago."

The JCS team would have preferred to see the MAAG absorbed into MACV and saw "some virtue" in the formal designation of the Assistance Command as a formalized subordinate unified command. Both General Harkins and Admiral Felt were opposed to these steps, however, and the team believed their views should prevail.[44]

---

44. The JCS later decided "MAAG/MACV and component command arrangements in force in the Republic of Vietnam are adequate, and sufficient flexibility exists within the terms of reference for CINCPAC to permit any necessary adjustment, in light of foreseeable operations." (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/203, 4 Mar 63, JMF 9155.3/3360 (1 Feb 63) sec 2. The AsstSecState for FE Affairs, W. Averell Harriman, suggested on 9 Feb 63 that COMUSMACV report directly to the JCS.

Noting that the President and the Secretary of State had also raised this question at a recent meeting, Mr.

The JCS team concluded and recommended:

> The situation in South Vietnam has been reoriented, in the space of a year and a half, from a circumstance of near desperation to a condition where victory is now a hopeful prospect. . . . there are no areas of assistance which are deficient in a quantum degree. This leads to the conclusion that the current support program in Vietnam is adequate, and should be retained with only minor alterations as may be recommended by the Advisory Command. This view derives from the conviction that we are winning slowly on the present thrust, and that there is no compelling reason to change.
>
> At the same time, it is not realistic to ignore the fact that we have not given Ho Chi Minh any evidence that we are prepared to call him to account for helping to keep the insurgency in South Vietnam alive, and that we should do something to make the North Vietnamese bleed. . . . The more reasonable course [is to authorize] . . . the Assistance Command to build up a much stronger unconventional warfare capability in the Vietnamese military, and then directing it in a coordinated program of sabotage, destruction, propaganda, and subversive missions against North Vietnam.

[redacted]

Harriman told General Taylor, "What bothers us is that the basic command concept, namely that there must be the closest cooperation and coordination between our military and civilian activities, is not being carried out fully." Although there was cooperation between military and civilian officials in South Vietnam and in Washington, CINCPAC's location, said Harriman, slowed up decisions and led to military decisions that had not been "concerted" sufficiently with political and economic considerations. On 2 April the CJCS told Harriman that neither CINCPAC nor COMUSMACV believed the present command arrangements should be changed. The JCS were also satisfied. Harriman agreed not to pursue the subject further for the time being, but reserved the right to reopen the question if he judged it necessary. (C) Ltr, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to CJCS, 9 Feb 63; (S) Memo for Record, CJCS, "Meeting with Under Secretary Harriman with regard to Command Relationships between CINCPAC and COMUSMACV," 2 Apr 63.

> The team believes that unless the Viet Cong chooses to escalate the conflict, the principal ingredients for eventual success have been assembled in South Vietnam. Now, perseverance in the field, and at home, will be required in great measure to achieve that success.

General Wheeler's team added that the National Campaign Plan was a logical outgrowth of the marshalling process that had taken place in response to the Taylor report. It should not create requirements for great increases in US support and would offer reasonable prospects for greatly improving the military situation. "As such, it deserves to be supported." They also recommended that COMUSMACV's Comprehensive Three Year Plan for South Vietnam (CPSVN) of 19 January 1963 be accepted as a generally sound basis for planning the phase-out of United States support.[45]

Hilsman-Forrestal Report

Several weeks after the JCS team returned from RVN, a report on the situation in South Vietnam from a different point of view was submitted to the President by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Roger Hilsman, and a National Security Council Staff Assistant, Michael Forrestal. They agreed with the Wheeler team that the war in Vietnam was clearly going better than it had been a year earlier. But their final conclusion was mixed:

> Our overall judgment, in sum, is that we are probably winning, but certainly more slowly than we had hoped. At the rate it is now going, the war will probably last longer than we would like, cost more in terms of both lives and money than we had anticipated, and prolong the period in which a sudden and dramatic event could upset the gains already made.

The impact of US aid was beginning to be felt. Military aid, advisors, helicopters, and air support had given the RVNAF new confidence and for the first time since 1959 these

45. (TS-GP 3) "Report of Visit by Joint Chiefs of Staff Team to South Vietnam, January 1963," JMF 9155.3/3360 (1 Feb 63) sec 1.

forces were capturing more weapons than they lost. US aid for the strategic hamlet program was just starting to arrive, a US military advisor had now been placed with each province chief, and 20 of the 41 provinces would soon have a US advisor on rural development. "The government claims to have built more than 4,000 strategic hamlets, and although many of these are nothing more than a bamboo fence, a certain proportion have enough weapons to keep out at least small Viet Cong patrols and the rudiments of the kind of social and political program needed to enlist the villager's support."

Both men told the President that the program to arm and train the Montagnards should go far toward choking off the border infiltration routes. Twenty-nine US Special Forces teams were already training Montagnards and 11 more teams were on the way. By mid-autumn 1962 training camps had been set up in all the provinces bordering Laos, and a system of regular patrolling, it was hoped, would one day cover the entire network of trails in the mountain region. Already 35,000 of an eventual 100,000 Montagnards had been trained, armed, and helped in setting up their village defenses.

On the negative side of the ledger, the VC were still aggressive and effective and had recently inflicted stinging defeats on the RVNAF. Despite GVN claims of 20,000 Viet Cong killed and 4,000 wounded during 1962, the VC apparently still had the same number of regular forces--". . . it is ominous that in the face of greatly increased government pressure and US support the Viet Cong can still field 23,000 regular forces and 100,000 militia, supported by unknown thousands of sympathizers."

The Washington visitors were doubtful of the attitude of the people toward the GVN, pointing out that while they might resent VC tax collections, there might be just as much resentment and suspicion directed toward the GVN.

> No one really knows . . . how many of the 20,000 'Viet Cong' killed last year were only innocent, or at least persuadable villagers, whether the Strategic Hamlet Program is providing enough government services to counteract the sacrifices it requires, or how the mute mass of villagers react to the charges against Diem of dictatorship and nepotism.

Hilsman and Forrestal believed that the basic strategic concept developed in 1962 was still valid. The trouble was in the implementation of the concept. They criticized the

GVN for not having an overall plan keyed to the strategic concept instead of a variety of regional and provincial plans. They criticized the GVN also for wasting its available manpower, pointing out that there was a confusing multiplicity of armies in RVN: the ARVN, the CG, the SDC, the CIDG, the Hamlet Militia, the Montagnard Commandos, the Force Populaire, the Republican Youth, the Catholic Youth, several independent groups under Catholic priests, and even a small army commanded by a private businessman to protect his property in Cap St. Jacques. In all, there were half a million men under arms in South Vietnam, enough for 51 divisions if properly organized. "South Vietnam does not need any more armed men, but it does need to reorganize what it has."

Commenting on the domestic political situation in RVN, the Washington observers noted that while it was true that the Diem government was a dictatorship, it was doubtful that the lack of parliamentary democracy bothered the average RVN villager very much. The real question was whether the concentration of power in the hands of Diem and his family, especially his brother Nhu and his wife, and Diem's reluctance to delegate were alienating the important middle and higher level authorities of the GVN. The United States did not really have as much information as it should have on this subject. There was evidence on both sides, but at the moment the important thing was that US aid had encouraged all GVN officials and they seemed to be getting on with the job. "Both the American and British missions, for example, feel that Brother Nhu's energetic support of the Strategic Hamlet Program has given it an important push," the President's advisors informed him.[46]

In an annex for the President, Hilsman and Forrestal made several criticisms of the US effort in South Vietnam.

> (1) There is no overall planning effort that effectively ties together the civilian and military effort. (2) There is little or no long-range thinking about the kind of country that should come out of a victory and about what we do now to contribute to this longer-range goal. . . . (3) Among both civilians

46. (S) Memo, NSC Staff Assistant Forrestal for Pres, n.d. [25 Jan 63], Att to CM-243-63 to D/JS, 28 Jan 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 62-Jan 63.

> and military there is still some confusion over the way to conduct a counter-guerrilla war. . . . The American military mission must share some of the blame for the excessive emphasis on large-scale operations and air interdiction which have the bad political and useless military effects described in our report. . . . (4) In general, we don't use all the leverage we have to persuade Diem to adopt policies which we espouse. . . .

They went on to recommend the appointment of an Ambassador to South Vietnam who could coordinate the US effort effectively, although they emphasized "not to make any sudden and dramatic change but to keep the problem in mind when changes are to be made in the normal course of events."[47]

Balance Sheet

In general, by early 1963 there was widespread optimism among US officials, both civilian and military, about the progress of the war in South Vietnam. As the Secretary of Defense had said earlier in 1962, "Every quantitative measurement we have shows we're winning this war." The President said in his 1963 State of the Union Message, "The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in Viet-Nam."[48]

The communists themselves acknowledged that "In terms of territory and population, Diem made a considerable comeback in 1962," and at one point the NLF almost decided to evacuate the delta and retreat to the mountains.

> If 1961 was a 'Front year' in terms of territory and population gained, 1962 however must be largely credited to Saigon. With United States aid in men and materials pouring in from the end of 1961, a major effort was made to destroy and isolate the Front's armed forces, to push Front influence back from the gates of Saigon and other provincial capitals and to re-install Diemist power in the countryside. The use of helicopters and amphibious tanks to increase rapidity of

47. Hilsman, To Move a Nation, pp. 465-466.
48. Public Papers of the Presidents, John F. Kennedy, 1963, p. II.

movement and to avoid the devastating ambushes that the Diemist troops invariably fell into when they moved by road or river, caught the guerrillas off balance at first.[49]

Also by early 1963, however, the war effort in South Vietnam was coming increasingly under the scrutiny of the US press, much of which was far from optimistic. Press reports caused friction with the GVN, and even prompted President Kennedy to ask Roger Hilsman to examine the problem in his report on the progress of the war.

The situation would deteriorate in 1963 and be further complicated by political troubles in South Vietnam. Many of the conditions for continued progress in the war effort would disappear as internal divisions in RVN intensified.

49. Wilfred G. Burchett, Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerrilla War (2d ed., 1965), pp. 189, 193.

Refer NSC for concurrence

Chapter 6

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN VIETNAM THROUGH AUGUST 1963

The year 1963 opened with an incident that in many ways was a harbinger of things to come. An unsuccessful RVN military operation against the Viet Cong, followed by severe press criticism of the RVNAF, focused worldwide attention on the GVN, intensified the conflict between President Diem and the press, and caused a deterioration in US-GVN relations.

American efforts to support the GVN ran into more heavy going in mid-1963 when political-religious turmoil rose to dangerous levels in South Vietnam. The smoldering opposition to the Diem government that US authorities had deplored in the past flared, fanned by Buddhist protests against alleged GVN oppression. As the Diem regime grew more obstinate and intractable, many US officials gradually lost confidence in Diem's leadership. American public opinion became increasingly impatient with the GVN's actions against the Buddhists, and signs began to appear that US policy in South Vietnam would become unpopular. Third countries, France in particular, criticized the US role in Vietnam more openly, and began more serious efforts to encourage a negotiated settlement to the troubled situation in Southeast Asia.

The Battle of Ap Bac

Ap Bac was a settlement in Dinh Tuong Province, 35 miles southwest of Saigon in the Mekong Delta. Its name became the symbol for "one of the most costly and humilitating defeats of the South Vietnamese army and its United States military advisers," and for "the bloodiest single battle of South Viet Nam's four year war against the Communist Viet Cong." These were, of course, opinions, but once expressed, their reverberations were felt around the world.[1]

The objective of the Ap Bac operation, which was mounted on 2 January 1963, was to destroy a Viet Cong concentration and radio station. Although it was not known at the time, the

1. Washington Post, 1 Apr 63. Philadelphia Inquirer, 1 Jun 63.

REGRADED SECRET
DATE 16 NOV 1993
AUTHOR JS
DECLASSIFY ON: OADR

enemy concentration was a regular VC battalion. In the judgment of the senior US advisor to the ARVN 7th Division, Lieutenant Colonel John P. Vann, USA, the Ap Bac operation was a failure--the mission had not been accomplished and friendly casualties were higher than VC casualties. Although the GVN force was much larger, the VC force escaped with few losses. He attributed the failure chiefly to the poor state of training of ARVN and CG units; a system of command that never placed a Vietnamese officer above the rank of captain on or over the battlefield; a reluctance to incur casualties; the inability of the RVN forward air controllers to assess the situation and bring air strikes to bear on the actual targets; and a complete lack of discipline in battle that resulted in commanders at all levels and even individual soldiers refusing orders they considered distasteful. In more detail, these complaints were backed by the more than a dozen US advisors on the ground and by the air liaison officer.

The senior US advisor to IV Corps Headquarters, Colonel Porter, endorsed LTC Vann's critique and added his own observations of the "many glaring weaknesses" that had been noted during the majority of other operations in the delta. Most important among these were the refusal of the corps and division commanders to accept at their remote command post the situation reports and tactical advice of US advisors on the battlefield; the failure of the senior commanders to act decisively and enforce orders; and the failure of commanders at all echelons to instill in their units aggressiveness, dedication, and, above all, a will to win. Many of these weaknesses appeared to the senior corps advisor to be "characteristic of virtually all of the senior officers of the Vietnamese armed forces."[2]

The Viet Cong subjected the Battle of Ap Bac to a searching critique of their own. A captured document revealed that the insurgents were operating on the basis of sound principles of command and control, superb intelligence and security, good communications, and adequate logistics. They left nothing to chance. For every contingency, alternate plans were ready in advance. Orders, with few exceptions,

---

2. (UNK) After Action Report by Sr Adv 7th Inf Div (LTC John P. Vann), 9 Jan 63; Comment on 7th Div AAR by Sr Adv IV Corps, 16 Jan 63.

were promptly executed. The Ap Bac battle was anticipated, though details were not known to the Viet Cong.[3]

CINCPAC stated on 4 January "that only lack of aggressive leadership on the part of two Vietnamese commanders prevented complete annihilation of the Viet Cong forces . . . [and] that he would request Vietnamese Secretary of Defense Thuan to relieve both commanders." On 5 January, General Harkins remarked ". . . it might appear that we lost a battle but we didn't."[4]

American advisors were highly critical of the manner in which US press representatives handled the affair. It appears that the first reports on the "debacle" were filed from what MACV's information officer described as the "incestuous gloom of the Saigon bars," even before correspondents had reached the division command post. Subsequent reports were more objective, but in publicizing US criticism of the RVN performance, they did severe harm to US-RVN relations.[5]

Diem's Public Image

The foreign press in South Vietnam, largely American, found themselves in a situation where government officials alternately ignored them, accorded them cavalier treatment, or fed them cut and dried, euphemistic handouts. Resentful of this treatment, some newsmen reacted by reporting the activities and views of the Diem government in a critical vein. In short, Diem had a "bad press." During 1963 it grew worse.

The JCS team that visited the RVN in January 1963 had cited the poor relationships between the Diem government and the foreign press as one of the major problems of the GVN. "The mutual distrust and dislike between the Diem government and the foreign press," the JCS team reported, "particularly United States press representatives, has created serious public relations problems which impact directly on the war effort, both in the United States and in Vietnam."

---

3. (C) DOD Intelligence Info Rpt, IR 2903011563, "VC Document on Ap Bac Battle, 2 Jan 63," dated 1 May 63.
4. (S) Ltr, SecA to Hon. Carl Vinson, Chairman, Com on Armed Services, H.R., 2 Feb 63.
5. (TS) MACV, Summary of Highlights, 8 Feb 62-7 Feb 63, p. 172.

Newsmen charged the GVN with repressing the freedom of the press, with being unduly secretive, with issuing deliberately false bulletins, and with trying to use the press as an instrument of propaganda. On the other side of the fence, GVN officials regarded the foreign press as untrustworthy, prone to publish secret and false information from private sources, and biased to the extent that only the bad aspects of events in the RVN were carried in the press reports.

The RVNAF had been severely criticized in the press for poor performance. According to the JCS team, even members of the press were appalled at the flood of editorial punditry and cries of doom following the Ap Bac incident. But newsmen insisted that their information came from US sources. The JCS team admitted that this was true but said that the stories were based on ". . . ill-considered statements made at a time of high excitement and frustration by a few American officers." Nevertheless, great harm had been done, with public and Congressional opinion in the US influenced by the press toward believing that the war effort in the RVN was misguided and lacking in drive, and that GVN officials flouted the counsel of US advisors. The GVN naturally resented press reports that raised doubt as to the courage, training, and spirit of its armed forces. "Moreover," the JCS team reported, "relations between the United States diplomatic and military representatives on the one hand and the press representatives on the other is somewhat strained."[6]

The Hilsman-Forrestal report confirmed what the JCS team had reported. They assured the President that in general the US diplomatic and military officials in South Vietnam had good relations with the press. This was not true, unfortunately, of press relations with the Diem government. Hilsman and Forrestal believed that much of the fault for this lay not with the American newsmen, but with Diem. According to them, Diem wanted only adulation and was completely insensitive to the desires of the foreign press for factual information. He was equally insensitive to his own image and and to the political consequences of the activities of Madame Nhu and other members of his own family. He himself had shown tendencies to arbitrariness, failure to delegate, and general pettiness, all of which were reflected in his relations with the foreign press. After much effort,

6. (TS-GP 3) Report of Visit by Joint Chiefs of Staff Team to South Vietnam January 1963, JMF 9155.3/3360 (1 Feb 63) sec 1.

Ambassador Nolting had persuaded Diem to let the Defense Ministry give regular military briefings. Unfortunately, these briefings presented nothing more than "saccharine eulogies" of Diem and gave no real facts. "It would be nice if we could say that Diem's image in the foreign press was only his affair," Hilsman and Forrestal told President Kennedy, "but it seriously affects the U.S. and its ability to help South Vietnam. The American press representatives are bitter and will seize on anything that goes wrong and blow it up as much as possible."[7]

Ambassador Nolting had reported that the daily briefings of newsmen by RVN information officers had been slow and occasionally deliberately misleading. On at least one occasion the GVN spokesman had cut in half the true GVN losses in an engagement and had rectified his false statement only after persuasion by MACV officers. American officials limited their briefings of newsmen to matters directly involving US personnel and equipment. The US position was that the counterinsurgency was a GVN war and that it would, therefore, be improper for the United States to release facts or conjecture on "strictly GVN matters."[8]

The Press and US Military Participation in the War

News stories emanating from the RVN in early 1963 also placed increasing emphasis on the active role of US military personnel, particularly pilots, engaged in helicopter and FARM GATE operations in combat against the Viet Cong. The US Ambassador told the Secretary of State in mid-February that these stories were to be expected and that they reflected the gradual and inevitable "uncovering of facts by US journalists." By February 1963 the US-GVN air effort had reached a level of over 1,000 sorties a month. American casualties in FARM GATE operations were being revealed, and the chances were increasing that reporters would feature the combat role of US pilots and airmen. "General Harkins and I will continue to answer

7. (S) Memo, NSC Staff Asst. to Pres., n.d. [25 Jan 63] Att to CM-243-63 to D/JS, 28 Jan 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 62-Jul 63.

8. (C) Msg, Saigon 656 to State, 8 Jan 63.

queries by sticking to the operational training role of FARM GATE," Nolting assured the Secretary of State.[9]

The State Department notified Ambassador Nolting that the United States was concerned by these news reports of the US air combat role because: 1) it was a clear violation of the Geneva Accords; 2) the United States had stated repeatedly in public that no US combat forces as such were in the RVN, and these stories gave the lie to all high officials who had made this statement and gave substance to communist charges that the war was a US war on the people of the RVN; 3) the combat role of US forces might cause a Congressional investigation, since the Administration had repeatedly stated that the US role was limited to advisory and logistic matters.[10]

News accounts emphasizing the US combat role continued, and on 27 February President Kennedy took steps to curb them. As a result of a news story stating that US personnel now had authority to "shoot first," Secretary Rusk told Ambassador Nolting:

> These news reports are very damaging both here and abroad, and we must do everything possible to prevent them in the future. Our policy remains that American role in Viet-Nam strictly limited to advisory, logistic, training functions. Any activities such as FARM GATE which may be construed as an American combat role are not to be discussed with newsmen. This policy set at highest level at time of initiation of increased aid to Viet-Nam. It has not changed.

Nolting was instructed to inform all "official Americans" that they were expected to observe the policy rigorously.[11]

The Ambassador and General Harkins were fully aware of the problem posed by these news stories, but did not see how carrying out the instructions from the State Department would solve the problem. General Harkins had already briefed all of his command who were involved in the relevant operations on the US policy and its importance. But to instruct all "official Americans"--more than 12,000 if the term were interpreted literally--would not only be physically difficult, it

9. (S) Msg, Saigon 749 to State, 14 Feb 63.
10. (S) Msg, State 807 to Saigon, 15 Feb 63.
11. (S) Msg, State 828 to Saigon, 27 Feb 63.

would highlight the matter to a vast number of Americans who were at this stage only dimly aware of it. This would be counterproductive to the overall public relations problem; newsmen would charge "official clamp-down." Since it was evident that "secret instructions re chopper rules of engagement were leaked, an investigation is now underway here."[12]

Meanwhile, public attention was also focused on Vietnam by the report of a group of four US Senators headed by Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana. They had gone to Southeast Asia in late 1962 at the request of President Kennedy, and they published their report on 24 February 1963. Although the report concerned aid programs and policies throughout mainland Southeast Asia, its main focus was on US support of the RVN in its struggle against the Viet Cong.

While deploring the magnitude of military aid and economic assistance required to counter the communist guerrillas, the Senators conceded that cutting it was a risky undertaking. Even when victory had been won over the Viet Cong, they said, "a massive job of social engineering" would remain. "In the best of circumstances, outside aid in very substantial size will be necessary for many years."

The principal concern of the authors, however, was with the prospect that the same intensification of US support of the GVN could only end in the conversion of the struggle into an "American war."

> If we are to avoid that course it must be clear to ourselves as well as to the Vietnamese where the primary responsibility lies in this situation. It must rest with the Vietnamese Government and people. What further effort may be needed for the survival of the republic in present circumstances must come from that source.
>
> If it is not forthcoming, the United States can reduce its commitment or abandon it entirely, but there is no interest of the United States in Vietnam which would justify, in present circumstances, the conversion of the war in that country

12. (S) Msg, Saigon 778 to State, 1 Mar 63.

primarily into an American war to be fought primarily with American lives.

Criticisms of the Diem regime in the report caused a flurry of displeasure in South Vietnam and further strained US-GVN relations.[13]

Within a few weeks, the US Government Accounting Office (GAO) submitted to the State Department a report of findings on US operations in the RVN from 1958 to mid-1962 that severely criticized several AID operations, GVN shortcomings in mobilizing its resources, and GVN personalities. The report also impugned the good faith of the GVN in several US-GVN negotiations. The State Department, wary of offending the GVN, sought the advice of Ambassador Nolting on publication of the GAO report. "We realize such a report in the aftermath of the Mansfield Report could have bad effect . . . ." Nolting replied immediately, pointing out that the general political situation in South Vietnam, "though improving, is still fragile and subject to dangerous deterioration. We are not out of the woods yet." Continued foreign press criticism of the GVN and of US policy, followed by the Mansfield report and by signs of reluctance and disillusionment on the part of certain segments of US public opinion, had, he said, encouraged coup plotting. The result had been to force the Diem government to tighten, rather than ease, its restrictions. The Ambassador believed that an overthrow of the GVN would redound to the benefit of the enemy and would be a "bonanza for Hanoi." He recommended deferring publication of the GAO report indefinitely. This apparently was done.[14]

Signs of Friction

The problem of US-GVN relationships came to the forefront in early April 1963 when President Diem told Ambassador Nolting that the number of Americans in the RVN should be cut back gradually to "restore control at the top." In Diem's warning was implicit proof that the GVN was sensitive to the

13. "Viet Nam and Southeast Asia," Rpt by Sen. Mike Mansfield et al., to S. Com on Foreign Relations, 88th Cong, 1st Sess. NY Times, 25 Feb 63, p. 1.

14. (C) Msgs, State 871 to Saigon, 15 Mar 63; Saigon 820 to State, 18 Mar 63.

American presence, particularly at the lower levels. The United States by this time had 13,143 military personnel in the RVN, with about 1,900 more on the way.[15]

This matter had arisen as a result of negotiations that had been going on for some months between Ambassador Nolting and the GVN on counterinsurgency funding. The United States had insisted that the GVN establish a fund to take care of the costs of the strategic hamlet projects and certain other counterinsurgency programs. The United States was prepared to furnish only part of the money, and wanted a voice in how the money was spent. Diem said that if the United States had any say in how the funds for the counterinsurgency program were spent, it would undermine the authority of his government. He told Ambassador Nolting that US military and civilian advisors at the lower levels were already, by their "very number and zeal," creating the impression among the population that the RVN was becoming a US protectorate. He charged that while the senior US officials in the RVN understood his country's problems, many junior advisors were prone to "insist" upon their own views even though they did not have sufficient experience. These advisors were causing Diem's people to disregard the authority of local GVN officials, and were confusing, delaying, and disrupting GVN operations. There were too many advisors, Diem said; the United States should give him more elbow room to run his own affairs and develop his own institutions according to South Vietnam's background and traditions. Ambassador Nolting warned Diem that he was striking at the root of the US-GVN cooperative effort, which could bring a downward spiral of mutual confidence, cause curtailment of US aid, and jeopardize the effectiveness of the effort against the VC insurgents.[16]

Although agreement on the counterinsurgency fund was reached in May, Ambassador Nolting reported at the 6 May 1963 Honolulu meeting that US-GVN relations were somewhat "less good" than they had been six months earlier. The crux of the problem appeared to be Diem's increasing sensitivity to the US presence and an increased sense of nationalism. The Ambassador told the Secretary of Defense that the GVN did not really want the United States to pull out but would be happy to see some sort of a reduction. The problem was becoming increasingly serious because at times the United States appeared to be tampering with Diem's "political base."

15. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 882 to State, 5 Apr 63.
16. Ibid.

Despite the authoritarian nature of the Diem regime, the Ambassador said, the US Country Team was unanimous in the opinion that the current GVN leadership was the best the United States could get.[17]

In the midst of this crisis, Diem's controversial brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, struck another blow at US-GVN relations. In an interview with Warren Unna of the Washington Post, Nhu reportedly observed that there were "too many American advisers in Vietnam, that half of them could be sent back to the US, and that the other half exposed themselves too readily to enemy fire." He also criticized US advisors, stating that in such matters as guerrilla warfare "Americans don't know as much as we do." In other words, he said publicly some of the things Diem had told Nolting privately.[18]

Realizing that Nhu's inflammatory statements would increase congressional and public resistance to the US program in the RVN, Secretary Rusk took immediate action. He cabled Ambassador Nolting that there had been a "very strong reaction" to Nhu's interview on Capitol Hill, and instructed him to protest to President Diem in the strongest possible language. "Public call for cut in US forces by high officials like Nhu is likely to generate new and reinforce already existing US domestic pressures for complete withdrawal from SVN . . . ," Rusk pointed out. He suggested that if Diem agreed that US forces should not be cut, Nolting should persuade him to make a public statement to that effect. " You may say it will be difficult for us to justify to Congress greater US forces than GVN apparently wishes and that a public statement is therefore important."[19]

Nolting did see Diem, but the President would not repudiate his brother's remarks. Nhu did deny publicly that he had said what Unna reported, claiming he had been misunderstood. And in a joint communique of 17 May announcing the agreement on counterinsurgency funding, the GVN agreed to insert a statement that the "present level of the advisory and support effort is still necessary." Explaining his failure to get a stronger statement from Diem regarding his

17. (TS-GP 3) Record, Honolulu Conference, 6 May 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 62-Jul 63.
18. Washington Post, 13 May 63.
19. (S) Msgs, State 1084 and 1098 to Saigon, 13 and 14 May 63.

brother's charges, Ambassador Nolting told Secretary Rusk on 20 May, "Given family situation here, I am convinced that any more direct public repudiation by Diem of Nhu would have been impossible."[20]

Ambassador Nolting also told Washington that he was impressed by the vast difference between what was actually happening in the RVN and the impressions in the outside world of what was happening there. He felt that actual events were vindicating US and GVN policy and that the classical pattern of communist subversion was being broken.

> There is a fierce concentration on the internal problems here and a consequent neglect of, or insufficient attention to, the factors forming international opinion which are way beyond the grasp or control of the Government. It goes without saying that, even on internal matters, there continues to be "snafus" but the general average of internal performance is improving constantly, I am convinced.[21]

Diem's Domestic Political Troubles

The concentration on internal problems reported by Ambassador Nolting did not stave off for long a crisis in the domestic politics of South Vietnam. Opposition to President Diem's authoritarian and highly personal administration had been simmering for some time, although there was no strong alternative candidate on whom dissatisfied elements could focus their support. In August 1962 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already heard reports of behind-the-scenes political maneuvering and warnings of a serious struggle for political power if Diem should be removed.[22]

The true crisis was not precipitated until the spring of 1963, when arbitrary and injudicious GVN handling of a

---

20. (S) Msg, Saigon 1031 to State, 17 May 63. (U) Msg, Saigon 1038 to State, 17 May 63. (C) Msg, Saigon 1040 to State, 18 May 63. (S) Msg, Saigon 1043 to State, 20 May 63.
21. (S) Msg, Saigon 1036 to State, 17 May 63.
22. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/139, 7 Aug 62, JMF 9155.3/9105 (1 May 62).

Buddhist protest demonstration touched off a series of events that led ultimately to the downfall of the Diem regime. What had begun as a religious protest broadened, eventually unifying and hardening all the factions in opposition to Diem.

The immediate cause of the crisis was the GVN reaction to a Buddhist demonstration on 8 May 1963 in Hue, 400 miles north of Saigon. The Buddhists were protesting a government ban on the display of religious flags and denial of permission to make a radio broadcast on the occasion of the birthday of Buddha. Since Catholic flags had recently been displayed on Archbishop Thuc's (another of Diem's brothers) anniversary, the Buddhists charged that Catholicism was the officilal government religion and was being favored positively over Buddhism. RVN troops assigned to break up the demonstration fired into the crowd. Buddhist priests charged oppression and brutality by the Diem government. Since an estimated 70-80 percent of the South Vietnamese people were at least nominally Buddhists, the Catholicism of the Ngo family and many other government leaders was thrown into sharp relief.[23]

That the Hue incident merely focused long-held Buddhist resentment was evident from the demands that Buddhist leaders presented to President Diem on 14 May. These were: 1) to rescind the order against flying religious flags; 2) to grant Buddhists equal rights with Catholics; 3) to halt arbitrary arrests of Buddhists; 4) to grant Buddhists equal rights to worship and propagate their creed; and 5) to pay compensation to the families of the demonstrators killed at Hue. Diem was noncommittal; the most he would do was to agree to have the incident investigated.[24]

In the next few weeks the crisis worsened as Diem temporized and the Buddhists organized more demonstrations and became more self-confident. Meanwhile the United States, through Ambassador Nolting and Charge d'Affairs Trueheart, urged the Diem regime to give public assurance to the Buddhists that their religious freedom would be respected.[25]

---

23. (S-NOFORN) Dept of State RFE-75, "Diem Versus the Buddhists: the Issue Joined," 21 Aug 63. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1005 and 1047 to State, 9 May 63 and 21 May 63. (S) SNIE-53-2-63, 10 Jul 63.

24. (C) Msg, Saigon 1038 to State, 18 May 63.

25. (S) Msg, State 1159 to Saigon, 29 May 63. (S) Desp, Saigon A-776 to State, 10 Jun 63.

On 11 June the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk in protest against the GVN treatment of Buddhists caused a shocked, worldwide reaction to the events in South Vietnam. The United States found it necessary to threaten the GVN, "if Diem does not take prompt and effective steps to reestablish Buddhist confidence in him we will have to reexamine our entire relationship with his regime." Diem agreed to negotiate with the Buddhist leaders.[26]

Although rioting by Buddhists and mass arrests by the GVN continued, the discussion between the GVN and the Buddhists resulted in a formal agreement signed on 16 June 1963 by President Diem and Thich Thien Khiet, President of the General Association of Buddhists of Vietnam (GABV). The GVN recognized the Buddhist demands, and a special committee headed by Vice President Tho was directed to implement the accord and to investigate all complaints by the Buddhists. This accord ostensibly cleared up the entire problem.[27] But elements on both sides took up arms against the agreement. On the GVN side, evidence piled up that dissatisfied persons, encouraged and organized by Ngo Dinh Nhu, were intent on nullifying or circumventing the agreement. On the other side, "younger activists" in the Buddhist ranks were not content to see the rift settled so easily and expressed great dissatisfaction. Trueheart reported that these people had "without doubt tasted the blood of politics" and either saw the religious issue as a way for political changes or had discarded the religious issue for an outright political objective--a change in regime.[28]

Acting on instructions, Charge d'Affairs Trueheart called on President Diem on 3 July and asked him to make an address to the people of the RVN designed "to bridge the gap of understanding" between the GVN and the Buddhists by making further concessions to the Buddhists. He urged Diem to make a public statement soon, warning that if another serious Buddhist incident occurred before the statement had been made, "my government believes that the situation in Vietnam would soon

26. (S) Msg, Saigon 1168 to State, 12 Jun 63.
27. (S-NOFORN) Dept of State RFE 75, 21 Aug 63.
28. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1231 and 1259 to State, 22 and 29 Jun 63.

get out of control. The United States Government would also have to make its own position perfectly clear." Diem replied to the effect that he understood that the United States had a problem with its public opinion but that he felt this was largely a matter of exaggerated and inaccurate reporting of the news. He did promise to consider the proposition, however.[29]

The next day, a meeting on the situation in South Vietnam was held at the White House. President Kennedy was briefed on developments in the RVN by a team of State Department officials, including Under Secretary Ball, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, and Ambassador Nolting. The President had already announced Nolting's replacement as Ambassador by Henry Cabot Lodge, but Nolting was to return to Saigon until Lodge could take up his new post in late August.

Mr. Hilsman informed the President of the extremely heavy pressure being placed on Diem by the United States. He also told him that there was an activist element in the Buddhist movement and some basis of truth in Diem's view that the Buddhists might push their demands so far as to make his fall inevitable. Hilsman believed that no matter what Diem did there would be more coup attempts within the next four months. Ambassador Nolting believed, however, that if the United States repudiated Diem on the Buddhist issue, his government would fall. Diem would live up to his agreement unless he believed he was dealing with a political attempt to overthrow him.[30]

Ambassador Nolting's arguments carried the day; when he returned to Saigon on 9 July, he carried with him a personal message of confidence in President Diem from President Kennedy. After a call on Diem, Nolting reported that Diem's confidence in US intentions had been badly shaken by recent events. Diem was hurt by what he considered to be lies and calumnies; he was torn by conflicting advice, resentful of US pressure, and not completely in control of his government's actions. Nolting believed that Diem's intentions were good and that some of his resentments and suspicions of the Buddhists were well founded. Nolting still seemed to feel that patience was the answer and he cautioned against further strong pressure.[31]

---

29. (S) Msg, Saigon 24 to State, 3 Jul 63.
30. (TS) Memo for the Record, "Situation in South Viet-Nam," 4 Jul 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Oct 62-Jul 63).
31. NY Times, 10 Jul 63, p. 1. (S) Msg, Saigon 85 to State, 15 Jul 63.

Fearing that Washington might order some drastic action regarding "disassociation" without having all the facts at hand, Ambassador Nolting pointed out bluntly to the Secretary of State his view that the Buddhist agitation was now predominantly controlled by activists and radical elements whose aim was the overthrow of the Diem government. "It may or may not be deliberately connected with coup plots by military officers," Nolting stated, "but Buddhists almost certainly aware of these."[32]

Nolting did convince Diem to make conciliatory efforts, however. On the night of 18 July Diem made a brief speech asking his special committee to work closely with Buddhists to resolve Buddhist complaints, and calling on GVN officials at all levels to carry out scrupulously the terms of the 16 June agreement. Barricades around three main pagodas came down on the morning of 19 July, presumably following up on Diem's speech.

Nolting believed that, in making the public address as the United States had been urging him to do, Diem had made a major concession and should be in some way rewarded for so doing. On 19 July Nolting urged the State Department to have its official spokesman make a statement that would call Diem's broadcast "forthright and statesmanlike" and would term it an unmistakable affirmation of the GVN's intention to carry out the 16 June agreement.[33]

Secretary Rusk felt much encouraged by the progress that Nolting seemed to be making with Diem, but felt that the Buddhist demands were reasonable "even if motivated by political aims." The Secretary of State was willing now to let matters drift.

> It seems to us that the outcome remains obscure. We do not know whether Diem really will do the things he must if his regime is to survive. We are, therefore, inclined to continue for the present a public posture of noninterference in this internal affair, neither favoring Buddhists or Diem in public statements, but merely expressing approval of all helpful steps and hope for a peaceful settlement.[34]

---

32. (S) Msg Saigon 95 to State, 17 Jul 63.
33. (S) Msg, Saigon 109 to State, 19 Jul 63.
34. (S) Msg, State 103 to Saigon, 19 Jul 63.

Ambassador Nolting was "very much disappointed." A "wait-and-see" attitude by the United States at this point would, he believed, further undermine the stability of the situation and jeopardize US vital interests. It would encourage more agitation by the Buddhists and increase the prospects of a coup. Nolting conceded that the GVN had badly underestimated and bungled the Buddhist problem and it might, although he did not believe so, have gotten out of hand. But at last Diem had come up with something concrete and had publicly committed his government to a conciliatory course. The United States should take all available measures to encourage him in this course. Diem's statement and the response to it might offer the last chance to get the situation "back on the tracks."[35]

In reply to his protest, Ambassador Nolting was told that the State Department had now carefully considered the Buddhist problem against the backdrop of a successful counter-insurgency program. The current State Department "thinking" was summed up as follows:

> We are inclined to anticipate further Buddhist demonstrations and resulting unrest and believe more protest suicides should be expected. This view based on 1) continuing GVN failure to act promptly to meet legitimate Buddhist grievances and to show a true spirit of conciliation; 2) belief that Buddhist movement likely to become increasingly militant. Buddhists probably more and more inclined to regard the overthrow of regime as only possible solution, thus attracting growing support (and conversely) from other major elements plotting regime's overthrow, particularly in armed forces. We also expect that Buddhist unrest and demonstrations will increasingly agitate the urban populace, and that this agitation, to a degree, may be expected to extend to countryside also, with resulting slowdown in war effort. In these circumstances and in light growing crop of reports on coup plans, we judge odds favor attempted coup within the next few months if not weeks.

35. (S) Msg, Saigon 117 to State, 20 Jul 63.

For the time being, the United States would hold to its posture of "watchful waiting" while continuing privately to press the GVN to "demonstrate proper spirit" and to take all necessary measures to finally resolve the issue. A more active role

> runs the obvious risk of putting us in the position of having backed a loser, and even of prolonging crisis and increasing violence, with all the bad effects on the war effort that would flow from such an error. We may well come to the point where we would want to throw all our influence behind either Diem or an acceptable alternative leader or junta (preferably Constitutional successor supported by military) in order to stabilize the situation as rapidly as possible. But in light of the information available to us here, we do not believe the situation has yet jelled to that point. At this moment, though alternatives to Diem seem to be emerging it is not yet clear who and what they are.[36]

Ambassador Nolting took a more sanguine view of the prospect of Diem's settling the Buddhist problem and avoiding a coup d'etat. He believed that the heat was slowly going out of the crisis and that Diem was quite likely to survive this crisis as he had many others in the past. He reminded the State Department of his firm conviction that, despite its shortcomings, the GVN was the government with the best chance of carrying the counterinsurgency to a successful conclusion. "Therefore, without putting all our eggs in one basket, or alienating possible successor governments or leaders," he urged, "we should . . . help, by all means consistent with our own principles, to maximize this government's chances of survival."[37]

Although Ambassador Nolting reported on 28 July that he had learned that the GVN was "now solidly behind policy of conciliation (including Nhu, at least at the moment),"[38] the crisis took a turn for the worse on 4 August. A second bonze, a 20-year old novice, burned himself to death in protest against GVN policies. Madame Nhu told a CBS reporter that the Buddhists "barbecued one of their own monks whom they

36. (TS) Msg, State 112 to Saigon, 23 Jul 63.
37. (TS) Msg, Saigon 134 to State, 24 Jul 63.
38. (S) Desp, Saigon A-89 to State, 28 Jul 63.

intoxicated. And even that burning was not done with self-sufficient means, because they used imported gasoline."[39]

Nolting took a stern stand with Diem on Madam Nhu's conduct and told him he could not expect to maintain the present relationship with the US Government unless he took the matter into his own hands. Diem hinted that perhaps Madame Nhu needed a rest but would go no farther.[40]

The schizophrenic nature of the GVN Government and of Diem himself became more and more evident as further pressures to reform were placed on him by the US Ambassador in mid-August. He seemed genuinely confused, yet obstinately opposed to any further concessions to the Buddhists or to any effort to control his family's damaging actions.[41]

The ritual suicides continued amid mounting resentment on both sides. Madam Nhu greeted these acts contemptuously, declaring "If they burn thirty women we will go ahead and clap our hands." By 19 August a total of five Buddhist bonzes had burned themselves to death, and emotions were running at fever pitch. By this time also Ambassador Nolting had left his post and Ambassador Lodge had not yet arrived in Saigon.[42]

At midnight on 20 August, government forces struck the Buddhists a blow that was obviously intended to crush all further restistance. The main pagoda in Saigon was attacked by police and a GVN Special Forces group. All pagodas in Saigon were seized and surrounded by barbed wire. Fighting broke out in Hue and was quickly crushed by government forces. At least 1,000 Buddhists and students were arrested. The GVN was clearly in control. The policy of conciliation had been abandoned and no pretense remained.[43]

---

39. (S) Msg, Saigon 178 to State, 5 Aug 63. Time, 9 Aug 63, p. 21.
40. (S) Msg, Saigon 240 to State, 10 Aug 63.
41. (S) Msg, Saigon 208 to State, 12 Aug 63.
42. Time, 16 and 22 Aug 63.
43. (U) Msg, Saigon to State, unnumbered, 20 Aug 63. (C) Msg, Saigon 267 to State, 21 Aug 63. (S) Msgs, Saigon 269 and 299 to State, 21 Aug 63.

President Diem had signed a decree establishing martial law in South Vietnam during the afternoon of 20 August, during a meeting with his top military leaders. The exact mechanics by which the crushing of the Buddhist movement came about remain hidden. What is apparent is that the GVN, exasperated by its failure to resolve the problem neatly and irritated by US pressure, took measures known to have been espoused by Madame Nhu and her husband, rather than make further concessions. Diem had openly challenged the United States and repudiated the advice given him by the US Ambassador.

The first US action was a public statement issued by the State Department on 21 August:

> On the basis of information from Saigon it appears that the Government of the Republic of Vietnam has instituted severe repressive measures against the Vietnamese Buddhist leaders. These actions represent a direct violation by the Vietnamese Government of assurances that it was pursuing a policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists. The United States deplores repressive actions of this nature.[44]

President Kennedy then directed General Taylor to find out from General Harkins just what was going on in the RVN. Specifically, he wanted to know whether the declaration of martial law meant that Diem had full confidence in his armed forces or whether he had become a hostage to them. Also, he wished an estimate of the effect of recent events on the US-GVN programs in South Vietnam. General Taylor posed these questions to Harkins on 21 August 1963.[45]

In an immediate reply COMUSMACV stated that, in his view, Diem still had confidence in his armed forces or he would not have put them in charge at such a critical time. He had talked with General Don, new Chief of the JGS, who could not tell him how long martial law would last. Don had asked for General Harkins' support, however, and had assured him that the political crisis would not affect operations against the Viet Cong. Turning to the effect on US-GVN programs, General Harkins said: "As you know, our programs are completed. We

---

44. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1963-1964, p. 20020.
45. (S) Msg, JCS 3284 to MACV, 21 Aug 63.

have accomplished our part of everything we set out to do after your visit in the fall of '61--all except ending the war, and that is not far off if things continue at present pace." All that was needed now to end the conflict was the will and determination of the Vietnamese people to win.

General Harkins even felt the present situation might be a blessing in disguise since it had set the stage for a military takeover with a minimum of violence.

> Few bones were bruised as the police and military took over the main pagodas yesterday. Not that I'm for the military taking over--no indeed--but with the state of affairs as they were, it was becoming evident things were getting out of control, and some measure of authority had to be established. That it was done without firing a shot and thru the nominal chain of command precluded a lot of bloodshed which would have spilled if the rival factions tried to take over.[46]

Reappraisal of US Policy

The attack on the pagodas confronted the US Government with the necessity to make a decision on the question that had been developing since the Buddhist crisis began: could the war in South Vietnam be won under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem? The United States had patiently endured Diem's refusal to heed its advice to reform his government and to improve its image at home and abroad. In nearly every instance in which US officials had approached him on these matters, Diem had adroitly turned aside from the suggested course and gone his own way, heedless of the dangerous discontent spreading among his people. The declaration of martial law and the attacks on the pagodas, latest and most serious evidence of the Diem government's totalitarian nature, brought the United States face to face with some very hard facts. Diem, apparently influenced by the Nhus, had rejected out of hand the most earnest advice of the US Government. Diem's actions could endanger the joint counterinsurgency effort into which the United States had poured hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of men. More important, Diem's actions threatened the long-range security plans of the United States by

46. (S) Msg, MAC 1495 to CJCS, 22 Aug 63.

weakening the US position in Southeast Asia. Diem's value as a leader of his people against the Viet Cong was, in the eyes of US authorities, seriously damaged. If he could not command the loyal, willing support of the people of the RVN, he could scarcely carry the difficult and complex counterinsurgency program to a successful conclusion, regardless of US aid.

"The present crisis," intelligence officials of the Department of State said on 26 August, "has clearly altered the balance of power within the government and seriously damaged its inner cohesiveness. . . . The generals, heretofore essentially non-political in their actions, have suddenly been introduced into the power structure."[47]

On 22 August the State Department directed Ambassador Lodge, who had just arrived in Saigon, to find out what the distribution of power was in the RVN at the moment. The next day Lodge reported that the military leaders were ostensibly supporting the Diem regime and working together. He did not believe this surface indication counted for too much, however, as there were at least three power elements in the ARVN, represented by General Don, the new Chief of the JGS; General Dinh, the Saigon area commander; and Colonel Tung, commander of the Special Forces group in Saigon, generally regarded as Nhu's personal hatchet man.[48]

On 24 August Ambassador Lodge informed Washington that there was strong disaffection among regular army officers and said he had definite indications from RVN military leaders that they wanted Nhu removed. They reportedly had said that if the United States took a clear stand against Nhu and in support of an army action to remove him from the government, the ARVN (with the exception of Colonel Tung), would unite and carry out such an action. Diem could be retained, but only if all Nhu influence was permanently removed.[49]

Lodge did not accept all this at face value. He had no information to prove that the troop commanders in the Saigon area were disposed to revolt or that the military had agreed

---

47. (S) Dept of State RFE-76, 26 Aug 63 (hereafter cited as RFE 76).
48. (TS) Msg, State 235 to Saigon, 22 Aug 63. (S) Msg, Saigon 314 to State, 23 Aug 63.
49. (TS) Msgs, Saigon 320 and 324 to State, 24 Aug 63.

on a leader. Any action by the United States would be a "shot in the dark," Lodge cautioned, saying that the United States should bide its time and continue to watch the situation closely.[50]

On the basis of these messages from Lodge, however, State Department officials developed a draft message for Lodge containing instructions of an extraordinary nature. The message was cleared with all concerned departments (but not personally with the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, who were on vacation) and the President, and was sent to Saigon at 2136 on 24 August.

> It is now clear that whether military proposed martial law or whether Nhu tricked them into it, Nhu took advantage of its imposition to smash pagodas with police and Tung's Special Forces loyal to him, thus placing onus on military in eyes of world and Vietnamese people. Also clear that Nhu has maneuvered himself into commanding position.
>
> US Government cannot tolerate situation in which power lies in Nhu's hands. Diem must be given chance to rid himself of Nhu and his coterie and replace them with best military and political personalities available.
>
> If, in spite of all of your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must fact the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved.
>
> We now believe immediate action must be taken to prevent Nhu from consolidating his position further. Therefore, unless you in consultation with Harkins perceive overriding objections you are authorized to proceed along following lines:

50. (TS) Msg, Saigon 329 to State, 24 Aug 63.

(1) First, we must press on appropriate levels of GVN following line:

(a) USG cannot accept actions against Buddhists taken by Nhu and his collaborators under cover martial law.

(b) Prompt dramatic actions redress situation must be taken, including repeal of decree 10, release of arrested monks, nuns, etc.

(2) We must at same time also tell key military leaders that US would find it impossible to continue support GVN militarily and economically unless above steps are taken immediately which we recognize requires removal of Nhus from the scene. We wish give Diem reasonable opportunity to remove Nhus, but if he remains obdurate, then we are prepared to accept the obvious implication that we can no longer support Diem. You may also tell appropriate military commanders we will give them direct support in any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism.

(3) We recognize the necessity of removing taint on military for pagoda raids and placing blame squarely on Nhu. You are authorized to have such statements made in Saigon as you consider desirable to achieve this objective. We are prepared to take same line here and to have Voice of America make statement along lines contained in next numbered telegram whenever you give the word, preferably as soon as possible.

Concurrently with above, Ambassador and country team should urgently examine all possible alternative leadership and make detailed plans as to how we might bring about Diem's replacement if this should become necessary.

Assume you will consult with General Harkins re any precautions necessary protect American personnel during crisis period.

> You will understand that we cannot from Washington give you detailed instructions as to how this operation should proceed, but you will also know we will back you to the hilt on actions you take to achieve our objectives.
>
> Needless to say we have held knowledge of this telegram to minimum essential people and assume you will take similar precautions to prevent premature leaks.[51]

On 25 August, Ambassador Lodge called for a modification of his instructions, telling Washington, "Believe that chances of Diem's meeting our demands are virtually nil. At the same time, by making them we give Nhu chance to forestall or block action by military." Lodge and his advisors in Saigon did not believe the risk was worth taking, since Nhu was in control of the combat forces in Saigon. Lodge proposed instead that he go straight to the Generals without informing Diem. He would tell these men that the United States was prepared to accept Diem without the Nhus, but that the Generals could make that decision when the time came. "Would also insist Generals take steps to release Buddhist leaders and carry out June 16 agreement," Lodge continued. "Request immediate modification instructions. However, do not propose move until we are satisfied with E and E [Escape and Evasion] plans. Harkins concurs. I present credentials President Diem tomorrow 11 a.m." The State Department approved the modification in plans.[52]

Ambassador Lodge made his first call on Diem on 26 August. He conveyed to Diem, but apparently not in a "tough" manner, the displeasure of the US Government over the persecution of the Buddhists and particularly over the conduct of Madame Nhu. Diem said that he had done his best to keep Madame Nhu quiet and had spoken to her several times. He said jokingly that he had even threatened to take a wife. Lodge pressed Diem to make a dramatic gesture, such as liberating the Buddhist prisoners, which would have a good effect on US opinion. Diem said he had liberated most of them. He then rambled on for two hours revealing a definite distrust of his own officials and of the intellectuals of the RVN. It

---

51. (TS) Msg, State 243 to Saigon, 24 Aug 63.
52. (TS) Msg, Lodge to State, number and date unknown [probably 25 Aug 63], quoted in Memo, Forrestal for COL Berry, 7 Oct 63, OCJCS File, Vietnam Cables, Aug-Dec 63.

was obvious that he believed the Buddhists represented only a small minority of malcontents and that he was determined to crush them. He said he had decreed martial law to defend Saigon. He would give Ambassador Lodge no estimate of when martial law would end. At the end of the meeting Diem expressed hope that US activities in Saigon would remain disciplined and that there would be an end to reports of various US agencies interfering in GVN affairs.[53]

Meanwhile, officials in Washington were beginning to have doubts about the policy and plan embodied in the message sent to Ambassador Lodge on 24 August. President Kennedy, although he had approved the message containing the instructions to Lodge, was concerned particularly with the feasibility of splitting Diem off from his brother. The President had also learned that the telegram had not been cleared at the highest levels in the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency: Mr. McNamara and Mr. McCone had been on vacation when the cable was cleared. They had misgivings about the plan, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also beginning to be doubtful. At White House meetings on 26 and 27 August the policy was discussed again at some length. The President finally decided to reaffirm the basic policy of supporting a coup by the Generals, because there was a consensus that although the present course was dangerous, to do nothing would be even more dangerous. He did, however, want assurances that the coup had a good chance of succeeding, and reserved the right to withdraw US support of the Generals if it seemed they would not be able to carry through their plan. In any event, the United States would not take any overt action in support of a coup against Diem and Nhu. Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, and General Krulak (SACSA) all favored making one more approach to Diem to urge him to remove his brother's influence, but this was apparently not done.[54]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were especially concerned that there was a lack of depth and quality in the planning for a coup. They cited "the hazard to US military personnel implicit in the situation, the military implications of the term 'direct support' used in the 24 August cable, the apparently fragile nature of the State plan and the possibility of improper involvement of CINCPAC in the planning."[55]

---

53. (S) Msg, Saigon 340 to State, 26 Aug 63.
54. (TS) SACSA Chronology, Aug 63.
55. Ibid.

The question of improper participation by CINCPAC arose on 26 August. General Taylor learned that Admiral Felt had expressed opinions on the coup planning directly to Mr. Hilsman of the State Department on 24 August. On 27 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed on a message reprimanding CINCPAC. Although they recognized his need for occasional direct contact with Washington agencies out of normal channels on nonsubstantive matters, they did not "view favorably the expression of your views, other than to themselves, on substantive matters as reflected by your statement 'I was favorably inclined to a course of action such as that indicated in paragraph 6 of SAIGON 320'. . . ."[56]

During the next few days Washington sought daily assessments from Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins on the balance of forces between coup and countercoup elements in South Vietnam, on the determination of the coup participants, and on the security of the planned coup. There continued to be a divergence in view between the State and Defense Departments and between Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins on the wisdom of supporting a coup. In answer to a query from the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Harkins revealed on 28 August that he was not in total agreement with Ambassador Lodge. General Harkins still believed that the Ambassador should give Diem a final chance to rid himself of Nhu before going to the military. But he did not feel strongly enough about it to interpose violent objection. "My one hope," he told General Taylor, "is that whatever happens there will be little or no bloodshed and we can get back to the main purpose of our being here--helping these very fine people fight the war against the VC."[57]

Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins were in constant contact with the coup leaders [redacted] Pursuant to the policy in the 24 August cable, [redacted] were to determine when and how the coup was to be handled and had told their counterparts that: 1) the United States agreed that Nhu must go; 2) Diem's retention would be up to the coup leaders; 3) bonzes and other political prisoners must be released and the 16 June agreements carried out; 4) the United States would provide direct

56. (TS) Msg, JCS 2252 to CINCPAC, 27 Aug 63.
57. (TS) Msgs, State 256 to Saigon, 27 Aug 63; 268 and 269, 28 Aug 63; 272 and 279, 29 Aug 63. (TS) Msg, MAC 1557 to CJCS, 28 Aug 63.

support during any interim period of breakdown of the central government mechanism; 5) the United States could not be of any help during the initial action of assuming the power of state and the coup leaders were on their own and the coup entirely their action, win or lose; and 6) if the Nhus were retained and Buddhist grievances were not redressed, the United States would find it impossible to continue military and economic support.[58]

The Generals seemed reluctant to move ahead without further assurances, however. Lodge now urged:

> We are launched on a course from which there is no respectable turning back: The overthrow of the Diem Government. There is no turning back in part because U.S. prestige is already publicly committed to this end in large measure and will become more so as facts leak out. In a more fundamental sense, there is no turning back because there is no possibility, in my view, that the war can be won under a Diem administration, still less that Diem or any member of the family can govern the country in a way to gain the support of the people who count, i.e., the educated class in and out of government service, civil and military--not to mention the American people.

Therefore, he said, the United States should proceed to make an all-out effort to get the Generals to move promptly. To do so he asked authority to do the following: 1) have General Harkins repeat to the Generals personally the messages previously transmitted [redacted] and 2) if the Generals insisted, make a public statement that all US aid to South Vietnam through the Diem regime had been stopped, on the express understanding that the Generals would have started their coup at the same time.[59]

Following a White House Meeting to discuss this latest recommendation, the most specific instructions to date on US involvement in a coup were sent to Ambassador Lodge on 29 August.

---

58. [redacted]
59. (TS) Msg, Saigon 375 to State, 29 Aug 63.

> In response to your recommendation, General Harkins is hereby authorized to repeat to such Generals as you indicate the messages previously transmitted [redacted] He should stress that the USG supports the movement to eliminate the Nhus from the government, but that before arriving at specific understandings with the Generals, General Harkins must know who are involved, resources available to them and overall plan for coup. The USG will support a coup which has good chance of succeeding but plans no direct involvement of U.S. armed forces. Harkins should state that he is prepared to establish liaison with the coup planners and to review plans, but will not engage directly in joint coup planning.

Lodge was granted authority to announce suspension of aid through the Diem government at a time and under conditions of his choice. Washington believed it would be best to hold this authority for use in close conjunction with the coup and not for present encouragement of the Generals, but that decision was up to him.[60]

The Secretary of State sent Lodge a related message on the matter of whether or not to approach Diem before going ahead with the coup. He did not give any specific direction to the Ambassador on whether he should or should not call on Diem. He merely presented Lodge with the pros and cons, and asked for his further thoughts on the matter.[61]

Ambassador Lodge, replying on 30 August, asserted that it would be futile to attempt to reason with Diem prior to going ahead with the coup. He told the Secretary of State definitely that he was contemplating no further talks with Diem at that time. "I am sure," he concluded, "that the best way to handle this matter is by a truly Vietnamese movement, even if it puts me rather in the position of pushing a piece of spaghetti."[62]

---

60. (TS) Msg, State 272 to Saigon, 29 Aug 63.
61. (TS) Msg, State 279 to Saigon, 29 Aug 63.
62. (TS) Msg, Saigon 383 to State, 30 Aug 63.

Secretary Rusk, noting that "when the spaghetti was pushed, it curled," called for Lodge to reopen communications with Diem. "It seems to me," he said, "that we must keep our eye fixed on the main purpose of our presence in South Vietnam and everyone on the US side needs to review the bidding on this elementary purpose: Why we are there, why are we asking our fellows to be killed and what is getting in the way of accomplishing our purpose?"

Rusk pointed out that the actions of the GVN and the Nhus had eroded this purpose, but that Diem must now be approached and made to realize his political leadership obligation. He must make a systematic effort to improve his international position and to demonstrate to the American people that "we are not asking Americans to be killed to support Madame Nhu's desire to barbecue Bonzes."[67]

Talk of a Negotiated Settlement

In the midst of the political intrigue in Saigon, French President Charles de Gaulle made a statement on Vietnam on 29 August 1963, saying:

> The grave events taking place in Vietnam are being followed with attention and emotion. The work which France has carried out in the past in Cochin China, Annam, and Tongking, the links which she has retained with the whole country, and her interest in its development enable her to understand the Vietnamese people's trials peculiarly well and to share them sincerely. From her knowledge of the worth of this people, she can appreciate the role which they could play in present-day Asia, for their own progress and to the benefit of international understanding, once they were able to live in independence of foreign countries, in peace and unity at home, and in harmony with their neighbours. Today more than ever this is what France desires for the whole of Vietnam. Naturally it is for the Vietnamese people, and for them alone, to choose their means of achieving it; but any national effort undertaken

67. (TS) Msgs, State 294 and 295 to Saigon, 1 Sep 63.

On the morning of 31 August General Harkins called on General Khiem, [redacted] General Harkins' intention was to give assurance of US backing of the planned coup, in accordance with the instructions from Washington. Before he could give this assurance, he was brought up short by General Khiem's statement that the Generals had stopped planning "at this time" and were working on other methods. Khiem stated that the Generals were not ready as they did not have enough forces under their control compared to those under Diem and those now in Saigon. The Generals, he indicated, did not want to start anything they could not successfully finish. In reporting these facts to Washington, Harkins said, ". . . we have an 'Organization de Confusion' with everyone suspicious of everyone else and none desiring to take any positive action as of right now. You can't hurry the East."[63]

[redacted]

The news was received in Washington without great consternation, since it had been apparent all along that the plans were somewhat nebulous and the Generals' military strength somewhat doubtful. Discussion by US authorities, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, turned to what actions could best be taken to make the best of the adverse developments. It was concluded that the United States should not attempt itself to operate a coup, nor should it withdraw from the RVN until the war was won. The Secretary of Defense insisted that the United States move quickly to reestablish firm communication with President Diem.[65]

Ambassador Lodge acknowledged the failure of the Generals' coup planning on 31 August but obviously had not abandoned hope that some sort of coup might be forthcoming "at some indeterminate date in the future when some other group with the necessary strength and lust for office comes forward." He was now thinking in terms of salvaging as much as could be saved by an approach to the Diem government to attempt some sort of meaningful reform.[66]

---

63. (TS) Msg, MAC 1583 to CJCS, 31 Aug 63.
64. [redacted]
65. (TS) SACSA Chronology, Aug 63.
66. (TS) Msg, Saigon 391 to State, 31 Aug 63.

> in Vietnam with this aim would find France ready, so far as lies in her power, to organize cordial co-operation with that country.[68]

The French Ambassador in Washington, M. Herve Alphand, clarified the statement the next day, saying that it was not directly connected with the present situation, and referred to a long-term solution. Nevertheless, partly because of its timing, the statement touched off a welter of speculation. Some commentators even saw it as evidence of an intrigue between Hanoi and certain elements in Saigon (Nhu, it was rumored) to neutralize the South and unify it with North Vietnam. The main point was that de Gaulle's statement offered an alternative policy to the war, especially since Diem seemed to be on the way out: Make peace in South Vietnam, reduce the US presence, then one could see what effect that might have on North Vietnam and on longer range prospects for the unity of the whole country within neutralization.[69]

The first US comment on de Gaulle's statement came on 18 September, when the State Department released the following statement:

> . . . it would not appear to be in the interest of South Vietnam, of ourselves, or of the other free world nations to consider negotiating away what has been accomplished by the courage and heavy expense in life and effort of the Vietnam people.[70]

An analysis of the possibilities of a North-South rapprochement by the CIA revealed that the rumors had some foundation in fact. In September 1962, the Chairman of the ICC for Vietnam had reported that Ho Chi Minh said he was prepared to extend the hand of friendship to Diem ("a patriot") and that the North and the South might possibly initiate several steps toward a modus vivendi, including an exchange of members of divided families. Again, on 15 July 1963, Ho Chi Minh released a statement suggesting that a ceasefire could be arranged if the GVN ousted its US

68. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1963-1964, p. 20019.
69. Ibid. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Dept of State, RFE-78, 11 Sep 63.
70. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1963-1964, p. 20020.

military advisors and established a coalition government including communists. The proposal echoed the terms laid down by the NLF in 1962, and called for "agreements . . . to abolish some of the dangerous abnormalities of the present situation and to abolish the existing trade, communications and cultural barriers between North and South." There had been an appreciable difference in the GVN response to the 1962 situation and its present behavior. The existence of contacts between North and South had always before been denied, but now Ngo Dinh Nhu acknowledged contacts with the North and was dropping occasional hints that the GVN would not necessarily refuse to consider overtures from Hanoi.

Nevertheless, the CIA did not believe that the GVN was seriously interested in any form of rapprochement of lesser dimensions than reunification, e.g., de facto or formal ceasefire, or some variant of neutralization. Reunification could not be imminent, either, since Hanoi's frequently stated conditions for unification would involve the virtual capitulation of the GVN. A variety of motives, however, could induce the GVN to explore the possibilities of rapprochement with Hanoi: a) a desire to develop their own "sanction" to counter threats of US aid cuts and provide the GVN some maneuverability in face of US pressures; b) a general interest in maximizing available options during a crisis period (e.g., one in which they might find themselves losing the military support necessary to prevent total defeat); and c) a new willingness to listen to long-standing French arguments or overtures. The CIA expected such exploratory activity to subside if US-GVN relations or the course of the war against the Viet Cong improved, or to increase if either should deteriorate further.[71]

Thus at the beginning of September the United States faced another series of hard decisions about the future of the GVN and its own role in the guerrilla conflict. "In short," said a diplomat in Saigon, "all bets are off. In April we could see the end of the war in sight. But the Buddhist episode is the worst thing that could have happened . . . it is a new element which no one can handle, the government, the U.S., or even the Buddhists themselves."[72]

---

71. (S) Memo, for Dir, CIA, 19 Sep 63, "Possible rapprochement Between North and South Vietnam," Encl to Ltr, DepDir (Intelligence) CIA to CJCS, 26 Sep 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Aug-Oct 63). NY Times, 19 Jul 63, p. 3.

72. Newsweek, 26 Aug 63, p. 36.

Despite conciliatory moves, Diem had consistently held that the Buddhist crisis was provoked for personal or political gain and that the Buddhist leadership was communist-oriented. He thus denied the legitimacy of the grievances and underestimated the political impact of Buddhist hostility on the stability of his government. Diem saw the crisis in essentially security terms and remained relatively confident that he could eventually discredit the Buddhist leadership and reduce the protest movement to a minor agitation. In this he had been greatly influenced by the Nhus, who became principal spokesmen of GVN policy on the issue. The result had been a schizophrenic approach: Diem had made conciliatory moves but had condoned the inflammatory statements of the Nhus. The Buddhists had also hardened their stand as the months went by, making compromise with the GVN more difficult.

The sudden injection of the ARVN into the situation on 21 August had introduced an entirely new factor. The Nhus became more powerful but significant opposition to the GVN also increased--among Buddhists, students, the bureaucracy, and the military leadership. The balance of power in the GVN was altered, damaging the inner cohesiveness of the government. International support for the Diem regime also reached a low ebb, with a United Nations debate threatening, concerning the violation of human rights in South Vietnam. American embarrassment in this predicament was acute, and the decision was made to support a coup against the Diem regime. A first attempt fizzled out, and the United States prepared to make the best of the situation, convinced that winning the war against the Viet Cong was the most important task at hand.

Chapter 7

THE FALL OF THE DIEM REGIME

The last three months of the Kennedy Administration brought a great upheaval in the situation in South Vietnam. The direction that either the GVN or the United States would take remained unclear when President Kennedy was shot down on 22 November 1963. September and October were months of constant reassessment in US policy, marked by deep divisions of opinion within the US Government. Before a coherent plan of action had emerged, South Vietnamese generals staged a successful coup against President Diem and his brother Nhu on 1 November 1963. The new government set up by the Generals had hardly begun to function when the US President was assassinated. Amid the uncertainties about the future, however, the United States tried to carry through its programs in support of what was deemed the most important task in South Vietnam--the successful prosecution of the war against the Viet Cong.

Pressure on Diem

The collapse of the generals' plan to overthrow the Diem government in late August left the United States with no better alternative at the beginning of September 1963 than to put the best possible face on a poor situation. The United States had now to salvage what it could by reopening communications with Diem, hoping to influence his government into attitudes and actions more acceptable to the United States and to world opinion. While US representatives in Saigon sought to persuade Diem to take the measures necessary to reestablish stability and public confidence in the GVN, President Kennedy applied the strongest political pressure he had attempted to date.

On 2 September 1963, in a television interview, President Kennedy made an unprecedented public statement of disapproval of the Diem regime's policy vis-a-vis the Buddhists. "I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort and, in my opinion, in the last 2 months, the government has gotten out of touch with the people. The repressions against the Buddhists, we felt, were very unwise." The President added that he believed the Diem government could regain its popular support only "with changes in policy and perhaps with personnel" - a clear reference to the Nhus.

President Kennedy asserted that "In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. . . . All we can do is help, and we are making it very clear, but I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake."[1]

After a White House meeting on 3 September, Ambassador Lodge was told that it had become clear that the United States faced a major problem with world opinion, with the US Congress, and with the American public. The GVN must take some kind of action to restore its image so that the United States could continue to support it. Washington officials had in mind the effective silencing and probable removal from the country of Mme. Nhu and the releasing of the bonzes and students arrested by the GVN. Even so, it was not clear "whether these measures will suffice to restore sufficient confidence in the Diem Government within Viet-Nam to permit them to win the war." The United States might have to apply sanctions rather than let the situation get steadily worse.

In order to decide whether other measures, such as the removal of Ngo Dinh Nhu, were necessary, the State Department wanted to know as much as possible about Diem's attitude. Accordingly, Ambassador Lodge was instructed to "initiate dialogue with Diem soonest." Ambassador Lodge would tell Diem how the problem looked from the US side and would find out what Diem meant to do in light of US views. "You must dispel any idea Diem may have gotten from recent press reports that everything is okay in US-GVN relations and make him understand that we are coming to a point where our sensitivity is as important as his." The Ambassador was directed to stress the difficulty that the United States would have defending the actions and policies of the GVN in the now inevitable debate before the United Nations, and the difficulties that the Administration was already having with Congress over Diem's actions.[2]

Ambassador Lodge called on President Diem on 9 September. Lodge was blunt. He informed Diem that US public opinion could not condone the idea that American lives and money were being spent for the repression of human rights. He told Diem that President Kennedy had expressed doubt that victory was possible without a change in policies. He personally believed

1. Public Papers of the Presidents, John F. Kennedy, 1963, p. 652.
2. (S) Msg, State 348 to Saigon, 7 Sep 63.

that unless the GVN did change its policies, the United States might suspend its aid. The Ambassador also advised Diem to have Ngo Dinh Nhu leave Saigon, and return only after the end of December when the US appropriations would have been voted. Diem looked aghast at this suggestion and said, "Why it would be out of the question for him to go away when he could do so much for the Strategic Hamlets." Diem also defended his brother when Lodge charged that Nhu was head of the secret police and responsible for the 21 August pagoda raids. And he gave no ground on the subjects of continued oppression of the Buddhists and the growing press censorship in the RVN.

> I did not feel he was really deeply interested. He seemed totally absorbed with his own problems here and was justifying himself and attacking his enemies. Perhaps this is all part of his medieval view of life. He is constantly preoccupied with fighting back, which is a commendable trait in many ways, but makes it hard to get a new idea across to him.[3]

The Krulak-Mendenhall Mission -- Progress in the War

As another step in reestablishing communication, to get a current idea of what the man in the countryside was thinking about Diem, President Kennedy sent General Krulak, SACSA, and Mr. Joseph Mendenhall of the State Department to RVN. Both men sought "an answer to the basic question now troubling our government. Can we win the war against the VC with the Diem-Nhu government?" Mendenhall was to make an intensive effort to obtain "at first hand information on attitudes toward GVN held by wide spectrum of populace." This public opinion poll, to be conducted independently of any official GVN agency, apparently was designed to find out how the average Vietnamese citizen viewed his government following several months of turmoil. General Krulak was to look particularly into the grass-roots reaction within the GVN military (and where feasible, of provincial officials) to recent events, particularly those related to the Buddhist issue.[4]

---

3. (S) Msg, Saigon 455 to State, 9 Sep 63.
4. (S) Msg, State 349 to Saigon, 6 Sep 63. (TS) Msg, JCS 3453 to COMUSMACV, 6 Sep 63.

Before departing for RVN on 6 September, General Krulak reported to the White House that he had no evidence that the imposition of martial law in South Vietnam had reduced the war effort to any appreciable degree. There had been a small diminution in the tempo of operations as indicated by a drop in the number of VC reported killed, the number of weapons captured, and the casualty rates of the RVNAF, but it was not alarming.[5]

General Harkins confirmed this assessment when he reported to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 9 September, that in his talks with GVN and US personnel in the field, he had found no evidence of the "Saigon turmoil." He reported that "the attitude of the people towards the military was fine. There is even an increase in the amount of information the people were reporting on the VC. There were no strained relations between advisors and their counterparts. In fact, some said the relations were even better, militarily at least."[6]

The optimistic attitude that was prevalent with key US military leaders was echoed by General Taylor on 9 September. He informed the President that final reports of military operations during August indicated a favorable trend, "despite Saigon's preoccupation with the unstable political situation," and despite a high level of VC activity designed to create as much confusion and lack of faith in the government as possible. Citing a figure of 166 large unit actions (battalion equivalents or larger) for August as compared with July's total of 168, General Taylor was sanguine about the tempo of the military campaign. Small unit actions in August had increased almost 50 percent over July. The latest GVN figures showed a total of 8,227 strategic hamlets completed of a planned 10,592. A reported 76 percent of the rural population of RVN--9.5 million people--was now living under the protection of strategic hamlets.[7]

General Krulak's report, following a whirlwind tour of South Vietnam, was similarly encouraging. He had spent four days in RVN and held "substantive conversations" with 87 members of the US advisory system, including senior officers and enlisted men of relatively low rank. He also talked with

5. (S-GP 3) Memo, SACSA to ExecSecy, NSC, "Vietnam," 6 Sep 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug-Oct 63.
6. (S) Msg, MACV 1649 to CJCS, 9 Sep 63.
7. (S) CM-882-63 to Pres, 9 Sep 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug-Oct 63.

Ambassador Lodge, General Harkins, and 22 Vietnamese officers. His general conclusions were:

> the shooting war is still going ahead at an impressive pace. It has been affected adversely by the political crisis, but the impact is not great. There is a lot of war left to fight, particularly in the Delta, where the Viet Cong remain strong. Vietnamese officers of all ranks are well aware of the Buddhist issue. Most have viewed it in detachment and have not permitted religious differences significantly to affect their internal military relationship. Vietnamese military commanders, at the various echelons, are obedient and could be expected to execute any order they view as lawful. The U.S./Vietnamese military relationship has not been damaged by the political crisis, in any significant degree. There is some dissatisfaction, among Vietnamese officers, with the national administration. It is focused far more on Ngo Dinh Nhu than on President Diem. Nhu's departure would be hailed, but few officers would extend their necks to bring it about. Excluding the very serious political and military factors external to Vietnam, the Viet Cong war will be won if the current U. S. military and sociological programs are pursued, irrespective of the grave defects in the ruling regime. Improvements in the quality of the Vietnamese government are not going to be brought about by leverage applied through the military. They do not have much and will probably not use what they have.[8]

General Krulak's rather optimistic view of the progress of the counterinsurgency in South Vietnam was in direct contrast to that presented by Mr. Mendenhall. Mr. Mendenhall charged that the RVN was suffering military reverses and was losing the war in the delta. He said that it was his view, supported by Mr. Truehart, the Deputy Chief of Mission in Saigon, that the RVN would lose the war if the Diem government stayed in power.

---

8. (TS-GP 3) Rpt, SACSA, "Visit to Vietnam, 7-10 Sept 1963," pp 2-3, JCS Hist Div Files.

At a White House meeting on 10 September, the President expressed surprise that two observers could return from the same area with such divergent reactions. General Krulak suggested that Mr. Mendenhall had given the metropolitan viewpoint, whereas he had obtained a national viewpoint. Two other observers, Mr. Phillips of AID and Mr. Mecklin of USIA, gave gloomy pictures of the war, stating that the United States was indeed losing and that, contrary to what General Krulak had said, the military campaign was not going forward satisfactorily. General Krulak said that his statements regarding military progress were the views of many advisors who were doing nothing but observing the prosecution of the war, that their view was shared and expressed officially by General Harkins.[9] The result of the meeting was to reveal clearly the opposing points of view on the war in South Vietnam held by US officials.

Definition of US Objectives

Ambassador Lodge entered the debate on 11 September. He believed the situation to be worsening rapidly and said the time had arrived for the United States to use whatever effective sanctions it could to overthrow the Diem regime and replace it with another. He called for intensive study by "the best brains in the government" to determine how US aid to South Vietnam could be suspended most effectively. He suggested that while aid to the GVN might be suspended, actual aid to the RVNAF might be continued secretly, bypassing the government. He also wanted the United States to begin evacuation of dependents, "both in order to avoid the dangers . . . , but also for the startling effect which this might have." Lodge had noted the sanguine view of the fighting war shared by Generals Krulak and Harkins. He said he did not doubt the military judgment on this matter, but

> as one who has had long connection with the military, I do doubt the value of the answers which are given by young officers to direct questions by generals--or, for that matter, by Ambassadors. The urge to give an optimistic and favorable answer

9. (TS) Memo for Record, SACSA, "Meeting at the White House, 1030, 10 September; subject: Vietnam," OCJCS File, "Memoranda, Vietnam" (28 Aug-28 Oct 63).

is quite insurmountable--and understandable. I, therefore, doubt the statement often made that the military are not affected by developments in Saigon and the cities generally.[10]

The next day, again at the White House, the President's top advisors summarized their views on the situation in South Vietnam and on Lodge's recommendations. Secretary Rusk said that the United States "should not abandon Vietnam, and that we should not apply force to achieve our objectives." He believed Nhu was the center of the problem; the objective of the United States should be to persuade Diem that Nhu "is a prime impediment to the accomplishment of our joint purposes." Rusk did not believe that Ambassador Lodge had "come fully to grips with Diem" and that he must now do so. He did not believe that the United States should cut any aid that might adversely affect the war effort or affect the people directly. He cautioned against "repeating our China errors by taking steps to depose the present government without a firm basis for proceeding thereafter." In any event, he did not believe that time was "gravely pressing."

Secretary McNamara told the President that he was personally convinced that the overall military campaign was going forward well now. He agreed with Secretary Rusk that there was no urgency for precipitate action such as that proposed by Ambassador Lodge, which would make the fall of the Diem government a US objective. The Director of Central Intelligence, Mr. McCone, agreed with Secretary McNamara, saying there was good reason to observe the development of affairs for some time.

Thus the cabinet-level advisors were unanimous that the decision on an objective vis-a-vis the Diem government was not urgent. The President directed Mr. Hilsman to tell Ambassador Lodge to do what he could to quiet the US press representatives in South Vietnam, since they were "doing our programs no good." He also approved the idea of developing contingency planning for evacuation of dependents, but only at the Washington level for the time being.[11]

---

10. (TS) Msg, Saigon 478 to State, 11 Sep 63.
11. (TS) Memo for Record, SACSA, "Meeting at the White House, 1800, 11 September; Subject: Vietnam," OCJCS File, "Memoranda, Vietnam" (28 Aug-28 Oct 63).

Public Reactions

The press, both in Saigon and in the United States, became increasingly critical of US policy in Vietnam and of the GVN. Prompted by the public reaction, on 12 September Senator Frank Church of Idaho and 21 of his colleagues, representing both parties, introduced a resolution in the Senate calling for the termination of all military and economic assistance to South Vietnam unless that nation abandoned its "policies of repression" and tried to gain the support of its own citizens. Asked during a press conference to comment on the Church resolution, President Kennedy declared that he, too, felt that US aid should be used in the most effective manner. "I think," he said, "that seems to be Senator Church's view." The President had not opposed presentation of the resolution; he though it might be helpful as leverage on Diem.[12]

The situation was further complicated when the South Vietnamese Embassy officially informed the United States on 13 September that Mme. Nhu would arrive in the United States on 2 October. She had been asked to speak by CBS, NBC, ABC, the Overseas Press Club, and other groups, totalling one solid week of bookings. The Secretary of State told Ambassador Lodge: "We consider that her performing here will greatly increase the risk of Congressional cut of aid to Viet-Nam." He asked Lodge how Mme. Nhu's trip could be discouraged in a manner not attributable to official US action. No effective means for preventing the visit developed, and she arrived on schedule. Her visit was officially ignored by the US Government.[13]

A Program of Action

As a result of the 11 September White House meeting, Ambassador Lodge had been instructed to continue frequent conversations with Diem, although they might be frustrating. On 13 September he told the Secretary of State that he did not see any advantage to frequent conversations with Diem if

12. Ibid. Washington Post, 13 Sep 63.
13. (TS) Msgs, State 398 and 405 to Saigon, 13 Sep 63.

he had nothing new to bring up. Mere repetition of points already made would give an appearance of weakness. Visiting Diem was time-consuming, he noted, and "it seems to me that there are many better ways in which I can use my waking hours." Ordinary methods of persuasion did not work with Diem; Ambassador Lodge thought he needed some authority to delay supplies or funds in order to get through to Diem.[14]

A program designed to obtain reforms and changes in personnel within the GVN was finally approved by the President on 17 September. "We see no good opportunity for action to remove present government in the immediate future, therefore . . . we must for the present apply such pressures as are available to secure whatever modest improvements on the scene may be possible." No really strong pressures on the GVN were authorized. Agreeing with Ambassador Lodge's view that he should have some say in the granting of aid to RVN, President Kennedy authorized him to apply any controls he thought might be helpful. "You are authorized to delay any delivery of supplies or transfer of funds by any agency until you are satisfied that delivery is in U.S. interest, bearing in mind that it is not our current policy to cut off aid entirely."

At the same time, the GVN would be pressed to take certain actions in order to reestablish US confidence and support. These had been urged for some time, and ranged from leaving the Buddhists and students alone, through holding free elections, repealing Ordinance No. 10, and rehabilitating destroyed pagodas, to an extended vacation for the Nhus. Ambassador Lodge was told that it was important for him to continue talking with Diem even though he found it wasteful.

"Meanwhile there is increasing concern here with strictly military aspects of the problem, both in terms of actual progress of operations and of need to make effective case with Congress for continued prosecution of the effort." In order to assess the needs, Ambassador Lodge was informed, President Kennedy had decided to send the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to South Vietnam on a military inspection mission.[15]

Ambassador Lodge did not greet these instructions with much enthusiasm. He replied that virtually all of the courses

---

14. (TS) Msg, State 391 to Saigon, 12 Sep 63. (TS) Msg, Saigon 325 to State, 13 Sep 63.

15. [redacted]

of action that the United States wanted Diem to take had already been suggested by him to Diem at one time or another. He did not believe that the United States could hope for more than lip service. On the other hand, Ambassador Lodge had detected signs that both Diem and Nhu were bothered by his silence of the past few days and, according to one source, were even "desperately anxious" to know what the United States was up to.

The Ambassador believed that whatever sanctions might be used, they should be directly tied to a promising plan for a coup d'etat and should not be applied without such a coup being in prospect.

> In this connection, I particularly think that the idea of supporting a Vietnamese Army independent of the government should be energetically studied.
>
> I have, of course, no objection to seeing Diem at any time that it would be helpful. But I would rather let him sweat for a while and not go to see him unless I have something really new to bring up. I would much prefer to wait until I find some part of the AID program to hold up in which he is interested, and then have him ask me to come and see him.[16]

The Ambassador was not happy about his impending Washington visitors. "If Secretary of Defense and General Taylor come to Vietnam, they will have to call on President Diem and I will have to accompany them. This will be taken here as a sign that we have decided to forgive and forget and will be regarded as marking the end of our period of disapproval of the oppressive measures which have been taken here since last May." Ambassador Lodge said that Secretary McNamara and General Taylor should come with their eyes open knowing that Nhu would attempt to exploit their visit to his own ends. He warned that his policy of keeping silent, thus creating apprehension in Diem and Nhu and getting them into a mood to make a few concessions, might be endangered if "we make such a dramatic demonstration as that of having the Secretary of Defense and General Taylor come out here."[17]

---

16. (TS) Msg, Saigon 544 to State, 19 Sep 63.
17. (TS) Msg, Saigon 536 to State, 18 Sep 63.

The President replied personally to Ambassador Lodge that "my need for this visit is very great indeed, and I believe we can work out an arrangement which takes care of your basic concern." The President told Lodge that they could easily set up the visit as one that they had decided on together. They could even make it appear that Lodge had asked for advice because of his concern over winning the war in the current situation. President Kennedy observed:

> Having grown up in an Ambassador's house, I am well trained in the importance of protecting the man-on-the-spot, and I want to handle this particular visit in a way which contributes to and does not detract from your own responsibilities. But in the tough weeks which I see ahead, I just do not see any substitute for the ammunition I will get from an on-the-spot and authoritative military appraisal.[18]

On 21 September the President told Secretary McNamara what he expected of the visit.

> I am asking you to go because of my desire to have the best possible on-the-spot appraisal of the military and paramilitary effort to defeat the Viet Cong. . . . The events in South Vietnam since May have now raised serious questions both about the present prospects for success against the Viet Cong and still more about the future effectiveness of this effort unless there can be important political improvement in the country.

President Kennedy told the Secretary of Defense that if McNamara's prognosis was not hopeful, the President wanted recommendations on what action must be taken by the GVN and what steps the US Government should take to lead the GVN to that action.[19]

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor proposed to make an extensive tour of the countryside during their short visit to South Vietnam. Ambassador Lodge objected. "It is inconceivable to me that direct questions asked on a whirlwind tour of the countryside can possibly elicit any new and deep insights into the situation which you do not already possess."

---

18. (TS) Msg, State 431 to Saigon, 18 Sep 63.
19. (TS) Memo, Pres to SecDef, 21 Sep 63.

He also pointed out that the timing of the Taylor-McNamara visit might be interpreted as interference in the elections that were to take place on 27 September. He suggested postponement of the trip and a change in itinerary that would not take the inspecting party out of Saigon. Secretary McNamara told Ambassador Lodge that he had talked the matter over with the President and that the trip was still on as scheduled. The trip could not be postponed beyond 27 September if it was to have the desired impact on Congressional leaders. "We may well be charged with interference in the election, no matter what we do," McNamara said, "but I am inclined to believe that a clearly military-related program as presently proposed on September 25-27 would be preferable from this standpoint to remaining in Saigon." The Secretary of Defense told the Ambassador that he was particularly anxious to be in a position to report to the President on the military effort, and believed that to do so he and General Taylor would have to make extensive field trips.[20]

The Washington visitors arrived in Saigon on 24 September. After a tour of the country, Ambassador Lodge, the Secretary of Defense, General Taylor, and General Harkins met with President Diem and Secretary Thuan on 29 September.

Secretary McNamara made particularly clear the US disapproval of the GVN's internal policies and there was, according to Ambassador Lodge, no chance that Diem did not understand. The meeting also made it clear to Diem that there was no rift between the State and Defense Departments. General Taylor and Ambassador Lodge joined with Secretary McNamara in stressing the importance of Diem's government taking positive steps to improve its image.[21]

President Diem asked General Taylor to give him a confidential report on the military situation as he had observed it during his tour of RVN in the past week. On 2 October 1963 General Taylor sent Diem a personal letter criticizing the military situation and calling for some changes. Taylor told Diem that until the "recent political disturbances" he had been fully confident of a GVN victory over the Viet Cong. But now a serious doubt hung over his hopes for the future.

---

20. (S) Msg, Saigon 577 to State, 22 Sep 63. (S) Msg, DEF 937502 to Saigon, 21 Sep 63.
21. (TS) Msg, Saigon 612 to State, 29 Sep 63.

"Can we win together in the face of the reaction to the measures taken by your government against the Buddhists and the students?"

Taylor judged the military situation in the I, II, and III Corps areas to be generally good although he cited the case of a division in the III Corps that had not been getting into action as much as it should. As a result, he believed the full potential of the RVNAF in this area was not being exploited. It was in the delta, however, that there was real trouble with the Viet Cong. General Taylor recommended regrouping of forces and centering RVN strength in the delta (IV Corps) area. He criticized the strategic hamlet program in the delta as being inadequate to meet the standards originally set for the program, and he called for clear-and-hold operations by GVN forces rather than the easier sweeping operations. He also criticized the diversion of men from combat units to headquarters and administrative duties. "Headquarters soldiers do not hurt the Viet Cong. Infantry with rifles in the jungle do."

General Taylor told Diem, however, that his talks with scores of GVN and US officers in RVN had convinced him that the VC insurgency in the north and center could be reduced to little more than sporadic incidents by the end of 1964, and that the campaign in the delta could be ended by the end of 1965. These judgments, he hastened to add, were predicated on the assumption that the GVN met certain conditions, energizing all agencies, military and civil, to a higher output of activity than had thus far been achieved. Ineffective commanders and province officials should be replaced as soon as identified. General Taylor made few political references, but did call for the restoration of domestic tranquility as a prerequisite for an effective campaign against the VC.[22]

The McNamara-Taylor Recommendations

Upon their return from RVN, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor presented a joint report to President Kennedy. Neither the Secretary of Defense nor the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, saw any evidence building up of a successful coup d'etat against Diem. They recommended against any US initiative to encourage a change in the government. They believed, however,

22. (TS) Msg, MACV 701 to JCS, 1 Oct 63.

that the United States should "seek urgently to identify and build contacts with an alternative leadership, if and when it appears."

On the military side, they concluded that: 1) the GVN military leadership, while concerned over unrest in the cities, was principally oriented toward winning the war against the VC and would continue to carry out their military responsibilities; 2) the military campaign was continuing without let-up and promised victory, probably by the end of 1965; 3) the progress of the war and growing GVN capabilities warranted the withdrawal of about 1,000 US military personnel by the end of 1963; 4) barring serious political upset or new tensions, the insurgency could be reduced to sporadic banditry and brought generally under control by the end of 1965; 5) the increasing unpopularity of the Diem-Nhu government was generating forces of tension that could negate or reverse the military progress that had been made over the past 18 months; and 6) pressures available to the United States to move Diem and Nhu to moderation must be exerted, acknowledging the possibility that none carried assurance that its application would be successful. There was also a caveat that pressures could not be applied for more than two to four months without adversely affecting the war effort.[23]

The President's first action on receipt of the report was to issue a statement, saying in part,

> The political situation in South Viet Nam remains deeply serious. The United States has made clear its continuing opposition to any repressive actions in South Viet Nam. While such actions have not yet significantly affected the military effort, they could do so in the future. It remains the policy of the United States in South Viet Nam, as in other parts of the world, to support the efforts of the people of that country to defeat aggression and to build a peaceful and free society.

The statement, obviously made with the US Congress and public in mind, also included the forecast that US aid would not be needed after the VC had been suppressed, which should be by the end of 1965. President Kennedy also announced that by

23. (TS) Memo, SecDef and CJCS to Pres, "Report of McNamara/Taylor Mission to South Vietnam," 2 Oct 63, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug-Oct 63.

the end of 1963 the situation would allow the withdrawal of about 1,000 US military personnel.[24]

The President approved the McNamara-Taylor recommendations for action almost without change. Instructions to this effect were sent to Ambassador Lodge on 5 October. The actions were designed to show to the Diem government the US displeasure at the GVN's political policies and activities and to create substantial uncertainty as to the future intentions of the United States. The Ambassador was told to suspend new commitments in the AID Commodities Import Program. Under this policy the second quarter allocation of $20-25 million would be withheld from the GVN, although it would not be publicly announced. Deliveries under PL 480, including a pending supplementary agreement for $2.9 million worth of condensed milk (a five-months' supply for the RVN), would be stalled. Milk delivery would not be suspended outright, but month to month agreements would be required, this slowing down deliveries and making the GVN aware of the situation. On 1 November actions on other PL 480 items (wheat, flour, and raw cotton) would become due and would be referred to Washington for decision. The pending balance of loan payments on two of Diem's favorite projects, the Saigon-Cholon Waterworks ($10 million) and the Saigon electric power project ($4 million), would be "suspended for review" and Ambassador Lodge should so inform the GVN, without comment and without public announcement.

The United States would no longer furnish support to military forces not under the effective military control of the JGS and committed to field operations. Specifically, this meant no support for Col. Tung's Special Forces, and certain other Civil Guard and "civilian airborne ranger" units, which were actually being held as private troops by Ngo Dinh Nhu.

> Your policy toward the GVN of cool correctness in order to make Diem come to you is correct. You should continue it. However, we realize it may not work and that at some later time you may have to go to Diem to ensure he understands over-all US policy. Decision of when this becomes imperative rests with you, in light of your assessment of the situation.

---

24. (U) Msg, State 517 to Saigon, 2 Oct 63.

If, as was hoped, Diem grew alarmed at these signs of US disapproval and asked the US Ambassador what he could do about it, Ambassador Lodge was to tell him that he must take positive steps to turn his government from its authoritarian course back to democracy. He was to avoid making specific demands on Diem, but he was furnished a list of things he might ask Diem to do if the situation warranted. Among the political actions suggested were: 1) release of students and resumption of normal university life; 2) specific concessions to the Buddhists; 3) re-emphasis on the political aspects of the strategic hamlet program; 4) cessation of police brutality and terrorist methods; 5) restoration of civil liberties; 6) reduction of the influence of the Nhus; 7) cessation of public statements attacking and slandering the United States.

Finally, to get on with the war most effectively,

> The burden of pressure for military actions should be assumed by General Harkins in direct conversations with Diem and others under your general guidance without awaiting Diem's initiative since the continuing posture of consultative cooperation on military matters should not be broken.[25]

The military instructions sent to Admiral Felt and General Harkins on the same day were identical with General Taylor's 2 October recommendations to Diem. COMUSMACV was directed to review with the GVN those changes in military plans and programs necessary to complete the military campaign in the northern and central areas (I, II, and III Corps areas) by the end of 1964 and in the delta (IV Corps) by the end of 1965. Among the changes proposed were 1) a shift of military emphasis and strength to the delta; 2) an increase in tempo of military operations in all Corps areas, so that all combat troops were in the field an average of 20 days out of 30 and static missions were ended; 3) emphasis on "clear-and-hold" operations instead of terrain sweeps with little permanent value; 4) expansion of combat units to full authorized strength; 5) acceleration of the training and arming of the hamlet militia, especially in the delta; 6) consolidation of the strategic hamlet program, especially in the delta, and action to insure that future strategic hamlets were not built until they could be protected and until civic action programs could be introduced.

25. (TS) Msg, State 534 to Saigon, 5 Oct 63.

The US training program for the RVNAF would be accelerated as much as necessary to insure that the GVN could take over the entire operation against the VC by the end of 1965. CINCPAC was also directed to carry out the plan to withdraw 1,000 US military personnel by the end of 1963.[26]

Actual planning for the withdrawal of some US forces from South Vietnam had begun at the 7 May 1963 Honolulu meeting, when the Secretary of Defense indicated that he was considering an arbitrary withdrawal of about 1,000 men. He was convinced that the United States needed a specific withdrawal plan to give evidence both at home and abroad that conditions in RVN were improving. He directed CINCPAC to prepare a plan "based on the assumption that the progress of the counterinsurgency would warrant such a move," to provide for the withdrawal of US units, as opposed to individuals, by replacing them with selected and specially trained RVNAF units.[27]

CINCPAC submitted a plan on 21 July 1963, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the plan to the Secretary of Defense on 20 August. They recommended that he approve it for planning purposes, but withhold a final decision until late October pending a reevaluation of the situation in South Vietnam. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that no US units should be withdrawn from the Republic of Vietnam for purely psychological purposes until the political and religious tensions now confronting the Government of Vietnam have ceased." The Secretary of Defense accepted the JCS recommendation, and the final decision to remove the men was made after the McNamara-Taylor visit to South Vietnam in October. The approved plan called for withdrawal of 1,000 men in four increments beginning on 25 November and ending on 5 December 1963.[28]

---

26. (TS) Msg, JCS 2792 to CINCPAC, 5 Oct 63.
27. (S) Record, Honolulu Conferences, 7 May 63, JMF 5401 (8 May 63). (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9820 to CINCPAC, 9 May 63.
28. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 212210Z Jul 63. (S-GP 4) JCSM-629-63 to SecDef, 20 Aug 63, JMF 9155.3/3440 (26 May 63). (S) Msg, JCS 2388 to CINCPAC, 6 Sep 63.

Progress Reports

On 14 October President Kennedy asked Ambassador Lodge for an evaluation of the results being achieved from the instruction of 5 October.[29] The first of his questions was "Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?" In his answer on 16 October, Ambassador Lodge said: "We appear to be doing little more than holding our own." To him the counterinsurgency looked to be a long, smoldering struggle, with political and military aspects intertwined, each of which was stubborn in its own way. Ambassador Lodge pointed out to the President that the US presence was a stabilizing influence in RVN and in Southeast Asia; it also kept the GVN from being overthrown. But the United States could not, he said, make the people of South Vietnam like the GVN and this fact could ultimately ruin all the military efforts to put down the VC.

A second Presidential question was "Is the government responding at any point to our three-fold need for improvement in (a) campaigns against the VC, (b) internal political developments, and (c) actions affecting relations with American people and government?" Lodge answered part (a) by citing a shift in boundaries and reallocation of RVN forces, but said with regard to the other two parts of the question that it was perhaps too early to conclude that the GVN would not make some positive moves, but that it was now doing the opposite of what the United States wanted.

The President had asked also about evidence of a strengthening or weakening of the effectiveness of the GVN in relation to its own people. Lodge replied that the GVN had some of the powers of a police state, but that it was not a thoroughly strong police state, because it was not efficient and the VC served as a large and well-organized underground movement against it. The people, or at least the vast majority, were mainly interested in being left alone.

29. (TS) Msg, State 576 to Saigon, 14 Oct 63.

In general, Ambassador Lodge said, "So far we appear to be getting virtually no effect from our actions . . . but we would not have expected effects this early." The withholding of commercial imports had not brought any request from Diem to see Lodge.

> Frankly, I do not expect him to speak to me about it because of his suspicion that if he asks me to do something for him, I would ask him what he is prepared to do for the US. He can, of course, dip into his Foreign Exchange Reserves to meet the cost of the Army for a few months, and, in my judgment, that is what he ought to do. If the Army does not mean that much to him, then how can he expect it to mean so much to us? But I oppose continuing to withhold commercial imports to a point where an economic crisis is produced which might bring about a popular outbreak. This could be extremely dangerous and might result in important and perhaps irreversible Communist gains.[30]

General Taylor told Admiral Felt on 17 October that he wished to have reports from General Harkins paralleling those submitted by Ambassador Lodge. COMUSMACV should report frequently and in greater detail than the Ambassador on "purely military reactions." He specifically wanted to know whether General Harkins had presented the proposals to Diem as directed in the 5 October instructions and, if so, how they had been received.[31]

General Harkins reported on 19 October that while he had not had a personal audience with President Diem since the Taylor-McNamara visit, he had sent a letter to Secretary Thuan embodying the major points of Taylor's personal letter to Diem. He had also written to Diem proposing a change in Corps boundaries to shift emphasis to the delta, and this action had been approved by Diem to be effective 1 November.[32]

---

30. (TS) Msg, Saigon 712 to State, 16 Oct 63.
31. (TS) Msg, JCS 4012 to CINCPAC, 17 Oct 63.
32. (TS) Msg, MACV 8250 to CJCS, 19 Oct 63.

Coup Plotting Again Emerges

Plotting against the Diem government had not ceased at the end of August. The plotters had merely gone farther underground. The conditions that brought about the plotting in the first place had not ameliorated; indeed they had grown somewhat worse as September passed. In early October the plotters again established contact [redacted]

On 2 October, [redacted] was approached by General Tran Van Don, Chief of the JGS, and told that General Duong Van Minh ("Big Minh") wished to see him privately. The US Ambassador approved the meeting, which was held on 5 October. General Minh told [redacted] of a plan to seize control of the GVN by a group of generals, headed by himself and including Generals Don, Tran Thien Khiem, and Tran Van Kim. General Minh wanted assurances that the United States would not attempt to thwart the plan. He stated that neither he nor his fellow conspirators had any political ambitions. Their only purpose in taking over the government would be to win the war against the VC. [redacted] made no commitments, but agreed to see Minh again in the near future.[33]

Ambassador Lodge immediately asked for instructions from the Secretary of State, saying that while neither he nor General Harkins had any great faith in General Big Minh, he had to make some sort of reply to his approach. Ambassador Lodge said that both he and General Harkins believed [redacted] should assure Minh that the US would not try to thwart his plans and should offer to review all but assassination plans. Minh should also be assured that US aid would be continued to South Vietnam under a government that promised to gain support of the people and to win the war against the communists.[34]

[redacted]

33. [redacted]

34. [redacted]

[redacted]

On the heels of this statement, Ambassador Lodge was given "additional general thoughts which have been discussed with the President." He was told that while the US did not wish to stimulate a coup, it did not want to leave the impression that it would thwart a change of government nor deny economic and military assistance to a new regime if it appeared capable of increasing the effectiveness of the military effort, insuring popular support to win the war, and improving working relations with the United States. He was advised to have [redacted] tell Minh that until he had more detailed information showing clearly that the Generals' plans had a high prospect of success, he could not present the case to "responsible policy officials" with any degree of seriousness.[36]

No further significant contacts occurred until 20 October when Colonel Khuong, a member of General Don's staff, approached a US officer and asked him to secure US assurances of recognition and support following a coup. He stated that four ARVN generals and six colonels were prepared to strike and named General Big Minh as one of the conspirators.[37]

This approach brought General Harkins into the matter. On 23 October, General Don contacted [redacted] He stated that the generals' coup committee had decided to take advantage of the RVN national holiday ordered for 26 October to stage a coup within the week. But on 22 October, Don said, he had been called to task by General Harkins because Colonel Khuong had approached a US officer. According to Don, General Harkins stated that this was the wrong time for a coup; the war was going well, and Colonel Khuong should stop his planning. General Don said that word of Khuong's

35. [redacted]
36. [redacted].
37. (TS) Msg, USARMA SAIGON 199 to SecDef, 21 Oct 63.

overtures to the US officer had reached Diem and that, as a result, two key ARVN divisions had been extended in their assignments outside of Saigon. These units had been counted on by the generals for their coup operations. General Don repudiated Khuong and indicated that he would be disciplined by the coup committee. [redacted] then challenged Don to produce proof that the coup committee actually existed and that there was a plan. Don promised to turn over the plans for political organization to the Ambassador on 24 October.[38]

In conversations with the Ambassador on the afternoon of 23 October, General Harkins, whom the Ambassador had mistakenly believed to be absent in Bangkok at the time he informed Washington of the Khuong fiasco, confirmed that he had indeed warned Don about the coup activities of his subordinate. According to Ambassador Lodge's report to Washington, General Harkins added that it was his intention to discourage GVN officers from approaching US officers on political matters, as he wished to focus their attention on their military duties. Ambassador Lodge reported that when he reminded General Harkins of the guidance contained in the 6 October Washington message, the latter stated that he had understood the messages to say that the United States was not now in favor of a coup. "I explained," Ambassador Lodge said,

> That while it was true that the USG did not desire to initiate a coup, we had instructions from the highest levels not to thwart any change of government which gives promises of increasing the effectiveness of the military effort, insuring popular support to win the war, and improving working relations with the U.S. . . . General Harkins expressed regret if he had inadvertently upset any delicate arrangements in progress and added that he would inform General Don that his remarks of 22 October did not convey official USG thinking.[39]

---

38. [redacted]
39. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1906 to State, 23 Oct 63.

General Harkins' version of what happened between him and General Don and between him and Ambassador Lodge was somewhat different from that reported by the Ambassador. General Harkins told General Taylor that he had not discussed coup planning with Don but had merely told him of Khuong's approach. "Don was surprised and told me he thought he had stopped all that. [redacted] is the first indication to me since your visit that the General Group was again in business." General Harkins said he was not trying to thwart a change in government but suggested a good hard look at the group's proposals. "There are so many coup groups making noises, unless elements of all are included, I'm afraid there will be a continuous effort to upset whoever gains control for sometime out and this to me will interfere with the war effort."[40]

On 25 October [redacted] stated that General Don had informed [redacted] that General Harkins had told Don that his comments on 22 October were actually contrary to a Presidential directive and added that his statements had been inadvertent and that he wished General Don to know this.[41]

Within a few hours, General Harkins informed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Apparently there is a discrepancy somewhere along the line." He denied having had any discussions on the coup with General Don or having said that his statement was inadvertent. General Don had been to see him that day, but General Harkins had told him he would not discuss coups.[42]

General Taylor advised General Harkins, "View here is that your actions in disengaging from the coup discussions were correct and that you should continue to avoid any involvement."[43]

---

40. (TS) Msg, MAC 1991 to CJCS, 24 Oct 63.
41. [redacted]
42. (TS) Msg, MACV 1993 to CJCS, 24 Oct 63.
43. (TS) Msg, JCS 4137 to COMUSMACV, 24 Oct 63.

On the night of 24 October [redacted] again met with General Don. Don now said that he could not turn over the political organization plan to the Ambassador as promised, because the coup committee had turned thumbs down on such a move for security reasons. The committee had, however, agreed to show their entire plan, military and political, to Ambassador Lodge two days before the coup. [redacted] reminded Don that the United States had made no commitment to the coup leaders and would make none until the plans had been studied in detail. Don replied that the coup was scheduled to take place not later than 2 November and that he would have the plans in Ambassador Lodge's hands two days ahead of time. Don told [redacted] that the generals had agreed that the new government would be civilian, that it would free all noncommunist political prisoners as soon as possible, that it would hold honest elections, that it would allow complete freedom of religion, and that it would be pro-Western, but not a vassal of the United States. The two men agreed to meet again on 28 October.[44]

In answer to expressions of concern from Washington, Ambassador Lodge took pains to reassure his superiors that in his best judgment, the coup committee was genuine and functioning. He excused the reluctance of the generals to provide details of their plans because of their fear of betrayal. He advised against trying to thwart a coup.[45]

[redacted]

Trouble between General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, was concerned over certain "troublesome aspects" of the situation in Saigon. First of all, there seemed to be a definite lack of communication between General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge. In addition, the Chairman said, the instructions sent to Saigon on US support of a coup were contradictory. Ambassador Lodge had been told that the United States would not thwart a change or deny assistance to a new regime if it appeared capable of doing three things: 1) increasing the effectiveness of the war effort; 2) ensuring popular support of the war; and 3) improving relations with the United States.

---

44. [redacted]
45. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1964 to State, 25 Oct 63.

General Taylor considered it inconceivable that any coup plotters could present advance proof of being able to meet these three criteria. He believed that until a new group had proved itself by some concrete actions, the United States should give it no assurance of support. General Taylor thought the guidance to Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins should be changed to instruct them to accumulate intelligence on coup movements without pursuing contacts and without attempting to delve into the strength of the plotters, which could only result in US involvement. There would be time enough to associate the United States with the plotters after they produced some tangible results.

The Chairman was also critical of the Ambassador's reporting of the war. General Taylor believed that where purely military matters were involved General Harkins was the source from which facts and professional judgment should be sought. Ambassador Lodge had stated in his latest weekly report that it was not possible to drive around the countryside freely and safely to the extent it had been two years before. General Taylor said that this contradicted reports received from such sources as the British mission, corps commanders, and US advisors. Ambassador Lodge also had told the President that there had been no mass surrenders by the VC. Without defining the term "mass," General Taylor pointed out that there had been a favorable change in the VC surrender picture with 4871 defectors in the first nine months of 1963 as compared with 1635 defectors during all of 1962, and Lodge's figure of 24,000 VC killed in the past two years was also much lower than the US military figure of 38,855.

General Taylor proposed a full review of these subjects prior to the arrival in Washington of Ambassador Lodge, who was scheduled to come shortly after 1 November for consultations on the RVN situation.[46]

After a discussion of the RVN situation at a JCS meeting with the Secretary of Defense on 28 October, General Harkins was queried on the apparent lack of effective communication between himself and Ambassador Lodge.[47]

---

46. (TS) Draft Memo, CJCS to SecDef, "Current Situation in Saigon," 28 Oct 63, OCJCS File, Vietnam Cables (Oct 63).
47. (TS) Msg, JCS 4188-63 to COMUSMACV, 29 Oct 63.

General Harkins replied at length on 30 October, stating that he had not been consulted properly in the preparation of the reports by Ambassador Lodge, that the Ambassador's estimate of the military situation in RVN was at complete variance with the facts as he saw them, and that he felt any coup would be unwise. Recounting the message mix-up and the discrepancies in reporting, Harkins said

> The Ambassador and I are certainly in touch with each other but whether the communications between us are effective is something else. I will say Cabot's methods of operations are entirely different from Ambassador Nolting's as far as reporting in the military is concerned. Fritz would always clear messages concerning the military with me or my staff prior to dispatch. . . . This is not true today.

There was, General Harkins said, a basic difference between his interpretation and that of Ambassador Lodge on the guidance from Washington on coups. Ambassador Lodge believed that the two messages he had received constituted the guidance. The first stated that the United States should take no initiative to give covert encouragement to a coup, and the second contained the "additional thoughts" that the United States should not give the impression it was trying to thwart a change of government. Harkins believed that only the first message of instruction applied, that the second was merely window dressing. He told General Taylor, "no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup." He did not think there was any South Vietnamese General qualified to take over the GVN. He still believed that Diem was the best man for fighting communists, "After all," General Harkins said, "rightly or wrongly, we have backed Diem for eight long, hard years. To me it seems incongruous now to get him down, kick him around, and get rid of him. The US has been his mother superior and father confessor since he's been in office, and he's leaned on us heavily."[48] General Harkins devoted a second message, a few hours later, to refuting categorically and point by point Ambassador Lodge's pessimistic assessment on the progress of the counterinsurgency.[49]

---

48. (TS) Msg, MACV 2028 to CJCS, 30 Oct 63.
49. (TS) Msg, MACV 2033 to CJCS, 30 Oct 63.

Meanwhile, on the morning of 27 October, General Don had made direct contact with Ambassador Lodge, asking him if [redacted] was authorized to speak for him. Lodge replied that he was. He also told Don to keep him informed of coup progress and to let him see the coup plans.[50]

In Washington, General Krulak told General Taylor that this latest development was

> dramatically important. . . . Lodge has had a face-to-face talk with Don (although he himself decried this in Saigon 1964 as dangerous and was discouraged from doing so in Washington 78161). He now has asked specifically to see the coup plans, in face of instructions to the contrary (Washington 74228) - And [redacted] speaks for the US.[51]

[redacted] met Don again on the evening of 28 October. General Don asserted that the coup committee was also anxious to avoid any US involvement in the coup. When [redacted] told him that Ambassador Lodge was leaving Saigon on 31 October for a brief visit to the United States and should see the generals' plans before his departure, Don replied that the plans could now be made available only four hours in advance rather than the 48 hours promised earlier.[52]

By 30 October the chance of action by the generals with or without US approval appeared so imminent that officials in Washington believed contingency plans should be prepared. Washington authorities still considered that the United States could influence the coup committee to delay or call off the coup by means short of betraying the committee to Diem. Their computation of the forces that would be available to the coup leaders and those remaining loyal to Diem showed the balance to be about equal. They believed that the United States must have assurance of a balance of force clearly favorable to the coup, since prolonged fighting or defeat of coup forces would be disastrous to the war effort. Ambassador Lodge was instructed to have [redacted] inform General Don that the United States did not find that presently revealed plans gave a clear prospect of quick results. "We reiterate, burden of proof must be on coup group to show a substantial possibility

---

50. [redacted]
51. (TS) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "Vietnam," 28 Oct 63, OCJCS File, Vietnam Cables (Oct 63).
52. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2023 to State, 29 Oct 63.

of quick success; otherwise we should discourage them from proceeding since a miscalculation could result in jeopardizing US position in Southeast Asia."

The complexity of the situation and the apparent imminence of coup action also raised some question of whether Ambassador Lodge should leave on 31 October as he had planned, but this decision was left to the Ambassador. He was told to discuss the situation fully with General Harkins, "whose responsibilities toward any coup are very heavy, especially after you leave." There must be clear and definite arrangements made before his departure so that General Harkins [redacted] knew exactly what was to be done in a normal situation, in continuing coup contacts, and particularly in the event a coup took place. Deputy Chief of Mission Trueheart would serve as head of the Country Team in a normal situation, but the President wanted it clearly understood that with Lodge away, General Harkins should participate in all coup contacts. In the event a coup began, General Harkins would become head of the Country Team and the direct representative of the President. Trueheart would then serve as his political advisor.

If a coup started and measures to protect US nationals had to be taken, a Marine BLT could be flown in within 24 hours, and instructions to ready the battalion for such action were being sent to CINCPAC.[53]

The Ambassador agreed that it was important to get the best possible estimate of the chances of a successful coup, but disagreed that the United States could, or should, attempt to slow down the effort. "If our attempt to thwart this coup were successful, which we doubt, it is our firm estimate that younger officers, small groups of military, would then engage in an abortive action creating chaos ideally suited to VC objectives."

With regard to putting Harkins in control in case of a coup, Ambassador Lodge said, "It does not seem sensible to have the military in charge of a matter which is so profoundly political as a change of government. In fact, I would say to do this would probably be the end of any hope for a change of

53. (TS) [redacted]

government here." His opposition to putting General Harkins in command was impersonal, since General Harkins was a splendid general and an old friend, "to whom I would gladly entrust anything I have." Ambassador Lodge also recommended that if requests came from the coup leaders for funds to buy off potential opposition at the last moment, the United States should comply. He also believed the United States had a residual commitment from the "August episode" to evacuate the generals' dependents if the coup failed, and should try to do so if circumstances required it. "General Harkins," he concluded, "has read this and does not concur."[54]

General Harkins did not indeed concur. He revealed to General Taylor on 30 October that he had not known of the further contacts with Don or that the coup plans were so advanced. "When I said last week I was out of the coup business," Harkins said, "I did not realize I was going to be so out of touch." Ambassador Lodge had agreed to keep him informed, General Harkins claimed, but had not done so until directed by the latest message from Washington. "I was shocked," Harkins said, "because I had not seen any of the Saigon 20 series -- Saigon 2040, 2041, etc."

While he could not comment on the coup plan, to which the United States did not yet have access, he did feel that the troop list furnished by Don was misleading. It appeared to him that Don had just taken the army roster and run down it indicating troops to be used in the coup. "How the 21st, 9th, 7th, 23rd and 5th Divisions can lend any immediate support to an effort in Saigon is hard to visualize." All of these divisions were outside the Saigon area and if brought in for the coup would give the VC a wonderful opportunity in the abandoned areas. But if the coup employed only the local troops, the effort might "be a flop."

General Harkins said that he had not concurred in Ambassador Lodge's latest estimate and recommendations because he did not feel the United States should go along with the coup until more information was available. He pointed out that the prestige of the United States was involved. "I feel we should go along with only a sure thing, this, or continue to go along with Diem until we have exhausted all pressures."[55]

---

54. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2063 to State, 30 Oct 63.
55. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2034 to CJCS, 30 Oct 63.

The White House advised Ambassador Lodge on 31 October that it did not accept his judgment that the United States had no power to delay or discourage a coup in RVN. If he were convinced the coup was going to fail, he should take every possible step to halt it. If he concluded that there was not "clearly a high prospect of success," he should communicate his doubts to the coup committee in a way calculated to stop them, at least until chances were better.

On the matter of who would run the show for the United States in South Vietnam if a coup took place after Ambassador Lodge had departed, the White House spokesman, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, left no doubt in Lodge's mind, telling him that in such a case the President wanted direction of the country team vested in the "most senior officer with experience of military decisions, and that officer in our view is Harkins." He then summarized

> our present standing instructions for US posture in the event of a coup: a) U.S. authorities will reject appeals for direct intervention from either side, and U.S.-controlled aircraft and other resources will not be committed between the battle lines or in support of either side, without authorization from Washington; b) In event of indecisive contest, U.S. authorities may at their discretion agree to perform any acts agreeable to both sides, such as removal of key personalities or relay of information. In such actions, however, U.S. authorities will strenuously avoid appearance of pressure on either side. It is not in the interest of USG to be or appear to be either instrument of existing government or instrument of coup; c) In the event of imminent or actual failure of coup, U.S. authorities may afford asylum in their discretion to those to whom there is any express or implied obligation of any sort. We believe, however, that in such a case it would be in our interest and probably in the interest of those seeking asylum that they seek protection of other embassies in addition to our own. This point should be made strongly if need arises; d) But once a coup under responsible leadership has begun, and within these restrictions, it is in the interest of the U.S. Government that it should succeed.[56]

56. (TS) Msg, CAS 79407 to Saigon, 31 Oct 63.

The Coup

On 1 November 1963 the generals struck without warning. Within 24 hours they were masters of Saigon and had received pledges of support from all major military commanders throughout the country. The generals put their plans into effect starting shortly after midday on 1 November. At 1345, Saigon time, General Don telephoned MACV headquarters and told General Harkins that the generals were starting their coup immediately.[57]

The military operations by which the generals seized control of key areas of Saigon and took the Presidential palace under siege were well conceived and smoothly executed. Marine and army combat units overcame strong resistance by loyal special forces troops and by the palace guard. By nightfall there was no longer any doubt of the coup's eventual success. All corps and division commanders had declared their full support of the generals' committee and coup forces controlled all major communication media in Saigon. No fighting or unrest had been reported anywhere in RVN outside the Saigon area.[58]

Several hours after the revolt erupted, Diem called Ambassador Lodge, who had decided not to leave on 31 October. Saying that some units had rebelled, Diem wanted to know the attitude of the United States. Lodge pleaded ignorance of the official US attitude. He praised Diem for his courage and great contributions to his country and offered obliquely to help him gain safe conduct. Diem hung up after telling the Ambassador that he would try to reestablish order.[59]

On the morning of 2 November Diem and Nhu surrendered to the generals' committee. Later that same day they died under mysterious circumstances. Officials of the generals' committee told Ambassador Lodge on 3 November that they had been assassinated, but not by order of the generals. No positive proof that the generals had ordered the deaths was ever uncovered.[60]

---

57. (S) Msg, MACV to NSA, Critic 2, 1 Nov 63.
58. (S) Msg, MACV to NSA, Critic, 011515EST Nov 63.
59. (S) Msg, Saigon 860 to State, 1 Nov 63.
60. (S) Msg, Saigon 900 to State, 3 Nov 63.

A New Start

Fourteen general officers and 10 colonels had comprised the generals' committee that overthrew the Diem government. With their successful seizure of power, the group adopted the more formal title of Revolutionary Military Council. The Council eventually reached a membership of 40, with an Executive Committee of 12.[61]

On 4 November, General Big Minh, Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council, announced formation of a Provisional Government, headed by former Vice President Tho. Executive and legislative authority would be retained by the Council, which would delegate this authority to the Provisional Government with the exception of matters pertaining to the national budget, taxes, national defense, and security. Of the 15 members of the Cabinet of the new government, four were military men. Most of the civilian members of the government appeared to US observers to be long-time, competent, and generally apolitical civil servants. The United States granted the new government formal recognition on 5 November.[62]

The first concern of US military leaders after the change in government was, of course, continued and effective prosecution of the war against the VC. On 2 November General Harkins noted that the RVNAF had displayed remarkable cohesion in the coup and expressed the hope that such unanimity would continue. He said that the "line-up" of the provisional government "looks good for a starter." Although some of the ministerial posts had been assumed by the generals, COMUSMACV said that he would push hard to get them to relinquish these posts as they had earlier promised. "The big job, and the entire interest of my people and me, is to get the new team focused on the VC immediately. We buckle down to this at once."[63]

---

61. (U) List, "Composition of Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council," CCJCS File Nov 63, Vietnam Black Book for Meeting in Honolulu, 20 Nov 63, sec I.
62. (S-NOFORN) CIA/CR BB 63-49, 5 Nov 63.
63. (TS) Msg, MACV 8556 to CJCS, 2 Nov 63.

On 3 November General Harkins notified General Taylor that he intended to press the new government to make such specific improvements as: 1) establishment of a direct chain of command; 2) subordination of province chiefs to corps and division commanders in military matters; 3) emphasis on training of units, including hamlet militia; 4) operational use of general reserves; 5) operational use of special forces under the JGS and corps commanders; 6) better use of military engineers; 7) better use of boat companies in the delta; 8) lifting of restrictions on aircraft armament; 9) increased tempo of operations with emphasis on those with the best chance of success; 10) freeing ARVN elements from static security missions; and 11) reduction of isolated outposts.[64]

On 2 November Ambassador Lodge had been authorized to inform the generals that the United States was prepared to resume the full Commodities Import Program and support under PL 480 in order to prevent disruption of the war effort and economy and to avoid hardships on the population. The United States would also proceed with other projects that had been suspended under Diem, such as the Saigon water and power projects.[65]

On 6 November Ambassador Lodge submitted a report, saying that the prospects of victory over the VC were now much improved, "provided the Generals stay united." He passed on the observations of the British advisor, Mr. Thompson, who now felt that the war could be considerably shortened as compared with the period he had estimated during the Diem regime. General Harkins, Lodge added, concurred. Both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins were optimistic that General Minh meant what he said when he promised a stepped-up campaign against the VC. Although the acceleration was not yet evident, the new government appeared to have the full and cheerful support of the people of the RVN.[66]

---

64. (S) Msg, MACV 2081 to CJCS, 3 Nov 63.
65. (S) Msg, State 700 to Saigon, 2 Nov 63.
66. (TS) Msg, Saigon 949 to State, 6 Nov 63.

Status of the Counterinsurgency

The fight against the VC had been overshadowed during the summer and fall of 1963 by the struggle for power within the GVN, but it had not been neglected. In terms of numbers, the RVN now had assembled a force of formidable proportions. A report presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 21 September 1963 credited the RVN with having 469,460 men under arms. This did not include the thousands of hamlet militia supporting the strategic hamlet program. Within the RVNAF, the Army had 198,100 men and officers, the Air Force 8,200, the Navy 6,400, and the Marines 5,600. The Civil Guard had an actual strength of 84,300 men, of which 43,300 had been trained. The Self Defense Corps totalled 102,800 members; 80,200 of these, organized into 2,186 platoons, had been trained. A total of 64,160 members of the CIDG had been trained.

The United States had a substantial investment in its own military personnel located in RVN by September 1963. The total number of US men and officers had reached 16,458, with the Army contributing 10,795, the Air Force 4,444, the Navy 668, and the Marines 551. Of these, 3,524 were with the US MAAG, 400 with MACV, 7,527 with the US Army Support Group, and 3,960 with the 2d Air Division.[67]

Before the Buddhist troubles and the coup, on 8 March 1963, the Secretary of State had described the struggle against the VC as "turning an important corner" and concluded that Saigon's forces "clearly have the initiative in most areas of the country." In a speech on 22 April, he had said that the strategic hamlet program was producing "excellent results . . . morale in the countryside has begun to rise," and the Viet Cong looked "less and less like winners."

The Buddhist rising against Diem's government in May 1963 shattered this official optimism. Nevertheless, for a time the counterinsurgency program had continued to go well. In April 1963, on the first anniversary of the official initiation of the strategic hamlet program, President Diem had announced an amnesty program for defectors

67. (S-GP 1) Rpt, "Trends in the Counterinsurgency Effort in South Vietnam," 21 Sep 63, JMF 9155.3/3360 (11 May 63) sec 2A.

from the VC. The program had long been urged on him by US authorities. Under Chieu Hoi, or "Return to Cooperate," the GVN offered to receive back into the fold all those who had cooperated or fought with the Viet Cong and to allow them full participation in all the current welfare programs. It stressed the opportunity to join the GVN fight against red colonialism rather than the previous white colonialism. Unprecedented numbers of Viet Cong reportedly surrendered under the program during the summer of 1963, despite the political troubles of the GVN.[68]

After the coup, US military authorities claimed that the struggle for political control of the GVN had not had a major effect on military activity, although they conceded that "military indicators for September, October and November showed a 'moderate lull in intensity of operations.'" By mid-November these indicators were showing that operations had regained the tempo of mid-summer.

VC activity against the RVN accelerated after the coup. It took a few days for the word to spread among the VC units, but by 11 November a flurry of VC activity had developed against the new government and its forces. This activity "trended heavily to harassment, propaganda and other relatively uncoordinated forms." The accelerated rate of VC activity dropped off sharply within several days and indicated that the enemy did not have the staying power for a sustained campaign at that level.[69]

The 20 November Honolulu Conference

A special meeting of US authorities responsible for national policy toward South Vietnam took place at CINCPAC headquarters on 20 November. The conferees included the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Director of AID, the

68. (S-GP 4) J-3 Briefing Sheet, "South Vietnam Operations-Intelligence Summary for the Secretary of Defense-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting 29 Apr 63-Project Headway," 27 Apr 63, JMF 9155.3/3/2200 (7 Jan 63).

69. (S) Rpt, "Highlights of the Military Situation," OCJCS File Nov 63, Vietnam Black Book for Meeting in Honolulu, 20 Nov 63, Tab 2.

Director of Central Intelligence, the US Ambassador to South Vietnam, CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and the Director of the Joint Staff.

The conferees met for a "full scale review of the situation in South Vietnam." In a statement issued after the conference, they reported: "In general, information received at the conference indicates an encouraging outlook for the principal objective of joint U.S.-Vietnamese policy in South Vietnam - the successful prosecution of the war against the Viet Cong communists." They also announced that the first contingent of 300 US troops would leave South Vietnam on 3 December. The rest of the 1,000 planned to be withdrawn would leave by the end of the year.

Ambassador Lodge reported at the meeting that he was optimistic about the progress of the counterinsurgency under the new GVN. He was aware of the "political fragility" of the new government, but he was very encouraged by the way in which the leaders of the military junta were turning their attention to the requirements of the people. Among their immediate interests and efforts were improvements in the strategic hamlet program, reduction of forced labor, elimination of arbitrary arrest, and enlistment of the support of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects, and of the Buddhists, who were by now a well-organized political force.

General Harkins was also optimistic, although statistics seemed to indicate a favorable picture for the VC. This was not necessarily so since statistics in counterinsurgency were "subject to great discount." General Harkins predicted that the new government would further shift military emphasis to the delta and would bring the overall strategy into line with US recommendations. He said, however, that the strategic hamlet program was lagging badly, primarily because province and district chiefs were either not sufficiently confident of the militia to give them weapons or "reluctant to a point of excessive conservatism."

Mr. Trueheart considered the strategic hamlet program basically sound, although it had been overextended in the delta. The program was also a victim of poor reporting, inadequate coordination, and inadequate security at the hamlet level. With the new government giving

evidence of doing away with forced labor and putting more effort into caring for the people, Mr. Trueheart was optimistic that there would be much improvement in the strategic hamlet program.

Economic problems were considered extensively at the meeting--there was a serious piaster deficit in the South Vietnamese budget that might hamper the war effort unless diminished in some way. The Secretary of Defense felt strongly that the economic situation was by far the most serious of all the counterinsurgency problems. It was too much to ask the inexperienced GVN leaders to face an economic crisis along with a military crisis. The problem was not to get more troops but to get more cash to finance the climactic year of the counterinsurgency campaign. He summarized the situation as he saw it:

> South Vietnam is under tremendous pressure from the VC. The VC are as numerous today as they were a year or two years ago. The surrounding area is weaker. The Cambodian situation is potentially very serious to the RVN. The input of arms from Cambodia before the recent developments was very worrisome in the Delta. The Generals head a very fragile government. The United States should not try to cut the corners too fine. We must be prepared to devote enough resources to this job of winning the war to be certain of accomplishing it instead of just hoping to accomplish it.

As far as the FY 1964 MAP was concerned, Secretary McNamara said "he wanted to move ahead with the war effort as fast as possible, spend whatever is necessary to win it, but at the same time to refine the program so as to avoid spending as much as the $187.5 million" indicated in the current proposal. He wanted the figure as close as possible to the suggested Department of Defense ceiling of $175.5 million.

The conferees also considered ways of retaliating against North Vietnam for the continuing infiltration of men and supplies to the South. Such action had been proposed by the JCS team that visited South Vietnam in January 1963. [redacted] The JCS team had recommended that the United States authorize COMUSMACV "to build up a much stronger unconventional warfare capability in the Vietnamese military," and

then direct it in "a program of sabotage, destruction, propaganda and subversive missions against North Vietnam." The United States could thus put pressure on NVN without taking any overt action. Also, the retaliatory campaign would become a "powerful military endeavour" [redacted]

Various studies had been made but no action was taken until the 6 May 1963 Honolulu Conference, when CINCPAC presented a plan for overt US military operations in North Vietnam, CINCPAC OPLAN 33-62. This was a unilateral US plan that included provision for strikes against specific targets by US aircraft. The Secretary of Defense had decided against the plan but had directed that the question be studied further. On 23 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCPAC to prepare detailed plans for RVN military hit-and-run operations in North Vietnam that could not be attributed to the United States but that would be conducted with US military material, training, and advisory assistance.

CINCPAC had then submitted his OPLAN 34-63 to meet this requirement. Under this plan, the United States would help the GVN engage in covert psychological operations against NVN and carry out covert military hit-and-run attacks to destroy selected targets in North Vietnam in order to increase substantially the cost to NVN of its involvement in subversion and insurgency in RVN and Laos. On 9 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved the CINCPAC plan for unilateral US planning and on 12 September informed the Secretary of Defense of the concept and features of the plan. They pointed out that further planning could not be undertaken effectively until RVN accepted the US concept. They had asked the Secretary to secure the concurrence of the Secretary of State, and a similar concurrence from the GVN.

[redacted]

At the 20 November Honolulu Conference, it was directed that "an optimum 12 months program for intensified operations against North Vietnam, including abotage, propaganda

incursions, intelligence and commando hit-and-run raids be developed by COMUSMACV [redacted]" This plan would: 1) use RVN military and paramilitary resources fully supported by the United States; 2) show clearly what could be done with the means presently available and specify what additional means would be needed to carry out the optimum program; 3) consider that there would be no policy restrictions other than "non-attributability" to the United States; and 4) provide for actions of graduated intensity, ranging from low level activity of the type currently being taken to large hit-and-run commando operations. When the conferees were informed that the commando raid planning was already under way by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, they directed that this program be reviewed [redacted] for covert operations on a 12-month program basis.

With regard to Laos the conferees decided to present two matters for "high level decision in Washington." These were [redacted] establishment of a zone extending up to 50 kilometers into Laos from the border, in which operations could be conducted without Washington-level concurrence.[70]

President Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963, before the conferees could submit their conclusions and proposals to him. One of the first actions of President Johnson, in NSAM 273 on 26 November, was to authorize further planning for possible increased activity against North Vietnam.

Thus on 22 November 1963 US support of the war in Vietnam had reached another decision point. The fall of Diem and the smooth beginning of a new government had eased the frustration that most US officials felt about persuading the GVN to act on US advice. There was a newly hopeful note that all that was now needed was vigorous application of available resources. US officials continued to plan on the complete withdrawal of US support units by the end of 1965. There was also recognition, however, that some very difficult problems remained. In particular, the officials who met in Honolulu on 20 November believed that the time had come to take more direct action against North Vietnam. This was perhaps the most important policy question pending as the new US President took over.

---

70. (S-GP 1) Records of Special Meeting on RVN, 20 Nov 63, JMF 9155.3/5410 (22 Nov 63) sec 1 and 2. (TS) OCJCS File, Black Book for Meeting in Honolulu.

Chapter 8

THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

1964: A New Year Begins

On the last day of 1963 President Lyndon B. Johnson sent a letter to General Duong Van Minh, Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council of the Republic of Vietnam, which publicly reaffirmed the US commitment:

> This new year provides a fitting opportunity for me to pledge on behalf of the American Government and people a renewed partnership with your government and people in your brave struggle for freedom. The United States will continue to furnish you and your people with the fullest measure of support in this bitter fight. We shall maintain in Viet-Nam American personnel and material as needed to assit you in achieving victory.
>
> Our aims are, I know, identical with yours: to enable your government to protect its people from the acts of terror perpetrated by Communist insurgents from the north. As the forces of your government become increasingly capable of dealing with this aggression, American military personnel in South Vietnam can be progressively withdrawn.
>
> The United States Government shares the view of your government that 'neutralization' of South Viet-Nam is unacceptable. As long as the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam persists in its aggressive policy, neutralization of South Viet-Nam would only be another name for a Communist takeover. Peace will return to your country just as soon as the authorities in Hanoi cease and desist from their terrorist aggression.[1]

1. Dept of State Bulletin, L (27 Jan 64), p. 122.

By his firm rejection of neutralization the President sounded a theme of US policy that was to be heard frequently during 1964. His own pronouncements on the matter were reinforced by Secretary of Defense McNamara, in a major speech on 26 March 1964, and by the repeated statements of Secretary of State Rusk throughout the year. The US opposition to any move toward neutralization was based, above all, on the reason President Johnson had given. Washington officials were convinced that a genuinely neutral Republic of Vietnam--or the goal they cited more frequently: a return to full observance of the terms of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 regarding Vietnam and the Geneva Accords of 1962 concerning Laos--would be possible only after defeat of the Viet Cong and cessation of the North Vietnamese support of the VC insurgency.

Two further reasons for the US attitude were not dwelt on in the public statements. The first was simply that at no time during 1964 was there a generally accepted assessment that the US and GVN programs were succeeding and that the RVN forces were clearly on their way to gaining the upper hand in the struggle. These were not the conditions under which the United States would wish to enter into any negotiations toward a general settlement.

The second and related reason was grounded in the chronic governmental instability that followed the overthrow of the Diem regime in November 1963. The seizure of power by the RVN Generals, whatever promise it held of a fresh start and a reinvigoration of the counterinsurgency effort, had swept away the existing constitutional system. Thereafter, throughout 1964 and for some months beyond, the public life of South Vietnam presented a scene of continuing turmoil and instability. A succession of governments rose to power, each arbitrarily proclaimed by a leader or faction that thereafter sought to legitimatize its rule. Among the groups vying for control of the government the military establishment disposed of the greatest strength, but jealousies and factionalism within its ranks added to the continuing political ferment. None of the successive leaders and governments inspired enthusiasm among the South Vietnamese population.

The establishment of a reasonably stable government in South Vietnam was the central concern of US officials throughout 1964. Only such a government could be expected to advance the pacification program and otherwise make effective use of the advice and assistance the United States was eager to give. As the conviction grew that cessation of North

Vietnam's support of the insurgency would require stronger actions, involving active participation by the United States, assurance that an effective and firmly based government was in place in South Vietnam became even more important. It was in this connection that the need for stability became an additional argument against serious consideration of the neutralization course, or of entering into any negotiations that might lead in that direction. American officials foresaw that if South Vietnam's leaders became aware that the United States was contemplating even exploratory negotiations with Hanoi, the knowledge would have such a demoralizing effect as to topple the shaky government in Saigon and possibly bring to power a regime that was itself committed to neutralization and US withdrawal.

At the moment when he received President Johnson's letter of New Year's greeting, General Minh had been in power scarcely two months. So far the record of the Generals who comprised the Military Revolutionary Council (MRC) under Minh's leadership had not been impressive. Their performance suffered from lack of political and administrative experience, and there were signs of disunity, distrust, and a curious inertia among some members of the government. In an early assessment Ambassador Lodge had called the Generals "able men who will do big things once they get started," but it is apparent that he was speaking hopefully rather than from firm conviction.[2]

General Krulak spoke more candidly of the weaknesses in the new government. "Operations of the governmental mechanism--far from satisfactory before the coup--have decelerated greatly," SACSA reported on 21 December 1963. The junta, although composed of competent military leaders, was now preoccupied with politics, a field in which it was far less qualified. As a result RVN military leaders slighted their primary task--fighting the war. General Krulak judged the civilian element of the GVN to be of marginal quality and unprepared to handle complex administration. Provincial officials were unsure of their authority, of their obligations and of their tenure.[3] The same was true throughout the military command.

---

2. (S) Msg, Saigon 1173 to State, 7 Dec 63.
3. (TS) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, 21 Dec 63, OCJCS File, Trip Reports.

To General Harkins the period of setback and uncertainty appeared to be ending by mid-January. "The war--the control of the counterinsurgency at least--is here for the winning," he wrote General Taylor. "All that has to be done is to go after it. We have lost seven months and it will probably be another before all the dust of many changes is settled. In the meantime I still feel the GVN can meet the time schedule you and Secretary McNamara laid down in October; of course taking into account the new starting date."[4]

On 23 January Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins accompanied the top leadership of the GVN, Generals Minh, Don, Kim and Dinh, on a helicopter tour of RVN, visiting several provinces and observing the new administration in action. Lodge reported in fairly sanguine terms to Washington on GVN efforts to reach the people and to prosecute the counter-insurgency. He even ventured the opinion that the struggle against the Viet Cong was now turning in favor of the government. He was most impressed with General Minh's efforts to win over the people and to make himself a popular leader. Of Minh, Lodge concluded, "He is also pushing a sound plan, political and military, with determination and ability, and so far seems to have kept his own crowd together on a cordial basis."[5]

The Khanh Coup, 30 January 1964

Not all of Minh's crowd was "together on a cordial basis." On 28 January, Major General Nguyen Khanh, commander of the I Corps, told the senior MAAG advisor at his headquarters, Colonel Jasper Wilson, USA, that he had learned from sources in France that another coup would be attempted, possibly within three days, by a clique of pro-French Generals. Once the coup was under way there would be a call for neutralization of South Vietnam. Khanh asserted that the plotters were already in touch with General Nguyen Van Hinh, former chief of staff of the RVNAF who had been ousted in 1954.[6]

---

4. (S) Msg, MAC 0144 to CJCS, 16 Jan 64.
5. (S) Msg, Saigon to State 1374, 23 Jan 64.
6. (S) SACSA Briefing Sheet for JCS, "Coup d'Etat in Republic of Vietnam," 30 Jan 64, OCJCS File O.

Colonel Wilson informed General Harkins, at Khanh's urging, of the latter's charges that some of the officers then in power (he named no names) were talking out of both sides of their mouths. In public they favored all-out war against the Viet Cong but in private they were talking neutralism, which Khanh vehemently opposed. He asked for assurance that the US Government would back a counter-coup and would oppose neutralism. General Harkins instructed Colonel Wilson to tell Khanh that it was hard for him to believe the charges of neutralism among members of the MRC. The United States was on record as rejecting neutralization, but it was also opposed to any unnecessary coup or counter-coup. Colonel Wilson was to seek more specific information from Khanh, after alterting the Ambassador to what had taken place.[7]

Subsequently Ambassador Lodge reported to Washington that Khanh was "profoundly disturbed" by signs of a strong move toward neutralism in the MRC and felt that if it were not vigorously crushed "it might succeed because of war weariness among the Vietnamese." When pressed for more information on who was involved in the coup plotting, Khanh had identified Generals Don, Kim, and Xuan as being "rabidly pro-French" and dealing with French agents. General Dinh was involved too, as one who "would go along for the money."

Khanh wanted US assurance that his family, then living in Da Nang, would be gotten out of the country if necessary, and the Ambassador promised to have a plane ready. Khanh also asked that Colonel Wilson be his exclusive liaison man and maintain radio contact with him at all times.

Ambassador Lodge told Washington on 29 January, "My assessment is that General Khanh is considered to be the most capable general in Viet Nam, that he controls the I and II Corps, which is the most orderly part of Viet Nam; and that in addition to being a capable soldier he has the reputation of being politically perspicacious." Nevertheless, Lodge could not quite believe the charges against Don and Kim, which went against his "deepest instincts," and he had not informed the GVN leadership of Khanh's activities. General Harkins agreed with his assessment.[8]

---

7. (S) Msg, MAC 0325 to CJCS, 30 Jan 64.
8. (S) Msg, Saigon 1431 to State, 29 Jan 64.

At about 0215 30 January, General Khanh informed Colonel Wilson that he, together with General Phat, CG 7th Division, and General Khiem, CG III Corps, would move against the GVN at 0400 that morning to "secure changes in the MRC." Wilson was to be picked up at 0315 and taken to the command post from which Khanh would direct the coup. Lodge and Harkins were both informed immediately, and the Ambassador sent word to Washington at once.[9]

True to his word, General Khanh, supported by Generals Khiem and Phat, at about 0400 30 January took over JGS headquarters, deployed men and armor into downtown Saigon, and detained or placed under immediate house arrest Generals Minh, Don, Kim, Dinh, and Xuan, as well as Prime Minister Tho. The coup was carried off quickly and without bloodshed. It was done so quietly that the majority of Saigon's population had no inkling of events until the afternoon newspapers appeared. Other RVN Generals who associated themselves with the coup were Generals Thieu, Mau, Co, and Tri.[10]

Colonel Wilson, who stayed at the command post during the entire active period of the coup, took no part other than to observe the actions of Khanh and his staff and to advise Khanh, on the Ambassador's orders, that he should make every effort to avoid bloodshed. The atmosphere in the JGS compound was described by one observer as "like an election headquarters after a victory."[11]

At 1100 on the morning of the coup Ambassador Lodge called on General Khanh, seeking information about his plans, his attitude toward the counterinsurgency, and the fate of the captured Generals. Khanh had offered General Minh an opportunity to join the coup and remain as head of state, but Minh had demanded the release of the other four Generals as a condition for doing so. Khanh sought no more than the removal of these men from the government, but he feared that they might provide a rallying point for students and other dissident groups if allowed to go free.

---

9. (S) Msg, Saigon 1432 to State, 30 Jan 64; (S) Msg, MAC 0325 to CJCS, 30 Jan 64.

10. (S) Msg, Saigon 1445 to State, 30 Jan 64.

11. (S) SACSA Briefing Sheet for JCS, "Coup d'Etat in Republic of Vietnam," 30 Jan 64, w/Tab A "Coup Chronology," OCJCS File O.

The new government head was anxious for early US recognition and support. During his discussion with the Ambassador, Khanh promised that he would prosecute the war against the Viet Cong vigorously and without delay. He intended to take a closer look at the strategic hamlet situation, keeping the good ones and eliminating the bad ones. He told Lodge that he was trying to get a good team around him, but that he recognized his own shortcomings. He knew nothing about politics, economics, or foreign policy, and he was going to depend heavily on the Ambassador for advice. Lodge reported these conversations to Washington, saying that Khanh was "a cool, clearheaded, realistic planner who has been abl to bring about order in much of the areas which he has commanded. He hopes to do the same in the rest of the country. He looks tough, ruthless, and far sighted."[12]

Later that afternoon, Radio Saigon announced the dissolution of the Executive Committee of the MRC in a declaration signed by a majority of the Vietnamese Generals and Colonels, including all Corps Commanders. General Khanh followed this with a declaration stating that his action had been taken because the government had shown itself incapable of bringing about promised changes in the social, economic, and political life of the country, thus disappointing the hopes and sacrifices of the people and the Army. He blamed this failure on a number of individuals who, mindful only of their own interests, had allied themselves with the colonialists in advocating a neutralist solution, "thereby paving the way for the communists to enslave our people." He ended with a pledge that the Army was determined to unite the people and to bring about real security, happiness, and democratic freedom in final victory.[13]

Thus General Khanh's takeover of the government on 30 January 1964 had been accomplished with some forewarning to US officials and under their immediate observation, but without any positive exercise of US influence. Among the earliest instructions sent to Ambassador Lodge was the State Department's admonition to make it very clear through his actions that the United States had nothing to do with staging the coup.[14] On the question of recognition, the

12. (S) Msg, Saigon 1443 to State, 30 Jan 64.
13. (C) Msg, Saigon 1446 to State, 30 Jan 64.
14. (S) Msg, State 1149 to Saigon, 29 Jan 64.

United States had the option of extending formal recognition or of handling matters as a simple continuation of normal relations with a government whose head of state had changed. There was precedent for the latter course in the instances of Pakistan in 1958 and Turkey in 1960, and the State Department chose to follow it, in part to avoid possible difficulties in obtaining acts of recognition from other nations.[15]

Ambassador Lodge informed Khanh of this view and he accepted it. Lodge then urged upon Khanh the strongest effort to defeat the Viet Cong. He warned against any delay for "so-called 'reorganization'" and said it was vital that commanders and province chiefs be driven ahead, if necessary by a few well-placed "kicks in the rear end." The entire counterinsurgency effort--military, political, psychological, economic, and social--must roll forward.[16]

Instructions from Washington along this very line arrived shortly. Remembering the uncertainty and neglect of military operations that had followed on the first coup in November, US officials feared a similar setback in the counterinsurgency as a result of the Khanh coup. Accordingly the Ambassador was directed "to state to Khanh that there must be no opportunity for the Viet Cong to benefit from the events of the past few days--it is essential that he and his Government demonstrate to the people of South Viet Nam, the people of the United States and the people of the world their unity and strength." To do this, the tempo of military operations against the Viet Cong must be increased, "visibly" and at once. Lodge was told that the President wanted to be able to announce at his press conference on the next day, 1 February, that Khanh had informed him that he had instructed the Corps commanders to step up the pace of military operations immediately.[17]

The Ambassador was able to give this assurance. At the press conference, after referring to "the new and friendly leaders" of South Vietnam, the President read aloud a letter to General Khanh that applauded his determination to take vigorous action and pledged that the United States would continue to provide assistance "to help you to carry the war to

15. (S) Msg, State 1154 to Saigon, 30 Jan 64.
16. (S) Msg, Saigon 1451 to State, 31 Jan 64.
17. [redacted]

the enemy and to increase the confidence of the Vietnamese people in their government."[18]

Thus was launched the new government headed by General Khanh, the first of the succession that was to emerge from the political turmoil of South Vietnam during 1964. Judged against the record that later unfolded, the Khanh government was unusual in one respect: it remained in power for more than six months.

The French Attitude and Other International Aspects

General Khanh's outspoken distrust of French motives and intentions was understandable, and in some respects well-founded. The influence of the former rulers of Indochina upon thought and events within South Vietnam had not entirely disappeared with the collapse of French military power and authority in the area. French business and professional men, French institutions, and French capital still remained in RVN. French culture and customs were part of the fabric of daily Vietnamese life. Nonetheless, resentment against their former governors had generated a substantial level of anti-French sentiment within the country. On the other hand, the United States had been concerned for some time over the course of French policy, which seemed calculated to undermine US efforts to establish a stable government and situation in RVN.

The official French approach to the problems of Southeast Asia appeared to be based on the following beliefs: 1) the West could not in the long run maintain pro-Western regimes in Southeast Asia, so distant from main Western power centers and so near to Communist China; 2) the neutralization solution that France had long advocated for Laos, whatever its risks and drawbacks, offered the only hope of keeping Southeast Asian countries from falling under Chinese control altogether;

18. (S) Msg, Saigon 1464 to State, 1 Feb 64. Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964 (1965), vol. I, pp. 254, 256 (hereafter cited as Public Papers, Johnson, 1963-1964).

3) the withdrawal of the dominant American presence from Southeast Asia--which would be the price the West would have to pay for neutralization--would allow greater scope for France to play a special role there as the country that would do what could be done on behalf of the West, but whose modest presence would not be considered provocative to Chinese Communist power.[19]

President de Gaulle had issued a declaration on 29 August 1963 whose rather lofty phrases stood as the principal public statement of French policy. After claiming for France a special knowledge and understanding of the Vietnamese people, it sketched de Gaulle's aspirations for the future of South Vietnam as a country working out its destiny in complete independence from all foreign influence, in internal peace and unity, and in concord with its neighbors. "Naturally it is for the people, and for them alone, to choose the means by which to succeed in this, but any national effort undertaken in Vietnam to this end would find France ready, to the limit of its possibilities, to organize a cordial cooperation with this country."[20]

Lesser French officials, when queried regarding the practical intent of the General's statement, sought to pass it off as a broad declaration of objectives that might be implemented in the long-term future. Nevertheless, it could be read as an open invitation to any South Vietnamese faction attracted to the neutralist course to look to France for understanding and support. It fired speculation that the French might already be covertly engaged in intrigue with Hanoi and disaffacted elements of the Diem regime, including Ngo Ding Nhu, to neutralize the South at once and possibly to unify it with the communist North. De Gaulle's statement offered to the Vietnamese leaders and people an alternative policy to continuing the war and the acceptance of US assistance.

At the time of the overthrow of the Diem government in November 1963, President de Gaulle informed US Ambassador Charles Bohlen that he had never supported the Diem regime

---

19. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) Research Memorandum, REU-16, 11 Feb 64, Dept of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "De Gaulle and Viet Nam," OCJCS File, Black Note Book, "South Vietnam Conference-March 1964-Vol II" sec 6, Tab A; hereafter cited as REU 16, Dept of State.

20. Ibid.

because it had not shown the "proper" attitude toward the French interest in South Vietnam's problems. While not regretting Diem's removal, he foresaw no ultimate victory for the successor government. De Gaulle predicted that the new military regime would intensify the war effort and press the United States for increased assistance but would eventually be rejected by a people wearied of the exertions it demanded of them.[21]

In the new year President de Gaulle took new initiatives. On 27 Janury 1964 he extended French recognition to the government of Communist China--the first such act by a major power since the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. At a press conference four days later he again advocated neutralization, declaring that "it is inconceivable to conclude a treaty of neutrality concerning the states of Southeast Asia, to which France lends special and cordial attention, without China being part of it." He spoke of a neutrality that would be accepted by the states it encompassed and guaranteed by international agreement, excluding both support by one state of armed action within another and "the many forms of outside intervention." Neutralization along these lines, de Gaulle said, "appears the only solution compatible with a peaceful life and progress for these people."[22]

President Johnson promptly rejected this rather amorphous proposal, at his press conference on 1 February. A New York Times editorial on the same day, however, found de Gaulle's suggestions "neither new, radical nor unthinkable" and called on Washington officials to "welcome rather than resent" the French leader's interest in the Vietnamese problem--a view later indorsed by Senator Mike Mansfield.[23] In urging that the proposal be pursued, these outside commentators perhaps underestimated the difficulty of getting the General to reduce one of his grand schemes to specific terms. Also, their thought probably did not extend to the aspect that was worrying Ambassador Lodge in Saigon. Later in the month he advised President Johnson that de Gaulle's pronouncements on neutralization were having an unfavorable effect on the will to win of RVN government officials and the politically conscious elements of the population. Thinking about the prospects for neutralization did not make for bravery and hard

21. (S) Msg, Paris 2223 to State, 5 Nov 63.
22. (S) REU 16, Dept of State.
23. Public Papers, Johnson, 1963-1964, vol. I, pp. 257, 259. NY Times, 1 Feb 64, 22; 20 Feb 64, 1.

fighting. Moreover, Lodge reported, General Khanh was convinced that French agents were conspiring with VC terrorists and had even supplied them with explosives. The Ambassador suggested that the President make a direct approach to the French leader with the intent of inducing him to state publicly that his remarks about neutralism defined a long-term goal and "were not meant to apply to the present time."[24]

President Johnson did not send the suggested message, but he assured Lodge that Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Bohlen had sought repeatedly to impress upon French officials the danger and futility of empty talk about the neutralization of South Vietnam.[25] A query went to the Embassy in Paris, nevertheless. Replying on 26 February, Ambassador Bohlen stated his conviction that any approach to de Gaulle at that time would elicit no more than a repetition of his previous statements, with no increase in concrete details. Furthermore, such an approach would give de Gaulle the satisfaction of knowing that his attempt to reassert a certain psychological influence in Southeast Asia was succeeding and that he had forced the United States to appeal to him. "I should be very loath to make any such request of General de Gaulle as matters now stand," Bohlen concluded.[26]

Five weeks later, for a somewhat different purpose, Ambassador Bohlen did call on President de Gaulle and ask him to make a clarifying statement of his position on South Vietnam. De Gaulle refused. In advising Ambassador Lodge of this "intransigent but not unexpected de Gaulle reaction," Secretary Rusk observed that by simply standing on his broad prescription for "neutralization now," de Gaulle had placed French policy "clearly at loggerheads with US and GVN interests in Southeast Asia."[27]

A somewhat different note had recently been sounded by the Soviet Union. In a move hardly likely to do other than stiffen the US resolve, an official spokesman declared on 25 February that the USSR would render all necessary assistance and support to the "national liberation struggle" in

---

24. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1606 to State, 22 Feb 64.
25. (TS) Msg, White House CAP 64058 to Saigon, 23 Feb 64.
26. (S) Msg, Paris 4061 to State, 26 Feb 64.
27. (S) Msg, State 1603 to Saigon, 4 Apr 64.

South Vietnam. The Kremlin called for the withdrawal of US forces and equipment and for an end to US "interference" in the country's internal affairs.[28]

The free world was not overawed by this declaration. When the Council of Ministers of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization met in Manila in mid-April, the conference concluded with issuance of the strongest and most specific communique in the ten-year history of the SEATO pact. The Foreign Ministers of seven nations joined in expressing "grave concern about continuing Communist aggression against the Republic of Vietnam, . . . directed, supplied and supported by the Communist regime in North Vietnam." They declared that defeat of this aggression was "essential not only to the security of the Republic of Vietnam, but to that of South-East Asia. It will also be convincing proof that Communist expansion by such tactics will not be permitted." The eighth member, France, abstained from endorsing this portion of the communique but did join in its general reaffirmation of SEATO's purpose: to resist communist aggression and subversion in the treaty area.[29]

Another voice was heard on 8 July, when UN Secretary-General U Thant called for a reconvening of the 1954 Geneva Conference powers to negotiate peace in South Vietnam. He said he had felt strongly for some time that military methods would not succeed; "the only sensible alternative is the political and diplomatic method of negotiation which, even at this late hour, may offer some chance of a solution." It was understood that Thant had in mind some form of neutralization of South Vietnam.[30]

Nations of the Communist bloc generally endorsed this initiative, and on 23 July President de Gaulle expanded upon it. The way to end the fighting, he said, was for the United States, the Soviet Union, Communist China, and France to agree to withdraw entirely from the Indochinese peninsula. A reconvened Geneva Conference could then frame the necessary guarantees against intervention and for the maintenance of neutrality.[31]

28. Jules Davids, The United States in World Affairs, 1964 (1965), p. 140.
29. Dept of State Bulletin, L (4 May 64), p. 692.
30. NY Times, 9 Jul 64, pp. 1, 2.
31. United States in World Affairs, 1964, p. 146.

President Johnson responded at his press conference the following day. The occasion was one of the first on which he used the words, "the United States seeks no wider war," after warning that provocation from the North could force a US response. The President then addressed "other friends [who] suggest that this problem must be moved to a conference table."

> If those who practice terror and ambush and murder will simply honor their existing agreements, there can easily be peace in Southeast Asia immediately. But we do not believe in a conference called to ratify terror, so our policy is unchanged.[32]

By this statement President Johnson bespoke a conviction that the course the United States had chosen was right and necessary and a resolve in seeing it through that had been evident in his actions from the moment he assumed office on 22 November 1963. No hitch or hesitation in US policy had marked the transition of authority following the death of John F. Kennedy.

Early Actions of the Johnson Administration: NSAM 273

President Johnson had taken hold immediately. On 26 November 1963 the Secretaries of State and Defense were informed that the President had reviewed the record of the discussions they had led at Honolulu on 20 November and had issued certain guidance, in NSAM 273. It opened with the following paragraph:

> 1. It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all U. S. decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.

Calling for a unified effort by all US officials concerned and for continuation of military and economic assistance

32. Public Papers, Johnson, 1963-1964, vol. II, p. 888.

programs at levels not less than those maintained during the Diem period, the President termed it "a major interest of the United States Government" that the new Minh regime in South Vietnam be assisted in consolidating itself and in developing increased public support. In particular, US efforts should be directed at inducing GVN leaders to concentrate their attention on the critical situation in the Mekong Delta. At the same time the President reaffirmed the White House statement of 2 October 1963 that had set the goal of substantial achievement of the purposes of the US advisory effort during the next two years, to be followed by a major withdrawal of US military personnel after 1965.[33]

In a paragraph that applied chiefly to the conclusions reached at Honolulu regarding a program of stepped-up GVN action against North Vietnam, with nonattributable US assistance, the presidential guidance called for prompt production of plans treating "different levels of possible increased activity" and in each instance including estimates of the resulting damage to North Vietnam, the plausibility of denial, possible NVN retaliation, and other international reactions. With regard to Laos, NSAM 273 required preparation of a plan for military operations launched from South Vietnam but penetrating no farther than 50 kilometers, together with political plans for minimizing the international hazards of such an enterprise. Secretary McNamara soon assigned concurrent responsibility for action in these several planning areas to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA).[34]

The issuance of NSAM 273 on the morrow of the day of national mourning and funeral services for John F. Kennedy summoned major officials to renew their consideration of the problems of Southeast Asia. At an interdepartmental meeting in Washington on 6 December Secretary McNamara provided what the Secretary of State described as a "disturbing analysis of the current military situation" in South Vietnam. He said that the GVN desired to respond to US military advice and to improve its operational effectivenes, but it was in a state of organizational turmoil. The Viet Cong were making an intensive effort to increase their hold on the countryside while the new government of General Minh was shaking down.

---

33. (TS-GP 1) NSAM 273, 26 Nov 63, Att to JCS 2343/297, 29 Nov 63, JMF 9155.3/5410 (22 Nov 63) sec 2.

34. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., "National Security Action Memorandum No. 273, dated 26 Nov 63," 6 Dec 63, Encl to JCS 2343/297-1, 9 Dec 63, same file.

The Viet Cong had exhibited a powerful capability for at least a brief period of intensified operations, and their skill in counter-airborne action was improving. Mr. McNamara identified it as a prime intelligence deficiency that while there were strong indications that infiltration of materiel had increased, there was little hard evidence.

The Secretary of Defense based his conclusions on the fact that VC incidents had greatly increased since the coup in early November, going as high as 1,000 in one week, with the great preponderance of incidents taking place in the Delta area. The weapons losses by the GVN had risen sharply while the VC weapons captured had not shown a corresponding increase. The Viet Cong appeared to be maintaining their hard core strength despite heavy casualties ascribed to them by US and GVN intelligence. In addition, numerous changes in GVN division and corps boundaries and in major commanders and district chiefs had by now been made as a result of the coup. These changes contributed to the "organizational turmoil" he had described and provided an inviting opportunity for VC incursions.

The VC capability for antiaircraft action had increased alarmingly, with twenty RVN and US aircraft having been damaged in a single day, 24 November. Much of this could be attributed to improved weapons. Recent capture of AA weapons and related equipment showed them to be of "possible Russian or Chinese design." The continued appearance of recoilless rifles and ammunition, unmarked but apparently of Chinese design, and the detection of new Chinese rifles in the Delta were added indications of increased infiltration.[35]

Secretary McNamara recommended four broad measures: 1) institute a program of pressures on North Vietnam of rising intensity; 2) institute probes of Laos, including the use of US advisors and US resupply capabilities; 3) institute aerial reconnaissance of both Cambodia and Laos; 4) accelerate dispatch of US economic experts to RVN.

Secretary Rusk informed Ambassador Lodge that the interdepartmental meeting had resulted in agreement to proceed with planning or action on all four points, and also to begin an analysis of waterborne traffic into South Vietnam and the development of plans to interrupt infiltration by this means.

35. (TS) Msg, State 908 to Saigon, 6 Dec 63.

A further provision of NSAM 273 had been the President's call for development of "as strong and persuasive a case as possible to demonstrate to the world the degree to which the Viet Cong is controlled, sustained and supplied from Hanoi, through Laos and other channels." The conferees on 6 December had agreed to send Mr. William Jorden to Saigon with the mission of gathering evidence for the production of a new report, similar to the State Department publication, A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam, which had been released in December 1961.[36]

"The President," Secretary Rusk concluded, "has expressed his deep concern that our effort in Vietnam be stepped up to the highest pitch and that each day we ask ourselves what more we can do to further the struggle."[37]

Planning for Actions against North Vietnam

Promulgation of NSAM 273 had constituted the President's approval for proceeding with planning for increased actions by RVN forces against North Vietnam, with nonattributable US assistance. The conferees in Honolulu earlier in November had defined this as a requirement for "an optimum 12 months' program for intensified operations against North Vietnam including sabotage, propaganda incursions, intelligence and commando hit-and-run raids." The operations would use RVN military and paramilitary resources, fully supported by the United States. The plan should show clearly what could be done with the means currently available and specify what additional means would be needed to carry out the optimum program. It should list actions of graduated intensity, ranging from low-level harassment and deception to large amphibious commando raids.[38]

Immediately upon the issuance of NSAM 273 the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to undertake this planning task, [redacted] with a target date for submission [redacted] December 1963.[39] Interest in Washington in early receipt

36. Dept of State Bulletin, XLV (25 Dec 61), p. 1053.
37. (TS) Msg, State 908 to Saigon, 6 Dec 63.
38. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/295, 23 Nov 63, JMF 9155.3/5410 (22 Nov 63) sec 2.
39. (TS) Briefing Memo, "Covert Operations Against Vietnam, Dec 1963," unsigned, OCJCS File, Black Binder "South Vietnam Conference, March 1964," vol. II, sec VII.

of the plan was keen, General Taylor advised CINCPAC in a follow-up message. A few days later, on 10 December, Secretary McNamara informed Ambassador Lodge that, at the President's behest, he would stop in Saigon on his way back from the NATO Council meeting. He looked forward particularly to seeing the plan for RVN operations against North Vietnam, which, in Mr. McNamara's words, was designed "to make clear to the North Vietnamese that the US will not accept a Communist victory in South Vietnam and that we will escalate the conflict to whatever level is required to insure their defeat."[40]

During consultations with the Secretary of Defense in Saigon on 19 December 1963 General Harkins presented the plan, which was the product of the joint efforts of his headquarters [redacted] It was subsequently designated OPLAN 34A-64. Secretary McNamara decided, following the presentation, that whether or not OPLAN 34A was eventually implemented in full, the United States should take action at once to assemble in RVN all the additional materiel assets required for the total execution of the plan.[41]

The Secretary returned to Washington with information and impressions that caused him to view the future with some anxiety. "The situation is very disturbing," he told the President on 21 December. "Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state."

The new government, which Mr. McNamara saw as indecisive and drifting, gave the greatest cause for concern. Although General Minh maintained that he, rather than the Generals' Council, was making decisions, this was in some doubt. In any event both Minh and his Council were inexperienced in political administration and, what was worse, showed little talent for it. They had no clear idea of how to reshape or conduct the strategic hamlet program. The province chiefs, most of whom were new, were receiving little or no direction. The preoccupation of military commanders with political

40. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS DIASO-3-4654-63 to CINCPAC, 2 Dec 63. (S) Msg, SecDef DIASO-3-4782-63 to COMUSMACV, 10 Dec 63.

41. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAG 4955 to CINCPAC, 20 Dec 63.

matters was reflected in ineffective direction of military operations.[42]

The encouraging accounts of the progress of the counter-insurgency that Generals Taylor and Krulak, as well as Mr. McNamara, had brought back from their September-October visits to RVN, and which had been challenged at the time by some State and USOM officials, had apparently been ill-founded. The Secretary now acknowledged that the Viet Cong were in the ascendancy and had been since about July. The Viet Cong had made great progress, and the situation had been deteriorating to a far greater extent than, as Mr. McNamara now expressed it, "we realized because of our undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting." The Viet Cong now controlled very high proportions of the people in some key provinces, particularly those directly south and west of Saigon. The strategic hamlet program was seriously overextended in these provinces, and the Viet Cong had been able to destroy many hamlets, while others had been abandoned, or betrayed and pillaged by the Government's own Self Defense Corps. In these key provinces, the Viet Cong were collecting taxes at will.

The remedy to the military troubles lay in getting the GVN to double its military strength in the key provinces through redeployment, plus improvement in the US military and USOM staffs to allow a reliable, independent US appraisal of the status of operations. Also, realistic pacification plans had to be prepared.

The situation in the northern and central areas was considerably better than in the Delta, and General Harkins still hoped that they could be made reasonably secure by the latter half of 1964.

Secretary McNamara did not believe that the situation required any substantial increase in US resources and personnel. He had, however, approved the sending of 42 additional 105mm howitzers and had directed that the Self Defense Corps, which was the most exposed force and had the lowest morale, be provided with uniforms. "Of greater potential significance," the Secretary observed, "I have directed the Military Departments to review urgently the quality of the people we are sending to Vietnam. It seems we have fallen off

42. (S) Memo, SecDef to President, "Vietnam Situation," 21 Dec 63, OCJCS File, Rpts on SVN, (Trip File Folder), Envelope #4. SecDef was also highly critical of the US Country Team in Saigon, citing its deficiencies as a second major weakness.

considerably from the high standards applied in the original selections in 1962, and the JCS fully agree with me that we must have our best men there."

With regard to prospective RVN operations against North Vietnam, Secretary McNamara [redacted] at a White House consultation shortly after [redacted] return from Saigon described the [redacted]an that had been developed [redacted] by COMUSMACV [redacted] In OPLAN 34A an array of over 2,000 actions were listed, ranging from small propaganda efforts to battalion-size commando raids and overt bombing of key targets. The President accepted the suggestion of his two advisors that an inter-departmental committee drawn from State, Defense, [redacted] be convened to select from this large target list the operations that were most feasible and promised the greatest return for the least risk. Under General Krulak's chairmanship this committee completed its report on 2 January. Secretary McNamara then prepared a shorter draft memorandum for the President and referred it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for comment.[43]

As a first phase in the implementation of OPLAN 34A the interdepartmental committee had proposed a four-month program of covert operations against North Vietnam, with a suggested beginning date of 1 February 1964. It provided for: 1) expansion of intelligence collection operations, including U-2 photographic missions and aerial communications-electronics intelligence missions; 2) expansion of psychological operations, including leaflet drops, delivery of propaganda kits, harassment and deception operations, [redacted] and 3) sabotage operations against 18 targets. Responsibility for all actions would be plausibly deniable by the United States, with the GVN being asked to adopt the program as its own. The United States would provide logistic and advisory support, but US personnel and forces would not engage in operations against North Vietnam. They would continue, however, to serve as air crews on certain air reconnaissance missions.

The proposed program had been designed to help convince the NVN leaders that it was in their own self-interest to

43. (TS-GP 1) SACSA T-2-64 to JCS, 4 Jan 64; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 3 Jan 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 63-Feb 64, vol II.

desist from aggressive policies. The importance attached by these leaders to the development of their economy suggested that progressive damage to NVN industrial projects and attrition of NVN resources might cause the government in the North to reduce its material support of the Viet Cong. The selection of sabotage targets had been guided by this view. Besides having an impact on the NVN economy and morale, the program could be expected to yield increased intelligence and to involve the Hanoi regime in costly countermeasures.

It was the JCS view that, taken all together and even if successful, these covert actions would not greatly influence the progress of the war. Still, the operations were within the current or early prospective capabilities of the GVN and represented a useful beginning. Intensive planning should go forward for a more vigorous program, with actions extended into the overt field if necessary. On 16 January the President approved the program recommended to him, for execution over a four month period beginning 1 February 1964. Selected from OPLAN 34A, the operations included [redacted] intelligence collection missions; 14, instead of 18, physical destruction operations, and several hundred psychological operations. The President did not approve any air strikes or other operations whose sponsorship could not be denied.[44]

Overall US political control of these operations in Saigon was charged to the Ambassador, with operational control assigned to COMUSMACV. Planning, liaison, logistics, training, and advice to the GVN would be handled by a [redacted] Task Force, reporting to COMUSMACV. Ambassador Lodge was instructed to bring the GVN into the planning process at once and in the manner considered by him and General Harkins to be most secure.[45]

Ambassador Lodge told Washington that he welcomed the exertion of increased pressure on North Vietnam. He considered the level of activity well chosen, since, he wrote, "I do not think it profitable to try and overthrown Ho Chi Minh, as his successor would undoubtedly be tougher than he is." The Ambassador said that he assumed the operations would be supported by diplomatic actions, designed to leave no doubt

44. (TS) Briefing Sheet, Agenda Item E, "OPLAN 34A-64 (North Vietnam)," OCJCS File, Trip Book, Mar 64, 29 Feb 64.

45. [redacted]

in the minds of NVN leaders, and of their Chinese mentors and Soviet associates, that these operations were merely a first phase, illustrating what North Vietnam could expect if it persisted in its support of aggression in Southeast Asia. At the same time the program should be carried out in a manner that would permit the Hanoi government to yield without serious loss of face. It might be possible to convey discreetly that some sort of reward, such as partial withdrawal of US forces and shipment of rice from the South to the North, would be forthcoming if Hanoi responded favorably.

Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins called on General Minh on 21 January to explain the US plan for expanding operations against North Vietnam. The reaction of General Minh and his associates was thoughtful and "constructive," according to Lodge, and included some canvassing of the consequences that might ensue. Assurance was given that the program the United States proposed was not one that would be pressed to a point that would make Chinese Communist intervention likely. After a further meeting between General Harkins and General Kim to discuss the military requirements in more detail, the GVN concurred in the program for February and agreed to make the forces available to carry it out.[47]

OPLAN 34A Gets Under Way

The overthrow of Minh and his associates by General Khanh occurred a few days later. Concern arose that the OPLAN 34A information passed to GVN officials might have been compromised, but investigation by General Harkins showed that the deposed Generals had not had access to the more sensitive portions of the plan and had apparently not been given any extensive written materials. Accordingly the planned operations were mounted, but they were largely unsuccessful during February and March. Equipment shortages, unfavorable weather, bad luck, and lack of motivation and enterprise on the part of the Vietnamese forces assigned contributed to this outcome.[48]

46. (TS) Msg, Saigon CAS 3902 to CIA, 20 Jan 64.
47. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3943 to State, 21 Jan 64; [redacted]

48. (TS) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "OPLAN 34A-64," 28 Feb 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 64. [redacted] (TS) SACSA-M-180-64 to CJCS, 19 Mar 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 64.

The failures of February were enough to cause the Secretary of Defense to question the adequacy of the operational procedures being used, and General Harkins was asked to comment In his reply, COMUSMACV held that the operational procedures were adequate and sound, but he acknowledged that morale and motivation had become serious problems. The basic loyalty of existing RVN agents and sabotage teams had been to Diem and their immediate superior, Colonel Tung, who had been removed in the November coup. They knew they were in disfavor with the Khanh government, and many of them were being called back from their missions for "interrogation." Changes in government and in key personnel had caused delays in executing programs, and some information appearing in the press suggested lapses in security. General Harkins hoped for improvement, chiefly from the intensified training program then in effect for RVN special forces.[49]

GVN National and Province Plans

While the results achieved in RVN operations against North Vietnam during February and March were disappointing, US officials could draw encouragement from the purposeful beginni General Khanh appeared to be making in carrying out an effective internal pacification plan. The RVNAF Joint General Sta had issued a new National Pacification Plan (NPP) during January. It was a revision of the earlier National Campaign Plan, and MACV advisors had participated extensively in its development. The NPP set forth the national strategy for a combined military, political, and economic offensive against the Viet C in two phases. Phase I involved a coordinated military and civilian effort under military command to clear territory of t Viet Cong, moving successively from secure and highly populate areas into the insecure and less densely populated ones. The concept became known as the "spreading oil drop." In Phase II military forces would destroy the Viet Cong in their secret bases and thus end the insurgency.

Priorities for carrying out Phase I were: 1) provinces surrounding Saigon and extending south into the Delta, to be completed by 1 July 1965; 2) remainder of the Delta in the Ca Mau peninsula and critical provinces north of Saigon; to be completed by 1 January 1966; 3) all of I and II Corps

49. (TS) SACSA-M-149-64 to CJCS, 4 Mar 64. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 031045Z Mar 64.

Tactical Zones, less the VC strongholds reserved for Phase II, to be completed by 1 January 1965 (lowest in priority but the easiest task).[50]

The new Khanh government approved the plan on 18 February 1964. The operations it called for would be conducted by military leaders with civil authorities in supporting roles, but with the relationship reversing upon the securing of a particular area.[51]

A National Pacification Committee, formally established on 9 March, was headed by Prime Minister Khanh and included key ministers of the GVN. The RVNAF high command served as executive agent for the pacification. The old Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets, established in February 1962, had been replaced by a commissariat for "Hamlets of the New Life" (Minh's new name for strategic hamlets). It was now attached to the Joint General Staff, reinforcing the principle that all aspects of pacification would proceed under military direction, with province chiefs assuming responsibility only in secured areas.

US advisors could view the NPP with satisfaction, as marking the acceptance of recommendations they had repeatedly made without result during the Diem period. The plan's implementation promised to end the difficulties that had arisen from the "two-hat" status of the province chiefs. The NPP's schedule of priorities accorded generally with the emphasis on securing the Delta area that US officials had advocated.

New Organization and Planning in Washington

On 14 February 1964, President Johnson established a high-level committee to oversee US policy and operations in South Vietnam. He named Mr. William Sullivan of the Department of State as the full-time head of this committee, under Secretary Rusk. The Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the AID Administrator were asked to to nominate individuals to serve on the committee, and

50. (S) SACSA Briefing Sheet, "GVN National and Province Plans," 28 Feb 64, OCJCS File, Red Trip Book, 29 Feb 64, Agenda Item C 2.
51. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 1266 to CINCPAC, 19 Feb 64.

Mr. Michael Forrestal was designated as the White House representative. The President directed that those appointed "give an absolute priority to their obligations as members of this committee and as agents for the execution of approved decisions. He closed by expressing the hope that "the establishment of this committee will permit an energetic, unified and skillful prosecution of the only war we face at present."[52]

To represent the Department of Defense, Secretary McNamara nominated Mr. William P. Bundy and Major General Rollen H. Anthis, USAF, who had recently succeeded General Krulak as SACSA.[53] Within a few weeks, however, Mr. Bundy left the Pentagon to become Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. His successor, both on the Sullivan committee and as Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), was Mr. John T. McNaughton.

The Sullivan committee, formally designated the Vietnam Coordinating Committee (VNCC), superseded an existing interdepartmental coordinating body whose somewhat lower organizational level had hampered its effectiveness. In launching the new arrangement President Johnson had indicated that, in the execution of approved policy, departmental appeals from Mr. Sullivan's decisions should be kept at a minimum. Mr. Sullivan was not authorized to render decisions on major questions of policy and operations, but he had considerable authority in regard to the continuing execution of approved policy. The level and terms of reference of the new committee were such as to raise some concern that Department of Defense responsibilities for military matters and JCS responsibilities for military planning and for providing the channel of command to CINCPAC might be preempted to some extent. General Anthis recognized that the two Defense representatives must be alert to insure that their Department did not become committed to policies or actions that had not received appropriate consideration by the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[54]

---

52. (S-GP 1) NSAM 280, 14 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2343/321, 15 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (14 Feb 64).

53. (S-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to President, 16 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2343/321-1, 17 Feb 64, same file.

54. (S) SACSA TP-6-64 to JCS, 18 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (14 Feb 64).

During a conference with the VNCC members and other advisors on 20 February the President directed that contingency planning be speeded up for the application of pressures against North Vietnam that would have the maximum deterrent effect on the Hanoi government.[55] Accordingly the VNCC turned immediately to the preparation of a plan of action for the United States in Vietnam consisting of: 1) a detailed scenario for the imposition of measured sanctions against North Vietnam on an ascending scale; 2) back-up studies exploring in depth the major questions encountered; 3) a list of major policy decisions required before starting the proposed courses of action; and 4) a statement of intelligence requirements to support the policy decisions and operations. A subcommittee that included representation from the Joint Staff prepared this plan, submitting it on 1 March to the full committee. It was based in part on a paper dated 11 February 1964, "Draft Outline (Southeast Asia)," written by Mr. Walt W. Rostow of the Department of State.[56]

The report produced by the VNCC subcommittee was titled "Alternatives for the Imposition of Measured Pressures Against North Vietnam." It described three alternative programs of military pressures, with associated political, economic, and psychological measures, and estimated the NVN, Chinese Communist, Soviet, and Free World reactions to each. The alternatives presented for consideration were: 1) further activity along the lines of OPLAN 34A, in which RVN or third-country personnel would conduct a series of increasingly severe maritime and airborne raids against targets related to the support of the Viet Cong or critical to the economy or security of North Vietnam; 2) a program of overt US and/or Allied activity, short of combatant action against NVN territory or territorial waters but not excluding combat operations in Laos; 3) an overt US program consisting of amphibious and airborne raids, destruction of junks and NVN-owned shipping, mining of northern seaports, blockade, shore bombardment, and air attacks against North Vietnam.[57]

---

55. (S) Memo for Record, Michael Forrestal, "South Vietnam," 20 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Feb 64).

56. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-387-64 to CJCS, 4 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (11 Feb 64).

57. (TS-GP 1) Rpt, State Dept Policy Planning Council, "Alternatives for the Imposition of Measured Pressures Against North Vietnam," 1 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (11 Feb 64) sec 1A.

The report received no immediate approval or disapproval. Like many other papers of the period it stood as a contribution to the continuing deliberations on Southeast Asian policy that proceeded at the highest levels of the US Government throughout 1964. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also had a role in this continuing discussion and had submitted their views more than once since the beginning of the year.

The JCS Recommendations of 22 January 1964

On 22 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff had advised the Secretary of Defense that if the United States was to achieve the objectives in Southeast Asia laid down by the President in NSAM 273 of 26 November 1963, it must be prepared to put aside many self-imposed restrictions and move more boldly and at greater risk.[58]

The stakes were high. "If the US program succeeds in South Vietnam it will go far toward stabilizing the total Southeast Asia situation," the Joint Chiefs of Staff observed. "Conversely, a loss of South Vietnam to the communists will presage an early erosion of the remainder of our position in that subcontinent." Laos could not long survive with an aggressive communist power on its east flank, and Thailand would probably succumb in turn. "Cambodia," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, "apparently has estimated that our prospects in South Vietnam are not promising and, encouraged by the actions of the French, appears already to be seeking an accommodation with the communists." Beyond this, in Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea the impact of an American defeat on judgments "with respect to US durability, resolution, and trustworthiness" would be severe.

As "the first real test of our determination to defeat the communist wars of national liberation formula," South Vietnam held "the pivotal position" in the world-wide confrontation between the United States and the communist nations The conflict there must be brought to a favorable end as soon as possible, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought it unrealistic to expect that a complete suppression of the insurgency could take place in one or even two years. The

58. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-46-64 to SecDef, 22 Jan 64, Encl to JCS 2339/117-2, 11 Jan 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (3 Jan 64) A.

successful counterinsurgency effort of the British in Malaya had taken ten years, they observed.

In voicing this opinion the Joint Chiefs of Staff were indirectly challenging one provision of NSAM 273, in which the expectation had been reaffirmed that the US advisory effort could accomplish its purposes over the next two years and allow a substantial US withdrawal after 1965. Instead, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed the way to a more extensive, and probably longer, commitment. They were convinced that the United States must make plain to the enemy its determination "to see the Vietnam campaign through to a favorable conclusion. To do this, we must prepare for whatever level of activity may be required and, being prepared, must then proceed to take actions as necessary to achieve our purposes surely and promptly."

Moreover, decisions regarding action in South Vietnam should be made within the context of an integrated US policy for all of Southeast Asia. Sufficient attention had not yet been given, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, to the integration of economic, political, and military measures in an effort that would seek compatible objectives in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, as well as South Vietnam.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were concerned that the RVN, with US support, was currently fighting the war on the enemy's terms; "our actions are essentially reactive."

> One reason for this is the fact that we have obliged ourselves to labor under self-imposed restrictions with respect to impeding external aid to the Viet Cong. These restrictions include keeping the war within the boundaries of South Vietnam, avoiding the direct use of US combat forces, and limiting US direction of the campaign to rendering advice to the Government of Vietnam. These restrictions, while they may make our international position more readily defensible, all tend to make the task in Vietnam more complex, time consuming, and in the end, more costly.

In addition, US observance of these restrictions might well be "conveying signals of irresolution to our enemies" and encouraging them to undertake more daring initiatives.

Then followed a sentence to whose precise wording the Joint Chiefs of Staff had given particular attention: "A reversal of attitude and the adoption of a more aggressive program would enhance greatly our ability to control the degree to which escalation will occur."[59] In this connection they discounted the likelihood of Chinese Communist intervention; "the economic and agricultural disappointments suffered by Communist China, plus the current rift with the Soviets, could cause the communists to think twice about undertaking a large-scale military adventure in Southeat Asia."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged that "the focus of the counterinsurgency battle lies in South Vietnam itself, and that the war must certainly be fought and won primarily in the minds of the Vietnamese people." But they judged the operational direction, personnel, and material support received by the Viet Cong from outside the country to have reached significant proportions. If this outside support were stopped completely, "the character of the war in South Vietnam would be substantially and favorably altered." The Joint Chiefs of Staff were wholly in favor of mounting the four-month program of OPLAN 34A actions that the President had approved a few days earlier, but they believed "it would be idle to conclude that these efforts will have a decisive effect on the communist determination to support the insurgency." The United States must be prepared to undertake a much higher level of activity.

The memorandum of 22 January then listed the "increasingly bolder actions" the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the United States must make ready to conduct:

> a. Assign to the US military commander responsibility for the total US program in Vietnam.
>
> b. Induce the Government of Vietnam to turn over to the United States military

---

59. Ibid. Additional language containing this thought had first been recommended by CSA; amendments subsequently proposed by CJCS were further refined during a JCS meeting. (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2339/117-2 - Strategy in Southeast Asia (U)," 15 Jan 64; (TS) Secy, JCS, "Decision On JCS 2339/117-2," 20 Jan 64; same file.

commander, temporarily, the actual tactical direction of the war.

c. Charge the United States military commander with complete responsibility for conduct of the program against North Vietnam.

d. Overfly Laos and Cambodia to whatever extent is necessary for acquisition of operational intelligence.

e. Induce the Government of Vietnam to conduct overt ground operations in Laos of sufficient scope to impede the flow of personnel and material southward.

f. Arm, equip, advise, and support the Government of Vietnam in its conduct of aerial bombing of critical targets in North Vietnam and in mining the sea approaches to that country.

g. Advise and support the Government of Vietnam in its conduct of large-scale commando raids against critical targets in North Vietnam.

h. Conduct aerial bombing of key North Vietnam targets, using US resources under Vietnamese cover, and with the Vietnamese openly assuming responsibility for the actions.

i. Commit additional US forces, as necessary, in support of the combat action within South Vietnam.

j. Commit US forces as necessary in direct actions against North Vietnam.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense of their conviction that "any or all of the foregoing actions may be required" to attain the US objectives. They would continue their close attention to developments in South Vietnam during the coming months and would recommend to him "progressively the execution of such of the above actions as are considered militarily required." For

the present the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the substance of their memorandum be discussed with the Secretary of State.

Secretary Rusk, upon receiving a copy of the JCS memorandum from Mr. McNamara, skillfully turned aside the bid for overall military control that could be read in the unqualified JCS proposal to "assign to the US military commander responsibilities for the total US program in Vietnam." Noting that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had written that the war must be won in the minds of the Vietnamese people, Secretary Rusk agreed, saying "this means that this war, like other guerrilla wars, is essentially political--an important fact to bear in mind in determining command and control arrangements in Viet-Nam."

He also subscribed to the JCS opinion that an integrated US policy must be followed in Southeast Asia but did not address directly the full implications of their thought. His reply dwelt on the need for careful consideration before decisions were made, in order to weigh the political and military risks involved and to assure due regard for the fact that action taken with respect to one country might have an impact on the situation in another. The Secretary of State declared that his Department would always be prepared to consider promptly any of the listed actions that the Joint Chiefs of Staff might subsequently recommend.[60]

JCS Planning After the Khanh Coup

Scarcely a week after submission of the JCS views on 22 January the overthrow of the Minh government by General Khanh occurred. In the new situation created by this event General Taylor, on 5 February, ordered the Joint Staff to draw up an outline plan for revitalizing the counterinsurgency program. He specified that the plan should give particular attention to means of assisting Khanh to produce the political stability that was indispensible to the success of the military program. The Chairman held that the United States could not afford to have any further changes of government before the military phase of the counterinsurgency program was concluded. "The problem," he wrote, "is to get this thought across to the

60. (TS-GP 1) Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 5 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2339/117-3, 11 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (3 Jan 64) A.

senior Vietnamese military who may entertain thoughts of future coups."

In connection with proposals for stepping up the tempo of the campaign against the Viet Cong, the Chairman wanted specific suggestions for actions to restore RVN confidence and morale and to reassure the US public that the policy their government was following in Vietnam could produce results. "We should look for several relatively spectacular operations which, if successful, could have a psychological impact in South Vietnam and in the United States. To achieve this effect, we shall need accurate and sympathetic press reporting," General Taylor said.[61]

The views of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV were solicited on this latter aspect of the Chairman's guidance.[62] In reply, General Harkins discouraged the thought that operations yielding a spectacular success could readily be planned. The basic concept of the National Pacification Plan, shortly to be implemented, and the general nature of the fighting were not condusive to it. In a situation in which the enemy held the initiative, "spectacular successes, if attained, will be the result of successful reaction operations rather than specifically planned operations, simply because VC forces assemble as units only at times and places of their choosing."

CINCPAC agreed substantially, observing that "in this war, operations using large forces to corner thousands and slay them" were not to be expected. Still he thought some possibilities might be developed by turning to night guerrilla operations, ambushes using vulnerable hamlets as bait, and hot pursuit of the Viet Cong into Cambodia or Laos. Admiral Felt doubted, however, that isolated successes in such operations, even if spectacular, would cause the press to change its tune. The correspondents seemed convinced that the US cause was lost, and "short of a major shift in press attitude, US public is not likely to be reassured by increase in tempo of GVN military actions."[63]

---

61. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/317, 5 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1.
62. (TS) Msg, JCS 559-64 to CINCPAC, 062117Z Feb 64.
63. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 081046Z Feb 64.

An outline plan responsive to the Chairman's guidance was circulated for JCS consideration on 11 February.[64] In it the Joint Staff presented a broad spectrum of actions--political, military, socio-economic, psychological, and organizational--that could contribute to revitalizing and intensifying the counterinsurgency effort. Some expanded on existing or scheduled activities, but others represented a sharp departure from the current US program. Divergent views soon emerged, relating mainly to the more consequential military actions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to reserve these matters for further study, in effect merging them with the continuing consideration of the military actions listed in the JCS memorandum of 22 January. Measures on which there was ready agreement would be recommended to the Secretary of Defense immediately.[65]

On 18 February 1964 the resulting JCS memorandum was forwarded to Secretary McNamara. Although including some military measures, its recommendations were largely restricted to actions needed to insure an integrated political, socio-economic, and psychological offensive to support the National Pacification Plan, whose approaching implementation the Joint Chiefs of Staff hailed as a promising move. They recommended that the Country Team in Saigon be directed to implement the following actions at the earliest practicable time: 1) persuade General Khanh to accept US advisors at all levels considered necessary by COMUSMACV; 2) improve control of borders by setting up intelligence nets without regard to geographic boundaries, using smugglers, the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and other minority border groups and establishing certain denied areas in which a "shoot on sight" policy would be followed; 3) step up the use of herbicides for crop destruction against identified VC areas recommended by the GVN; 4) assist the GVN in readying the civil administrative effort necessary to establish orderly government in areas cleared in the military phase of the NPP; 5) support the GVN in intensified internal psychological planning and operations; 6) press for an early, effective, and realistic land reform program; 7) support the GVN in a policy of tax forgiveness for low income groups in critical insurgency areas; 8) undertake consultations aimed at gaining the support of US newsmen; and 9) arrange US-sponsored visits to South Vietnam by groups of prominent

64. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/317-1, 11 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1.

65. (TS) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/317-1 - South Vietnam (U)," 12 Feb 64, same file.

journalists and editors. Further, the Country Team should make certain that all GVN military and civilian officials understood that the United States, considering it imperative that the existing government be stabilized, would oppose another coup. All US intelligence agencies and advisors should be alert for and report cases of dissension and plotting in order to prevent any further disruptive moves.[66]

The Secretary of Defense referred these JCS recommendations to the Vietnam Coordinating Committee for consideration.[67]

66. (TS) JCSM-136-64 to SecDef, 18 Feb 64, Encl to JCS 2343/317-2, 13 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1.

67. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam," 5 Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/317-5, 9 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 4.

Chapter 9

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RECOMMENDS A PROGRAM

Preparation for a Visit to South Vietnam

In a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 21 February 1964 the Secretary of Defense reviewed the intensive consideration being given to the possibility of exerting military pressures on the government of North Vietnam to induce it to terminate its support of the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. Noting that there were "a number of military uncertainties which must be resolved" before the ultimate decisions could be taken, he posed an extensive list of questions on which the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were desired.

Secretary McNamara asked what military actions could be undertaken by the GVN against North Vietnam, employing air and naval power but limiting ground force activity to small-scale raids, and what further actions could be attributed to the GVN even though not within the plausible range of its capabilities. Similarly, what actions could US forces take without public acknowledgement, or, alternatively, after an open declaration of the US intention to exert military pressure on North Vietnam? What targets would it be most effective to attack from the standpoint of a) specific effect on North Vietnamese capabilities for action against South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand; b) interdiction of sea communications into North Vietnam and of main communication routes from Communist China; c) inflicting damage on key installations while holding the effect on the North Vietnamese civilian population to a minimum?

In addition to answers on each point, the Secretary sought the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as to the courses of action under one or more of the above headings that would be most likely to cause cessation of Hanoi's support of the insurgents but least likely to "lead to stepped-up conflict and adverse reactions in third countries."

The majority of the queries, however, had to do with the capabilities of North Vietnam and Communist China for military action, and with the US means and capabilities of deterring or opposing them. Must the US planning contemplate the possibility, for instance, that the enemy would react militarily both in Southeast Asia and in Korea or against Taiwan?

A line of thought the Secretary seemed particularly interested in pursuing was indicated by the question "what modifications must be made in existing contingency plans in order to provide for U.S. reactions which would depend primarily upon air activities rather than the intervention of substantial U. S. ground forces?" Elsewhere in the list he asked, in the event that North Vietnam and/or Communist China reacted to attacks on the North by advancing large numbers of troops into Laos, South Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, South Korea, or Taiwan, to what extent could the United States effectively counter the invasion through air and naval responses only, without adding to the ground forces currently deployed, under alternatives ranging from use of conventional ordnance only to selective use of tactical nuclear weapons.

In closing his memorandum of 21 February, Secretary McNamara noted that a detailed response might well require a longer time, but he wished to have the preliminary judgments of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for consideration prior to his scheduled departure for South Vietnam on 4 March.[1]

Recognizing the magnitude of the Secretary's requirement, General Taylor nevertheless called for a response by 1 March, holding open the possibility that supplementary material might be submitted later. The Chairman directed that an ad hoc planning unit be established within the Joint Staff to conduct the intensive effort required. Brigadier General Lucius D. Clay, Jr., of the J-3 Directorate was immediately appointed to head the group.[2]

Among the materials on hand or shortly made available to General Clay's group were the individual views of three of the JCS members. General LeMay had submitted a major relevant paper on the same day that Secretary McNamara posed his questions. "In my military judgment," said the Chief of Staff, Air Force, "the time has come for a showdown in South Vietnam if we are to contain Communism there and in the whole of Southeast Asia."

In an 11-page outline plan for revitalizing the counterinsurgency effort General LeMay proposed issuance of a statement of policy reaffirming the US determination to assist the GVN in destroying the externally directed insurgent forces, including a warning that communist sanctuaries beyond South Vietnam's borders would no longer be immune to attack. Action should be taken to

1. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam," 21 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2343/326, 22 Feb 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1.
2. (TS) CM-1213-64 to D/JS, 22 Feb 64; (TS-GP 1) DJSM-321-64 to CJCS, 22 Feb 64; same file.

increase offensive strength and contribute to "militant prosecution" of the war within South Vietnam, including the introduction of jet aircraft for both US and VNAF use. At the same time, restrictions on both US and RVN forces should be lifted to allow hot pursuit of the Viet Cong into Cambodia and deliberate operations against enemy sanctuaries and lines of communication in Laos. He proposed intensive covert operations against North Vietnam with participation by personnel from Taiwan, Thailand, or the Philippines.[3]

Submission of views by the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant, US Marine Corps, followed shortly. Like General LeMay, they were impressed with the fact that only a token of the immense military power commanded by the United States had yet been committed to achieving the nation's vital objectives in Southeast Asia. Citing the Lebanon intervention, the Taiwan Straits confrontation of 1958, and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 as instances in which the United States had effectively used its power, gaining both a favorable outcome and heartening expressions of support from the free world, the Chief of Naval Operations thought it strange that "we are hesitant to use it again in the particular and serious crisis we now face." The specific proposals in the Navy paper paralleled those of the Air Force but went farther by recommending direct US military actions against North Vietnam.[4]

The Commandant, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., was perhaps even more forthright. He called for a prompt and clear-cut governmental decision "either to pull out of South Vietnam or to stay there and win. If the decision is to stay and win--which is the Marine Corps recommendation--this objective must be pursued with the full concerted power of U.S. resources." General Greene recommended that the United States "commence systematic destruction--in a rising crescendo--of targets in North Vietnam by air attack, amphibious raids, covert operations, and naval gunfire," initially using RVN forces but with readiness to add those of the United States. He would "place a single military officer, COMUSMACV, in complete and total control of all operations" and would introduce such wartime measures as news censorship and controlled accreditation of US and foreign

3. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/326-1, 22 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1.
4. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/326-3, 26 Feb 64, same file.

correspondents. The ultimate outcome General Greene sketched in the following recommendation:

> While maintaining the necessary tempo of operations to convince the Communists that we mean business, make it clear that the U.S. is willing to confer and negotiate at any time with Ho Chi Minh. Listen patiently to our allies, friends, and enemies, but continue to press home the campaign in South Vietnam until a settlement on U.S. terms is reached.[5]

The JCS reply went to the Secretary of Defense on 2 March, in the form of a lengthy memorandum with several appendices. It gave detailed estimates of NVN and Chinese Communist military capabilities but presented the conclusion that while the two enemy powers might exert military pressures in several areas at once, such as in Southeast Asia, South Korea, and the Taiwan Straits, they were unable to mount and sustain a major campaign in more than one direction, owing mainly to logistic limitations. As for the US effort that would be required to contain a large-scale communist invasion of South Korea, Taiwan, or any of the countries of Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff listed the forces already designated in CINCPAC's contingency plans.

To the query regarding US ability to counter a major communist invasion through air and naval responses without deployment of further ground forces, the JCS answer was indirectly stated but unmistakable. [In applying land and sea-based air power in that situation, nuclear attacks would have "a far greater probability" of causing the enemy to desist from aggression than attacks with lesser ordnance.] Sea power would be most effectively applied in a blockade, but it would have to be imposed for a considerable time before it had a marked effect on the enemy's operations. Hence the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized that "in initiating actions against the DRV there must be a readiness and willingness on the part of the United States to follow through with appropriate contingency plans to counter DRV/CHICOM reaction as required." That is, air and sea attacks alone could not be counted on to halt a major aggression.[6]

---

5. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/326-2, 25 Feb 64, same file.

6. The quoted sentence was added as the result of a more direct statement of this view by the Joint Chiefs of Staff during discussion of a preliminary draft. (TS) Note to Control Division, "JCS 2343/326-5 - Vietnam," 29 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 2.

As for the Secretary's related question about modification of contingency plans to exclude the use of substantial US ground forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that "while CINCPAC has numerous plans which call for substantial US air effort in conjunction with the intervention of US ground forces, there are no specific plans based solely on air and naval responses which apply to all of the situations contained in this paper." They undertook to direct the preparation of such plans as required.

In assessing the means available to apply military pressures against North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited particularly air strikes, amphibious raids, sabotage operations, and a naval blockade. The RVNAF, acting alone, had a very limited capability to conduct the first three types of operations. By adding nonattributable US support in the form of FARM GATE operations, the VNAF air effort could be intensified and expanded, mounting strikes against lines of communication, military installations, and industrial targets. FARM GATE capabilities would be greatly enhanced if augmented with B-57 jet aircraft. Progressing to further levels, unacknowledged introduction of other US air and naval elements would permit further selective destruction of the targets mentioned, while open announcement of the US intention to apply pressures would provide still more freedom of action. More detailed treatment appeared in an appendix and in a scenario outlining the steps in a program of increasing pressures against North Vietnam.

The central question in Secretary McNamara's list had been the request for JCS views on the course of action most likely to cause cessation of support from the North to the insurgents in South Vietnam and Laos, with the least unfavorable enemy and international reaction. In their reply on 2 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that:

> (a) US intentions and resolve to extend the war as necessary should be made clear immediately by overt military actions against the DRV.
>
> (b) Military actions should be part of a coordinated diplomatic, military, and psychological program directed at deterring the enemy and preparing the world for extension of the war.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then for the first time defined two possible modes of attack, offering a choice that was to be debated repeatedly during subsequent months:

(c) We should prepare military actions, one in the form of a sudden blow for shock effect, another in the form of ascending order of severity with increasing US participation . . . .

The more detailed portion of the JCS recommendation followed:

(d) Initial military preparations should provide for:

i. Overt demonstrations of US intentions through US low level aerial reconnaissance over Laos and North Vietnam.

ii. Expansion of RVN activities including FARM GATE aircraft, into North Vietnam by:

1. Air strikes

2. Amphibious raids

3. Sabotage

4. Harassment of shipping and fishing activities.

(e) Preparation should be initiated by the US and GVN for:

i. Increasing the intensity of efforts against the DRV by:

1. Armed reconnaissance along the principal supply routes from DRV to Laos.

2. Destruction of:

(i) Highway bridges along the principal supply routes from DRV to Laos.

(ii) Military targets in DRV and Laos which directly support the insurgency.

(iii) Airfields in DRV which are used for aerial resupply to Laos.

(iv) POL installations and major LOC facilities between China and DRV in North Vietnam.

(v) Industrial base targets in the Hanoi/ Haiphong area.

3. Mine laying in selected areas.

4. Conducting cross-border operations.

5. Undertaking a maritime blockade of DRV.

These listings indicated the general categories of targets the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought it most effective to attack, within the limiting conditions set by the Secretary of Defense. A detailed treatment of target systems appeared in an appendix.

As for enemy response to the military actions recommended, the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought it "unlikely that the CHICOMs would introduce organized ground units in significant numbers into the DRV, Laos, or Cambodia except as part of an over-all campaign against all of Southeast Asia." It was their assessment that "the Chinese communists view Laos and South Vietnam as DRV problems." The leaders of the Peiping government might offer fighter aircraft, AAA units, and volunteers to North Vietnam and at some stage might commit Chinese Communist aircraft to the defense of that country. The USSR could be expected to continue and possibly increase its economic aid shipments to Hanoi, but the Soviet leaders "would probably be highly concerned over possible expansion of the conflict." If it began to appear that the communist regimes in Hanoi and Peiping were in jeopardy, the Soviets would probably set aside their differences with Communist China and send further assistance, including higher performance aircraft. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the leaders in Moscow would make a realistic assessment of their own national interests and of US determination and intentions and would take no action that increased the likelihood of nuclear war. While condemning the US policy in international forums, the Soviets might even "seek to initiate, or have initiated by other parties, discussions aimed at terminating hostilities and stabilizing the situation throughout all of Vietnam."

In summation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed the view expressed in their memorandum of 22 January 1964 concerning the overriding importance to the security interests of the United States of preventing the loss of South Vietnam. Since North Vietnamese direction and support of the insurgency was one of the controlling factors in the continuation of the war, "intensified operations are warranted and essential at this time to convince both the DRV and CHICOM leadership of our resolution to prevail." Admittedly, adoption of the program

they had set forth would involve a change in US policy, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the specific actions they had described be approved as a basis for discussion and planning with US and GVN officials during Secretary McNamara's impending visit to South Vietnam.[7]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff met with the Secretary of Defense on 2 March and discussed the recommendations in their memorandum in detail. General Taylor drew attention to the two modes of attack they had defined--the sharp blow as against a steadily intensifying application of pressure--and said that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had not yet matured their view regarding which should be chosen. The matter would be studied further, particularly in the light of any decisions resulting from the Secretary's trip to South Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara's comments showed him to be still strongly disposed toward the fullest possible use of air power, though he had apparently abandoned any thought that it could preclude the commitment of US ground forces. He now sought a minimum involvement of US ground forces, whatever the ultimate level of escalation, by substituting Chinese Nationalist or other third-country units and particularly by a "far more massive use of air." In CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 (Defense against North Vietnamese Invasion of South Vietnam and Laos), for instance, he would like to see up to three times as many USAF squadrons committed as were currently listed. The Chairman undertook to have all the plans for Southeast Asia reviewed to assure that maximum use of air power, including naval air, was featured.

The meeting concluded with agreement that the JCS memorandum of 2 March would receive further review and that Secretary McNamara and General Taylor would discuss it with CINCPAC while en route to South Vietnam.[8]

Cross-Border Operations

As a separate action on 2 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a strong recommendation that the United States lift restrictions that were preventing military operations into Laos and Cambodia. "While our

7. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-174-64 to SecDef, 2 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/326-6, 1 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 3.
8. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Vietnam (U) (Response to SecDef Memo of 21 Feb 1964)," 2 Mar 64, same file, sec 4.

available hard intelligence does not reveal the exact dimensions of the infiltration of men and materials into South Vietnam from the North, and the true extent to which the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese supporters are utilizing sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, there is mounting evidence that these are of such proportions as to constitute an increasingly important factor in the war."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff cited the growing firepower of the Viet Cong, which could have been achieved only through the introduction of modern infantry weapons from outside the country, and they pointed to a recent instance of the escape of a battalion-sized VC force to haven in Cambodia, following a raid into South Vietnam. Reverting to some of the language of their memorandum of 22 January 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urged the lifting of self-imposed restrictions that denied the means of interdicting infiltration routes and of pursuing and destroying enemy forces. "Certain military operations across the borders of Laos and Cambodia are considered essential to successful prosecution of the war," they declared.

CINCPAC had already proposed certain specific cross-border operations, in fulfillment of NSAM 273, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary seek approval to have these carried out. Terming them "Overt Secret Operations," the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the following actions: 1) encourage the GVN to adopt the principle of hot pursuit into the Demilitarized Zone, Cambodia, and Laos of Viet Cong committing hostile acts in or against South Vietnam; 2) authorize US advisory personnel to accompany RVNAF combat elements in hot pursuit; 3) authorize the 2nd Air Division (FARM GATE) to engage in hot pursuit under the same rules as the VNAF; 4) authorize overflights of Laos and Cambodia for reconnaissance and photography (with operations over Cambodia being limited for the time being to high altitude flights); 5) encourage GVN ground and air operations across the Laos border against VC units, installations, and activities, in cooperation with friendly forces in Laos arranged through GVN planning with General Phoumi Nosavan; 6) authorize US personnel to accompany South Vietnamese forces in international waters north of the 17th Parallel and on ground and air operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended encouraging South Vietnamese covert ground operations into Cambodia and air operations in support of these forays.[9]

9. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-168-64 to SecDef, 2 Mar 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/330, 25 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (D).

Naval Blockade of North Vietnam

One of the prospective measures that had been listed more than once by the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the imposition of a naval blockade against North Vietnam. To support more detailed consideration they had asked CINCPAC to furnish his views on the feasibility of such a blockade, including the recommended concept of operations, types and numbers of ships required, and the magnitude of the effort needed to obtain effective results.[10]

In his reply on 28 February 1964, Admiral Felt pointed out that the predominant part of North Vietnam's trade was with Communist Bloc countries, although the majority of ocean-going ships entering the three principal ports were from free world registries. About 85 percent of NVN maritime commerce moved via shallow draft coastal shipping. Since the maritime shipping to be cut off would be owned by nations other than North Vietnam, the blockade would have to be a "total" rather than a "pacific" blockade. Accordingly, the United States would have to adopt a belligerent status. To make the blockade effective, coastal shipping would have to be stopped, requiring US forces to enter NVN territorial waters and air space.

CINCPAC pointed out that such a blockade would require considerable effort and would involve great risk, with a constant threat of Chinese Communist countermeasures. The Tonkin Gulf area in which the blockade zone would be declared was a virtual cul de sac, surrounded by existing or potential Chinese Communist air bases in South China, Hainan, and North Vietnam. While Admiral Felt believed that carrier aircraft could neutralize these threats and establish control of the air, the danger of precipitating broader hostilities with Communist China meant that "advanced readiness must be assumed to implement a family of war plans."[11]

A Joint Staff study, drawing heavily on CINCPAC's reply, was circulated to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 6 March. It concluded that the United States had the capability to impose an effective naval blockade against North Vietnam, but this action was feasible "provided only that the United States is

10. (TS) Msg, JCS 5003 to CINCPAC, 241912Z Feb 64.
11. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 280311Z Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (24 Feb 64).

prepared to accept escalation of the tempo of operations into a belligerent status with the DRV and subsequently with the Chinese communists." Thus naval blockade was identified as a measure high up on the scale of escalation.[12]

The March Trip

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, accompanied by Mr. Sullivan, Mr. William Bundy, and several other officials, reached Hawaii on 6 March. During consultations at CINCPAC Headquarters, Admiral Felt indicated his complete agreement with the program recommended in the JCS memorandum of 2 March, excepting only the provision for a naval blockade, on which his views were already recorded. A briefing on the implementation of OPLAN 34A, necessarily citing the consistent failure of the operations to date, drew a strong expression of displeasure from the Secretary of Defense. In this connection he directed CINCPAC to begin the training of South Vietnamese pilots in aerial mine-laying techniques at once.[13]

From Hawaii the Secretary of Defense and his party continued to Vietnam, arriving on 8 March. In conferences with Ambassador Lodge, in briefings by COMUSMACV and his staff, in visits to the JGS and to leading officials of the GVN, the Secretary and General Taylor received a comprehensive picture of the situation and of the status of plans and problems. Several trips were made into the countryside, including a visit to Hue with General Khanh on 11 March. On 12 March General Khanh briefed Secretary McNamara and other US officials on his latest plans for mobilizing to fight the Viet Cong. Khanh proposed enacting a National Service Act, which would bring hundreds of thousands of young men into service, either military or civil defense. The civil defense component included a civil administration corps for work in the countryside and civic action teams for the hamlets and villages.

Although the Secretary and the Ambassador expressed reservations about the numbers of men proposed by General Khanh (the Self Defense Corps and Hamlet Militia alone were

12. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/339, 6 Mar 64, same file.
13. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/341, 10 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 4.

to have 422,874 men), they did agree with his idea of total mobilization. General Khanh intended to make a maximum effort in the eight critical provinces surrounding Saigon. To recruit and train administrative cadres for these eight provinces would take about a month, and Khanh believed that they would be in place by the end of April. Secretary McNamara asked Khanh whether he could tell President Johnson that the GVN was now operating on the basis of a full national mobilization of its human and material resources and whether the President could so inform the American people. General Khanh answered affirmatively, noting that since the GVN was now a "fairly compact organization," it would not take him long to get a National Service Act promulgated.[14]

The Secretary found General Khanh primarily concerned with the need to establish a firm base in South Vietnam. While he favored continuation of covert activities against North Vietnam, he did not wish to engage his forces in overt operations against the North until such time as he had established "rear area security."[15]

Secretary McNamara's Report

The Secretary of Defense returned to Washington with his report to the President already completed in draft form, dated 13 March 1964. It opened with a review of the principal US objective in South Vietnam. The United States sought an independent, noncommunist South Vietnam. The country need not serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western alliance, but South Vietnam must be free to accept outside assistance in maintaining its security, including military help. "Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance," and there would be a further unfavorable impact owing to the fact that in many world capitals the conflict was being regarded as "a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation meet a Communist 'war of liberation.'"

The current US policy Secretary McNamara described as that of "trying to help South Vietnam defeat the Viet Cong, supported from the North, by means short of the unqualified use of U. S.

14. (S-GP 1) "Memorandum of Conversation," no sig, 13 Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/353, 3 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (2).
15. (S)Draft Memo, SecDef to Pres, "South Vietnam," 13 Mar 54, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

combat forces," taking no action against North Vietnam except a very modest covert program operated by the GVN. Continued observance of the Geneva Accords with regard to Laos and respect for the neutrality of Cambodia meant that the United States and the GVN had to accept extensive use of Cambodian and Laotian territory by the Viet Cong for sanctuary and infiltration routes.

Secretary McNamara believed that "the military tools and concepts of the GVN/US effort are generally sound and adequate." Substantially more could be done toward effective employment of military forces and in the economic and civic action areas, but these improvements could be accomplished without any major equipment replacement or increases in US personnel. Indeed, the Secretary declared that the US policy of "reducing existing personnel where South Vietnamese are in a position to assume the functions is still sound." It might not lead to any major reductions in the near future, but adherence to the policy was an open avowal of the more fundamental principle that the United States regarded the war as "a conflict the South Vietnamese must win and take ultimate responsibility for." Substantial reductions in the numbers of US military training personnel should be possible before the end of 1965, he believed.

It was Mr. McNamara's assessment that the situation in South Vietnam had been growing steadily worse since at least September 1963. In 22 of the 43 provinces, the Viet Cong now controlled at least half the land area. In the eight critical provinces around Saigon, VC control ran as high as 90 percent. Large segments of the RVN population were apathetic, and the failing morale and motivation of the military and paramilitary units were evident in the rising desertion rate. Draft dodging was prevalent, while the Viet Cong continued to recruit effectively.

To illustrate the weakening of the GVN position during the past 90 days, the Secretary cited instances in which the hamlet militia had turned in their weapons or had been disarmed because of suspected disloyalty. In contrast to 1963, when few attacks had been made on strategic hamlets and those few had been repulsed, 75 hamlets in Binh Dinh had been severely damaged by the Viet Cong. In Quang Nai province the government now controlled only 275 of the 413 strategic hamlets that had existed a year earlier. Security in the Delta area had deteriorated to the point where the Viet Cong controlled nearly every aspect of peasant life, and GVN troops were reduced to defending administrative centers.

Effective political control of the provinces from the capital had largely disappeared with the November coup. Since

the fall of Diem, 35 of the 43 province chiefs had been replaced. In three months time, nine of the provinces had had three different chiefs; one province had had four. Scores of lesser officials had been replaced and almost every major military command had changed hands twice since November.

The viability of the present Khanh government, now in its second month, was open to doubt. Khanh himself was intelligent and forceful but had limited experience. He lacked wide political appeal and his control of the Army was uncertain. He lived under constant threat of assassination or another coup. "Whether or not French nationals are actively encouraging such a coup, de Gaulle's position and the continuing pessimism and anti-Americanism of the French community in South Vietnam provide constant fuel to neutralist sentiment and coup plotting," the Secretary said.

Yet there was some basis for encouragement in the performance of the Khanh government to date. Its key members appeared to be generally able; they were highly responsive to US advice and apparently aware of what needed to be done to defeat the Viet Cong. The opposition to the regime was fragmented, and Khanh was seeking to keep it so. Secretary McNamara saw evidences of energy, decision, and comprehension that added up to "a sufficiently strong chance of Khanh's really taking hold in the next few months for us to devote all possible energy and resources to his support."

In the report he had drafted for submission to the President, Secretary McNamara next considered three possible US courses of action. The first he summarily rejected: negotiation on the basis of neutralization, along the lines recently advocated by General de Gaulle. If the proposition included withdrawal of all external military assistance, and specifically total US withdrawal, as de Gaulle appeared to suggest, "this would simply mean a Communist take-over in South Vietnam."

The second possible course of action--"Initiate GVN and U.S. Military Actions Against North Vietnam"--Mr. McNamara analyzed at length before delivering his recommendation. Extensive thought had been given to all aspects of this course, he said, with a finding that the possible actions broke down into three categories: 1) border control actions; 2) retaliatory actions; and 3) graduated overt military pressure by GVN and US forces. Border control actions included low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos when required to supplement the existing U-2 flights along the border; GVN cross-border ground penetration into Laos, initially without US advisors or US resupply but with the possibility of adding this support; hot pursuit of VC forces moving

across the Cambodian border and destruction of VC bases on the Cambodian line; air and ground strikes against selected targets in Laos by South Vietnamese forces.

Retaliatory actions included overt reconnaissance of North Vietnam, at high and low levels, by US or FARM GATE aircraft to locate the sources of external aid to the Viet Cong; tit-for-tat bombing strikes and commando raids by the RVNAF against such NVN targets as communications centers, training camps, and infiltration routes ("tit-for-tat" was not further defined in the memorandum); and aerial mining of major NVN ports by the VNAF, possibly with US help.

Graduated overt military pressures, beyond retaliation, would include air attacks against military and possibly industrial targets, using the combined resources of the VNAF, the FARM GATE squadron, and three squadrons of B-57 aircraft currently in Japan. "Before this program could be implemented," the Secretary wrote, "it would be necessary to provide some additional air defense for South Vietnam and to ready U.S. forces in the Pacific for possible escalation."

Analysis had revealed "the extremely delicate nature" of all the listed military actions more severe than aerial reconnaissance. Problems to be anticipated included those of marshalling the case to justify such actions, deterring or meeting communist counteractions, and "dealing with the pressures for premature or 'stacked' negotiations." While the stronger actions would be aimed at eliminating North Vietnamese support and direction of the insurgency, their real objective would be to break down the morale and confidence of the hard-core Viet Cong cadres, while bolstering the morale of the Khanh regime.

> We could not, of course, be sure that our objective could be achieved by any means within the practical range of our options. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, unless and until the Khanh government has established its position and preferably is making significant progress in the South, an overt extension of operations into the North carries the risk of being mounted from an extremely weak base which might at any moment collapse and leave the posture of political confrontation worsened rather than improved.

The counterargument was that the Khanh government needed the reinforcement of some significant successes against the North,

without which its pacification program might not be sufficient to overcome the Viet Cong.

"On balance," Secretary McNamara wrote, "I recommend against initiation at this time of overt GVN and/or U.S. military actions against North Vietnam."

The third and recommended course was "initiate measures to improve the situation in South Vietnam." While the possibility remained of mounting military pressures against the North at some future time, it was necessary in any event, the Secretary said, to take every reasonable measure to assure success in South Vietnam. To emphasize that a new phase had begun, publicity should be given to the programs of the Khanh government as "South Vietnam's Program for National Mobilization," while real substance was given to the idea by intensive efforts of the US Country Team to assist Khanh in developing the new National Service Act and other measures that would put the whole nation on a war footing.

As part of this effort the United States should give full support to the National Pacification Plan, whose concept the Secretary thought excellent, and to development of the Civil Administrative Corps and civic action teams needed to fulfill it. The United States should encourage an enlargement of the RVN's regular military forces, through an effective system of conscription and recruiting, and should back measures to reverse the deterioration of the paramilitary forces. The Secretary thought it important to develop an offensive guerrilla force within the RVNAF. US Special Forces could train the present Ranger companies and ARVN Special Forces to fight the Viet Cong with their own methods, near the border and in other areas in advance of those in which more conventional clear-and-hold operations were in progress. He foresaw only a modest requirement for additional military equipment, costing an estimated $ 20 million. As for economic measures, the approved but unannounced program of providing fertilizers to the GVN should be stressed, enlarged, and publicized. It promised to yield great improvement in the rice crops and resulting export earnings, benefiting both the government and peasants in the secure areas.

If the Khanh government could stay in power while the United States urgently pursued the above course of action, it was Mr. McNamara's judgment that "the situation in South Vietnam can be significantly improved in the next three to four months." At the same time, however, the United States should press its preparations for further action, since it might still become desirable to apply military pressures against North

Vietnam. If hard evidence came to hand of significantly stepped-up arms supply to the Viet Cong from the North, for instance, the United States might wish to take any or all of the actions he had listed under the headings of border control, retaliation, and graduated overt military pressure. At a longer range, these actions might come to be recognized as necessary in any event, if the programs of the Khanh government, even with marked improvement in execution, were found insufficient to put down the insurgency.

In passing the Secretary noted that three proposals had been rejected, it being "the universal judgment of our senior people in Saigon" that the adverse impact on GVN morale would outweigh the possible advantages. These included the withdrawal of US dependents from South Vietnam and the dispatch of a US combat unit to secure the Saigon area. The third rejected proposal was for the United States to abandon its advisory role and assume direct control of all military operations. "It would cut across the whole basic picture of the Vietnamese winning their own war and lay us wide open to hostile propaganda both within South Vietnam and outside."

Secretary McNamara's draft report concluded with a recommendation that the President instruct the appropriate agencies of the US Government:

1. To make it clear that we are prepared to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.

2. To make it clear that we fully support the Khanh Government and are opposed to any further coups.

3. To support a Program for National Mobilization (including a national service law) to put South Vietnam on a war footing.

4. To assist the Vietnamese to increase the armed forces (regular plus paramilitary) by at least 50,000 men.

5. To assist the Vietnamese to create a greatly enlarged Civil Administrative Corps for work at province, district, and hamlet levels.

6. To assist the Vietnamese to improve and reorganize the paramilitary forces and to increase their compensation.

7. To assist the Vietnamese to create an offensive guerrilla force.

8. To provide the Vietnamese Air Force 25 A-1H aircraft in exchange for the present T-28s.

9. To provide the Vietnamese Army additional M-113 armored personnel carriers (withdrawing the M-114s there), additional river boats, and approximately $5-10 million of other additional material.

10. To announce publicly the Fertilizer Program and to expand it with a view within two years to trebling the amount of fertilizer made available.

11. To authorize continued high-level US overflights of South Vietnam's borders and to authorize "hot pursuit" and South Vietnamese ground operations over the Laotian line for the purpose of border control. More ambitious operations into Laos involving units beyond battalion size should be authorized only with the approval of Souvanna Phouma. Operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia.

12. To prepare immediately to be in a position on 72 hours notice to initiate the full range of Laotian and Cambodian "Border control" actions (beyond those authorized in paragraph 11 above) and the "Retaliatory Actions" against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 30 days notice to initiate the program of "Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against North Vietnam.[16]

JCS Views on the McNamara Report

Copies of the draft report went to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the afternoon of 13 March for study and comment. The Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant, USMC, submitted views in writing, both being critical of the report in various respects. General Greene found the 12 recommendations to "offer little more than a continuation of present programs of action in Vietnam." He repeated his dictum that if the decision of the US Government was to stay in South Vietnam and win, then this objective must be pursued with the full concerted power of US resources. "Half-measures won't win in South Vietnam."[17]

16. (S) Draft Memo, SecDef to Pres, "South Vietnam," 13 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).
17. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/346-1, 17 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

General LeMay concurred in the actions recommended to shore up and stabilize the Khanh government, but he did not agree with the Secretary's statement that "the military tools and concepts of the GVN/US effort are generally sound and adequate." Its acceptance would leave in effect the restrictions on US and GVN actions that barred operations to end the VC sanctuary in Cambodia and the unmolested movement of supplies and reinforcement from North Vietnam through Laos.[18]

Considering these views together with a draft memorandum proposed by the Chairman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reached agreement on their reply, which was forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 14 March. They concurred in the recommendations of his draft report subject to several comments, the foremost being: "The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not believe that the recommended program in itself will be sufficient to turn the tide against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam without positive action being taken against the Hanoi Government at an early date." They had in mind the kind of program designed to bring about cessation of North Vietnamese support of the insurgency that had been outlined in the JCS submission of 2 March, prior to the Secretary's departure for Vietnam.

> To increase our readiness for such actions, the US Government should establish at once the political and military bases in the United States and South Vietnam for offensive actions against the North and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders, including measures for the control of contraband traffic on the Mekong.

Apparently believing that Prince Sihanouk was already fixed in a policy unfavorable to US interests, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended authorizing hot pursuit into Cambodia at once. Further, they believed the reaction times proposed in Recommendation 12 should be reduced. The United States should seek to be in position to implement the border control and retaliatory actions within 24 hours and the graduated overt military pressures against North Vietnam within 72 hours.[19]

---

18. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-263-64 to JCS, 14 Mar 64, same file.
19. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-222-64, 14 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/346, 14 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

Other Views on the McNamara Report

Both Ambassador Lodge and the Director of Central Intelligence, Mr. McCone, also commented on the draft report, expressing views that often coincided with those of the Joint Chief of Staff. Mr. McCone believed the situation in RVN so serious as to call for more drastic and immediate actions than the Secretary of Defense proposed. Like General LeMay, he did not believe success was possible so long as the Viet Cong were permitted a sanctuary in Cambodia and an uninterrupted supply route through Laos. He suggested that General Khanh meet immediately with Prince Sihanouk to develop a joint RVN-Cambodian program to clear the border of Viet Cong. If Sihanouk would not cooperate, then the United States should assist Khanh in stopping all traffic on the Mekong River to and from Cambodia and immediately authorize hot pursuit into Cambodian territory. Khanh should also negotiate with Chiang Kai-shek for the movement of two or possibly three Chinese Nationalist divisions into the southern tip of the Delta in order to support the hard-pressed ARVN effort in that area. Mr. McCone recommended US air reconnaissance over North Vietnam, including overflights of cities for psychological and intelligence purposes.[20]

Ambassador Lodge gave his reaction in messages received in Washington on 15 March. He concurred fully in the first eleven recommendations in the McNamara report. As for Recommendation 12, he favored immediate implementation of the border control measures and of reconnaissance over North Vietnam, rather than merely preparing to institute them. "I also continue to believe in pressure and persuasion on North Vietnam to cease its aggression in South Vietnam," he wrote, "by an essentially diplomatic carrot and stick approach backed by covert military means," reserving judgment on overt US measures until covert methods had been fully tried. The Ambassador disagreed, however, with McCone's proposal for use of Chinese Nationalist troops in the Delta, judging that their presence would be resented by the area's inhabitants.[21]

Approval of the 12 Recommendations: NSAM 288

Secretary McNamara formally submitted his report on 16 March 1964, with only one change of significance from the

20. (S) Msg, Pres, CAP 64077 to Saigon, 14 Mar 64.
21. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1756 and 1757 to White House, 15 and 16 Mar 64.

original draft. He now said that pursuit of the recommended program could be expected to yield measurable improvement in the situation in South Vietnam in four to six months, rather than the three to four initially predicted. The President approved the report at a meeting of the National Security Council on 17 March. All agencies concerned were directed, by NSAM 288, to proceed energetically with carrying out the twelve recommendations. The President designated the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Mr. William P. Bundy, to coordinate their actions.[22]

A White House press release on the same day revealed the general nature of the decisions and began the highlighting of the Khanh government's programs that Secretary McNamara had recommended. "General Khanh and his government are acting vigorously and effectively" and would shortly announce a National Mobilization Plan. The release noted that an increased commitment of US economic and military assistance funds would be required to support the Khanh program.[23]

Before the day ended, also, President Johnson disptached a message to Ambassador Lodge that revealed some of his thoughts and anticipations, running beyond the decisions made at the NSC meeting that morning. With regard to Laos, the President wrote, "I will authorize low-level reconnaissance there wherever the present high-level flights indicate that such reconnaissance may be needed." He was also fully prepared to authorize hot pursuit into Cambodia if relations with Sihanouk deteriorated further. Like Lodge, the President reserved judgment for the present on overt US measures against North Vietnam, but he appeared to accept the idea that specific retaliatory actions would be necessary if the Viet Cong singled out Americans for attack. He was not ready to make a decision on high or low-level reconnaissance over North Vietnam. Such action might become desirable "after a few weeks," however, and the President had directed that the political and diplomatic groundwork be laid for this eventuality.[24]

---

22. (S-GP 1) NSAM 288, 17 Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/348, 18 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64). SecDef had also deleted a reference to the members of Khanh's government as "more able than under any previous regime," in deference to McCone's objection that US experience with them was not sufficient to permit this judgment.

23. Dept of State Bulletin, L (6 Apr 64), pp. 522-523.

24. (TS) Msg, State 1454 to Saigon, 17 Mar 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam March 64.

Following the issuance of NSAM 288, a discussion arose among the Joint Chiefs of Staff that culminated in a rare instance of their submitting split views to the Secretary of Defense on a major aspect of the course to be followed in Vietnam. Their divergence of view was less concerned with the substance of the recommendation, however, than with its timeliness.

On 18 March the Chief of Staff, Air Force, expressed his concern "that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have not taken a firm position on specific courses of action which they recommend be taken at this time." Having advised the Secretary of Defense on 14 March that they did not believe the program recommended in his report would be sufficient to overcome the Viet Cong without positive action being taken against North Vietnam at an early date, the Joint Chiefs of Staff should set forth the course of action they did recommend and urge its immediate implementation. General LeMay noted that the Commandant, US Marine Corps, had expressed similar views.[25]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that a study be prepared from which a determination of the optimum course of action could be made. When it was completed at the end of the month, however, the Chief of Naval Operations pointed out that the course it recommended differed from the one approved by the President in NSAM 288 only in timing. The study proposed implementation of certain military actions immediately, whereas NSAM 288 provided for preparation to implement these same actions within specified time periods after they were directed. Both Admiral McDonald and General Wheeler objected that the study presented no new facts or arguments that would justify proposing modification of a policy decision so recently made at the highest level.[26]

On 14 April 1964 the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense of the study they had undertaken and forwarded a copy. As a result of this study, the Secretary was told, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant, US Marine Corps, were "convinced that operations in Vietnam should

25. (TS) JCS 2343/350, 18 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (1). CMC views were on record in (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/345, 14 Mar 64, same file, and (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/346-1, 17 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

26. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/345-2, 30 Mar 64; (TS) CNOM-121-64 to JCS, 31 Mar 64; (TS) CSAM-203-64 to JCS, 31 Mar 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (1).

be extended and expanded immediately," by implementing substantially the same list of actions against North Vietnam and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended on 2 March. The Chairman, the Chief of Staff, Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations each attached dissenting views. General Taylor did not consider that it would be "appropriate or indeed possible" to cut across the government-wide preparations to fulfill the program of NSAM 288, then in progress, by turning to immediate implementation of an expanded military program. Observation of the military and political efforts already under way had convinced him that "some lapse of time will be required to attain a condition of readiness for the implementation of an effective course of action against North Vietnam." Both he and his Army and Navy colleagues believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff could more appropriately and effectively formulate recommendations for military action when these preparations were further advanced.[27]

Noting that the dissenting view was, in fact, that of the majority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary McNamara did not pursue the matter further.[28]

Implementation of NSAM 288: RVN Forces

As approved by the President on 17 March 1964, NSAM 288 included three major actions to be taken with respect to the South Vietnamese armed forces, regular and paramilitary. Approved Recommendation 4 called for assistance to the GVN in increasing these forces by at least 50,000 men. Recommendation 6 looked toward the improvement, reorganization, and increased compensation of the paramilitary forces, and Recommendation 7 set the goal of creating an offensive guerrilla force within the RVNAF. In assigning responsibilities within the Department of Defense, Secretary McNamara charged Recommendations 4 and 6 to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) in collaboration, while making Recommendation 7 solely

27. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-298-64 to SecDef, 14 Apr 64, Encl to JCS 2343/345-3, 14 Apr 64, same file.
28. (C-GP 4) Memo, Admin Secy, OSD to Secy, JCS, "JCSM-298-64 Alternative Courses of Action, Vietnam," 5 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/345-4, 7 May 64, same file.

a JCS responsibility. All three bore a relation to Recommendation 3, "support a Program for National Mobilization . . . to put South Vietnam on a war footing," which was assigned exclusively to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA).[29]

Difficulty in achieving these purposes stemmed, first, from the fact that they depended heavily on planning, decision, and effective administration by GVN officials, and second, from the advanced state of the deterioration of the armed forces when the effort began. The strength of the RVN regular and paramilitary forces had declined in each month since October 1963, as the rising desertion rate, added to combat losses, outstripped the government's feeble efforts at recruiting and conscription. As Secretary McNamara had noted in his report, an estimated 20,000 of the prospective 50,000-man increase would be required simply to bring the ARVN, Civil Guard, and Self Defense Corps up to authorized strength.

On 4 April General Khanh signed a National Public Service Decree. It placed on all able-bodied male citizens from ages 20 to 45 an obligation for national service in either the military forces or civil defense.[30]

On 23 March Ambassador Lodge had been instructed to act quickly through the Country Team and in concert with GVN officials, to develop the concept for putting Recommendations 4, 6, and 7 into effect. Before the 50,000-man increase could be applied, for instance, General Khanh would have to refine more precisely his plans for using the added forces.[31] Consultations between MACV officers and the GVN high command on these matters carried well into April. The requirements to bring RVN forces up to authorized strengths were soon determined to be:

29. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., "Implementation of South Vietnam Programs," 23 Mar 65, Encl to JCS 2343/348-1, 24 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).
30. (C) Msg, Saigon 1992 to State, 15 Apr 64.
31 (S) Msg, State 1505 to Saigon, 23 Mar 64.

Force	Current (Mar 64)	Auth (Jul 64)	Shortage
Regular	211,000	227,000	16,000
Civil Guard	86,000	90,000	4,000
Self Defense Corps	92,000	93,000	1,000

The proposals initially advanced by the GVN for higher force authorizations were:

Force	By 31 Dec 64	By 31 Dec 65
Regular	237,320	251,683
Civil Guard	101,060	119,636
Self Defense Corps	110,000	122,874[32]

General Harkins agreed that a 10,000-man increase in the regular forces by December 1964 was warranted, but he doubted that further increase to 251,683 by the end of 1965 was justified. He had greater reservations about the CG and SDC strengths and had advised General Khanh that a joint group should study the security situation province by province before establishing the requirements.

On improving and reorganizing the paramilitary forces, it had been Secretary McNamara's idea that "what remains of the present hamlet militia" should be consolidated with the Self Defense Corps and the pay and allowances of the SDC and the Civil Guard should be substantially improved at once. General Khanh had a different concept, however. In March he proposed to grant formal status to the armed youth of the hamlet militia. He wanted to pay them at SDC rates and retain them as a force separate from the SDC with a chain of command through youth commissioners at district, village, and hamlet level. The GVN estimates of total numbers of hamlet militia, derived from a formula of one or two squads per hamlet, amounted to 144,000 for CY 64 and 216,000 for CY 65.

Describing this scheme after his April trip to Vietnam, General Wheeler observed that "the nationally supported paramilitary array becomes more complicated, rather than simplified. The thrust of the Secretary of Defense recommendation

32. (TS-GP 3) "Report of General Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff, United States Army, on visit to The Republic of South Vietnam . . . 15-20 April 1964," 22 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (22 Apr 64) sec 1A. (hereafter cited as The Wheeler Report, Apr 64.)

was opposite." In discussions with the RVN high command, General Harkins was continuing a strong effort to discourage the idea of a separate hamlet militia force, paid by the central government. He urged that the Self Defense Corps be relied on as a single paramilitary force entrusted with local security of the village seat and its several hamlets.

On 27 April General Wheeler briefed the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the implementation of Recommendations 4, 6, and 7. Secretary McNamara expressed great disappointment at the lack of progress. Six weeks had gone by since the issuance of NSAM 288 without positive action to bring the regular and paramilitary forces up to strength, to reorganize them, or to create an offensive guerrilla force. He was concerned over MACV's difficulty in bringing the GVN to agree on realistic strength projections and effective paramilitary organization but said improvements in the conscription and recruiting systems must be pressed without awaiting joint agreement on the strength figures, and the whole effort must be accelerated. Instructions to this effect went to CINCPAC from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to Ambassador Lodge from the State Department on 29 April.[33]

The following day the Ambassador, accompanied by Deputy COMUSMACV, Lieutenant General William C. Westmoreland, made strong representations to General Khanh and his associates. Ambassador Lodge said that US advisors throughout the RVN were reporting that the GVN was nowhere making an adequate effort to furnish the money to corps and division levels to permit active recruiting, to increase the pay of ARVN and paramilitary units, and to meet family allowance and disability compensation commitments. He noted that no claim had been made that the government lacked funds or that the support pledged by the United States was lagging. The failure, which Lodge was sure contributed to the desertion rate and the low intake of draftees and volunteers, was owing to "want of administrative initiative."

General Westmoreland cited further details. The RVN regular and paramilitary forces were currently short about 35,000 men from authorized strengths. Only 55 percent of the conscription goals had been met in March, and the training facilities were operating at far below capacity. It was urgent, he said, that quotas for recruiting and conscription

33. (S) Msg, JCS 6073 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 64.

be set at new levels to counteract the manpower shortage and that the GVN leaders reach a decision on the form and pay status of the paramilitary forces. General Khanh promised a renewed effort and predicted that an influx of draftees would soon fill the National Training Center to capacity.[34]

Reporting a week later, General Harkins said "Khanh has turned on the pressure since his meeting on 30 April with the Ambassador and DEPCOMUSMACV." Definite recruiting goals and new draft quotas had been set and orders were out to tighten up the induction system. Meanwhile it had been agreed to accept the GVN figure of 237,000 as the strength goal for regular forces by the end of 1964. This would raise the authorization by 10,000 but would involve an actual increase of 30,600 men, since the downward trend in overall RVNAF strength had continued during April.

In the joint consultations, MACV had agreed to raise the MAP-supported strength of the Civil Guard by 7,600 during 1964, to a new level of 97,615. This was less than the initial GVN proposal of 101,060 but would require an actual increase of 11,615 men. MACV was continuing to press for combination of the Self Defense Corps and the hamlet militia (which the GVN now called the "combat youth") into a single paramilitary organization for local security, paid by the national government and responsive to a single chain of command. If these proposals were agreed to, the United States would accept the GVN figure of 110,000 as the CY 64 ceiling for the force.

Turning to Recommendation 7, the development of a guerrilla warfare capability, General Harkins reported that the GVN was seeking a better distribution of ranger battalions for employment in border areas of the northern provinces; developing plans for more effective border control, using RVN Special Forces, rangers, and air surveillance supported by an integrated intelligence system; and training junior officers and NCOs, and some Montagnards, in guerrilla warfare techniques at a RVN-US Special Forces Center recently established near Nha Trang.[35]

Secretary McNamara gave particular attention to the status of the plans for augmentation of the RVN forces, reorganization of the paramilitary forces, and implementation

---

34. (S) Msg, Saigon 2091 to State, 30 Apr 64; (S) Msg, MACV 3421 to JCS, 30 Apr 64.
35. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 070725Z May 64.

of the national mobilization plan during his May visit to South Vietnam. The Secretary was informed that General Khanh had signed a further mobilization decree on 6 May. It authorized drafting of men for the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps on the same basis as for the regular forces. With the object of involving all the people in the war effort, it committed men not in military service, plus women volunteers, to part-time, unpaid duty in various kinds of security, medical relief, and social welfare work.

At a meeting with Country Team officials in Saigon the Secretary of Defense tacitly accepted the force increases that General Harkins reported had been agreed between his staff and the GVN high command. These involved a total build-up of at least 75,000 men between April and the end of 1964: 31,000 in the regular forces; 12,000 in the Civil Guard; a minimum of 18,000 and possibly twice that many in the combined SDC-combat youth; 10,600 in the National Police, and 3,400 in the hamlet action cadre.

With reference to Recommendation 7, both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor stressed that a capability to operate by guerrilla methods in VC-dominated areas must be developed within the RVNAF. The Secretary charged General Harkins specifically with this task. If MACV's studies disclosed a valid requirement for more US Special Forces personnel, Mr. McNamara was prepared to approve an augmentation.[36]

Implementation of NSAM 288: Cross-border Operations

Recommendation 11 in the list approved by NSAM 288 on 17 March 1964 contained the only new military operations authorized by the President's action. Besides continuing the existing high-level US overflights of South Vietnam's borders, the appropriate US agencies were to "authorize 'hot pursuit' and South Vietnames ground operations over the Laotian line for the purpose of border control." No operations by units larger than battalion size should be undertaken without the approval of the Laotian Premier, Souvanna Phouma. Operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the

36. (S) Msg, MAC JOI 3846 to CINCPAC, 14 May 64; (TS) Msg, MAC JOI 3849 to CINCPAC, 14 May 64. (TS) Memo, no sig [CJCS?] to CSA et al, "Visit of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman, JCS to RVN, 11-13 May," undtd, OCJCS Envelope Files.

state of relations with Cambodia. The Department of State had the primary responsibility for carrying out Recommendation 11.[37]

The undertaking began on what seemed to be a promising note. On 17 March Ambassador Lodge reported the results of a meeting between General Khanh and Laotian General Phoumi, held with the consent of Souvanna Phouma. The two leaders had reached agreements allowing for very extensive cooperation, granting free passage and use of bases in Southern Laos to RVN forces and providing for commando raids and other operations by combined Lao-RVN units.[38]

In an immediate reply the State Department noted that no information had yet been received regarding Souvanna's reaction to these agreements. The Department itself had strong reservations about some of the actions contemplated. In particular, its officials feared that any extensive operations against communist-held areas of Laos might breach the underlying understanding on which the tripartite government of Laos was based, namely, that the status quo be maintained with respect to the territories held by each of the Laotian parties. Besides inviting retaliatory action from North Vietnam, such operations, with evident US approval, might convince Souvanna that the United States was no longer supporting the Geneva Accords respecting Laos; he might then resign.[39]

A few days later the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that they favored approval of the Ambassador's recommendation that the United States assure Khanh of financial and materiel support for his prospective Laotian operations and specifically provide Khanh with aerial photographs of areas in Laos he would designate. They endorsed the actions Khanh and Phoumi had agreed on as "appropriate military steps" but pointed out to Secretary McNamara that "large-scale air and ground (battalion or larger size) operations will require the United States to be prepared to counter possible communist reaction."[40]

---

37. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., "Implementation of South Vietnam Programs," 23 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-1, 24 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

38. (S) Msg, Saigon 1767 to State, 17 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

39. (TS) Msg, State 1448 to Saigon, 16 Mar 64, same file.

40. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-245-64 to SecDef, 20 Mar 64, App to JCS 2343/347-1, 20 Mar 64, same file.

On 7 April the Department of State put out "tentative guidelines" for implementation of Recommendation 11, seeking comments from the Ambassadors in South Vietnam and Laos. Under these guidelines Ambassador Lodge would be able to inform Khanh that the United States approved certain of the actions and would provide financial and materiel support to carry them out. Acceptable actions included hot pursuit by RVN forces into Laos, but not deep penetrations by large units; intelligence collection operations and sabotage raids by RVN forces into the region south of Tchepone, under certain restrictions and when cleared by the US Embassies in both Saigon and Vientiane. Any operations requiring aerial resupply would have to be considered and approved "by Washington on a case-by-case basis." Resupply, if approved, would be conducted by unmarked VNAF planes operated by VNAF personnel. No US personnel would accompany RVN forces on any cross-border operations, except advisors attached to ARVN units engaged in hot pursuit. Beyond this there were unapproved activities that "Khanh should be warned should not be undertaken," including RVNAF use of Lao bases. "Vietnamese aerial bombing of targets in Laos by either marked or unmarked planes should be specifically prohibited under current circumstances."[41]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were convinced that the State Department's cautious approach to cross-border operations did not fulfill the spirit and letter of NSAM 288. They expressed this view to the Secretary of Defense at a meeting on 20 April and three days later provided him a draft memorandum to the Secretary of State recommending that it be used in discussion with Secretary Rusk. They wished Mr. McNamara to say that he was concerned over the general lack of progress in implementing Recommendation 11, noting that no firm planning guidelines had been provided to the field, that joint planning with the GVN had not been undertaken, and that no actual operations had been conducted. The draft memorandum also expressed concern over the restrictions imposed by the tentative guidelines, finding that "they do not define a program of the scope authorized by the President in NSAM 288." COMUSMACV had pursued his planning task as far as was possible without entering into joint consultations with the GVN; he should be authorized to take that next step at once. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also asked that the Secretary of State be urged to remove the restrictions concerning aerial

41. (TS) Msg, State 1630 to Saigon, 7 April 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

bombing (at least in support of ground operations), resupply, US advisory assistance, and extensive coordination in advance of operations.[42]

Earlier in April the Secretary of Defense had received from DIA a statement that there was a requirement for cross-border air and ground intelligence collection missions into Laos. Ambassador Lodge had recently raised the possibility that the communists were readying a capability there "to support future direct military unit cooperation in VC operations in South Vietnam," but DIA judged its current intelligence sources insufficient to provide verification. "Ground reconnaissance patrols into Laos would appear to be the best way to get detailed information on the extent of Communist activity there."[43]

This intelligence requirement came to the fore even more prominently on 30 April, when the conferees at a NSC meeting were presented with strong evidence derived from high-level photography that increased military logistic activity was taking place along the infiltration routes in Laos. State Department officials began considering the desirability of stronger intelligence reconnaissance patrols than had been contemplated in the tentative guidance, as well as the possibility of mounting low-level reconnaissance flights over certain parts of Laos.[44] At the same time, General Taylor sent a concept for the establishment of covert reconnaissance patrols to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, seeking their comments. Both officers replied that the concept of operations was feasible and that the reconnaissance missions could be initiated within two to four weeks following agreement by the Khanh government to undertake them. But, as Admiral Felt pointed out, nothing could be done at all until the "long-overdue joint planning with the Vietnamese" was authorized.[45]

On 5 May, following interdepartmental agreement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to initiate joint planning with the GVN for the conduct of covert reconnaissance patrols

---

42. (TS-GP 1) CM-1332-64 to SecDef, 23 Apr 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-3, 27 Apr 64, same file.
43. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/358, 13 Apr 64; (TS) Msg, Saigon 1913 to State, 6 Apr 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (6 Apr 64).
44. (TS) Msg, State 925 to Vientiane, 30 Apr 64.
45. (TS) Msg, JCS 6098 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 64; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 022223Z May 64.

of the type General Taylor had described, specifically along Route 9 and east of Tchepone. Meanwhile the State Department was actively considering low-level reconnaissance flights over some areas.[46]

General Harkins secured the agreement of General Khanh to the cross-border patrol operations on 11 May. RVN Special Forces would furnish the operational personnel, to be trained and advised by US Special Forces. Operations in Laos would be conducted by six-man teams, not in uniform, infiltrated and withdrawn by air; they would gather intelligence, fighting only in self-defense. In subsequent joint consultations an operations target date of 15 June for the first four teams was set.[47]

Visiting South Vietnam during this period, Secretary McNamara received a briefing from General Harkins on 14 May. The Secretary said he wanted the cross-border operations to develop the maximum possible information on NVN assistance to the Viet Cong. General Harkins should strive for a rapid expansion of the capabilities for patrol operations in Laos and should assume that authority to seek out additional intelligence targets would be forthcoming. Secretary McNamara set a goal of doubling the number of operational teams every 30 days. Eight teams should be ready by 15 July.[48]

YANKEE TEAM

Low-level air reconnaissance over Laos was instituted later in May, but more directly as the result of internal developments in Laos than in implementation of Recommendation 11. The Laotian stability that the State Department had been concerned with preserving had been destroyed by forces beyond US control. On 19 April a group of right-wing military officers carried out a briefly successful coup against Premier Souvanna Phouma. With US support, Souvanna was shortly restored as head of the government, but less than a month later the communist Pathet Lao launched an

46. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6163 to CINCPAC, 5 May 64; (TS-GP 1) Memo, Actg ASD (ISA) to CJCS, "Implementation of Recommendation 11, NSAM 288 (U)," 13 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-5, 15 May 64; (TS) Msg, State 951 to Vietiane, 5 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

47. (TS) Msg, MAC 2310 to JCS, 12 May 64; (TS)Msg, MAC 2419 to JCS, 18 May 64; same file.

48. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV J1 3849 to CINCPAC, 140330Z May 64.

offensive in the Plaine des Jarres that drove Souvanna's forces westward into the hills in confusion.[49]

As part of the US response to these developments the Secretary of State on 17 May asked the Ambassador in Vientiane to induce Souvanna Phouma to request low-level US reconnaissance over certain roads and key areas of the Plaine des Jarres. The objective would be to obtain target information and other intelligence of communist activity, to lift the morale of the pro-government forces, and to demonstrate US determination to the Pathet Lao. On the following day the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINPAC to launch the first low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos. They were conducted on 19 May by US aircraft of the 2nd Air Division in South Vietnam, augmented in later operations by carrier aircraft. The Laos reconnaissance flights received the nickname YANKEE TEAM, and COMUSMACV was designated as the coordinating authority.[50] On 21 May the State Department publicly acknowledged that the flights were occurring. A fuller statement on 6 June noted that they had been instituted in response to an appeal by Souvanna Phouma and would continue, by agreement with the Royal Laotian Government.[51]

Implementation of NSAM 288: Future Operations

In NSAM 288, as approved by the President on 17 March 1964, Recommendation 12 contained the provisions looking to the future. Referring to actions discussed elsewhere in Secretary McNamara's report, it called on all appropriate agencies:

> 12. To prepare immediately to be in a position on 72 hours notice to initiate the full range of Laotian and Cambodian "Border Control" actions . . . and the "Retaliatory Actions" against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 30 days notice to initiate the program of "Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against North Vietnam.

Within the Department of Defense, Secretary McNamara assigned responsibility for Recommendation 12 to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[52]

---

49. The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 163-164. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 260.

50. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2344/79, 18 May 64, JMF 9155.2 (18 May 64). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, pp. 269-270.

51. Dept of State Bulletin, L (29 Jun 64), p. 994.

52. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., "Implementation of Vietnam Programs," 23 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-1, 24 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

On 18 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to prepare an operation plan to meet the requirements of Recommendation 12, treating the three categories: border control actions, retaliatory actions, and graduated overt military pressures. Elements of several of these actions already appeared in various CINCPAC OPLANs, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted them drawn together in one cohesive plan "to permit sequential implementation as may be desired by higher authority."[53]

In a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense on 23 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff referred to the comments they had submitted when NSAM 288 was moving toward approval. Besides suggesting that the 72-hour and 30-day reaction times set in Recommendation 12 should be "materially compressed," they had stated at that time that "the US Government should establish at once the political and military bases in the United States and South Vietnam for offensive actions against the North and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders." To accomplish this a wide range of governmental actions was necessary, with coordination to assure that effort toward the political objective of preparing international opinion for a campaign against the sources of the Viet Cong insurgency did not lag behind the achievement of military readiness. "The immediate interdepartmental problem," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, was to identify the needed preparations, incorporate them into a program with an agreed time sequence, and assign tasks to appropriate agencies. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff are unaware of any move to develop such a program in the spirit of urgency suggested by Recommendation 12." They recommended that the Secretary of Defense "take the lead in energizing the actions which must be taken throughout the Government."[54]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed two days later that Secretary McNamara accepted the role they had suggested for him. Through Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton he had generated action within the Vietnam Coordinating Committee, where Mr. Sullivan and White House aide Michael Forrestal were now at work on a comprehensive paper.[55]

---

53. (TS) Msg, JCS 5390 to CINCPAC, 18 Mar 64.

54. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-256-64 to SecDef, 23 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/346-2, 23 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (A).

55. (S-GP 3) Memo, Actg ASD (ISA) to CJCS, "Implementation of Recommendation 12 . . . ," 25 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/346-3, 26 Mar 64, same file.

Before the first results of the VCC effort appeared, however, Admiral Felt submitted CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, "Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN," dated 30 March. As directed, the plan set forth in detail how US forces would support or participate with RVN forces in the conduct of graduated operations to eliminate or greatly reduce the North Vietnamese support of VC insurgency in South Vietnam, in three categories: 1) actions to control or curtail VC activity on or across the RVN borders with Laos and Cambodia, on 72 hours notice; 2) selective retaliatory actions by RVN forces against North Vietnam on 72 hours notice; 3) expanded military pressures by both US and RVN forces against North Vietnam, on 30 days notice. Concurrently with the Category 2 or 3 operations, CINCPAC would establish a strategic posture and readiness in Southeast Asia and elsewhere to deter or respond to NVN-Chinese Communist retaliation or major aggression.

The border control operations of Category 1 would be conducted by RVN forces, with US aerial reconnaissance, airlift, and advisor support. The Category 2 retaliatory operations would include overt high and low-level reconnaissance by US or FARM GATE aircraft, bombing strikes and commando raids by RVN and FARM GATE forces against such NVN military targets as communications centers, training camps, and infiltration routes, and aerial mining of northern ports by VNAF aircraft, possibly with US assistance. The graduated overt pressures of Category 3 were chiefly "air attacks against NVN military, and possibly industrial, targets . . . utilizing the combined resources of GVN Air Force and FARM GATE, reinforced by two B-57 squadrons." Target lists for the aerial bombing in Categories 2 and 3 were attached.[56]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 on 21 April, subject to several comments and a number of lesser changes.[57]

Meanwhile the Sullivan-Forrestal effort to develop a comprehensive program for implementation of Recommendation 12 had been productive but not successful. The first scenario produced, early in April, had dealt mainly with political

56. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, "Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN (U)," 30 Mar 64, JMF 3146 (30 Mar 64) sec 1

57. (TS-GP 3) SM-560-64 to CINCPAC, 21 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2054/627-5), same file, sec 2.

actions and for various reasons had been withdrawn almost immediately. A second scenario, which combined a revised political draft with a military draft produced within the Department of Defense, was referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for comment by Secretary McNamara late in April.[58] They found it unsuitable and so advised the Secretary on 16 May. With respect to military actions, the scenario considered only the third category, graduated overt military pressures against North Vietnam. On the other hand, it explored some contingencies not included in Recommendation 12, which they thought might better be treated separately. Believing that the unsatisfactory product had resulted from the separate departmental approaches used and from lack of an orderly input of military information, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that an interagency working group be established to draft a new scenario. They forwarded an 11-page listing of military actions in support of Recommendation 12 as a contribution to the effort.[59]

A week later the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided the Secretary of Defense with information on timing factors affecting the readiness to implement Recommendation 12, keyed to the provisions of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64. Necessary steps that would consume time were, in order: 1) development of an agreed political-military scenario for the coordinated US-GVN implementation of the plan; 2) consultation and coordination with the GVN; 3) training of existing GVN and US forces in the types of operations contemplated; 4) activation of additional programmed forces; 5) deployment into position of participating and deterrent forces.

In more detailed comments the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that no consultation with GVN officials had yet been undertaken or scheduled. "The Department of State should take the lead on this but as yet has not," they informed the Secretary. Once the GVN had agreed to the program, training and preparation could follow. Time must be allowed for sanitizing, translating, and disseminating certain TOP SECRET-NOFORN information to the

58. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Status Report on the Political/Military Scenario, SVN," 10 Apr 64; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Draft Scenarios for Recommendation 12 (NSAM 288)," 23 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/348-2, 24 Apr 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64)(A).

59. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-422-64 to SecDef, 16 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-4, 8 May 64, same file.

RVNAF. The aerial mine-laying training of VNAF units had been interrupted but was scheduled to resume on 20 May. Meanwhile the substitution of higher-performance aircraft was proceeding on schedule. A second VNAF squadron would receive A-1H aircraft by the end of May and a third squadron by August. Thirty FARM GATE A-1E aircraft would be in South Vietnam with combat-ready crews by August, with an additional 20 planes by December.

All border control operations called for under OPLAN 37-64 could be mounted within 72 hours after notification, except certain larger actions that would require 5-10 days notice. The retaliatory actions of Category 2 likewise could be undertaken within the 72-hour limit, except for the amphibious and airborne raids, requiring 10-30 days notice. The limited deployment of US deterrent forces that accompanied Category 2 operations could be accomplished within 72 hours.

The overt military pressures of Category 3 could be implemented within 12 days of notification, assuming prior alerting of forces. The only US units to be added for participation in these operations would be the B-57 squadrons. They could reach South Vietnam from Clark Field in the Philippines, ready to go in 24 hours, but time must be allowed for the much more extensive movement of US forces committed to the deterrent role. The bulk of these forces would need 12-15 days to deploy into position, while the final increment would require 45 days. CINCPAC had said, however, that so long as forces were actually in motion, the operations against North Vietnam could be started in 12 days. This represented the only substantial compression of the readiness periods originally stated in Recommendation 12. The Category 3 operations could be begun on even shorter notice, however, if the circumstances made it acceptable to forego the planned deployment of US ground forces to deterrent positions on the mainland of Southeast Asia, such as to Thailand.

Answering a question he had posed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that the climate in Vietnam was one of the lesser considerations in undertaking military operations.

> The best period for conduct of all types of military operations in North Vietnam is mid-October to mid-December. However, weather for offensive air operations into NVN is suitable during the summer months and provides the worst conditions for ground operations. While coastal weather during the late winter months can be expected to hamper certain types of air operations into NVN, over-all weather

conditions for military operations are satisfactory. In fact low ceilings may serve to provide added protection to certain operations.[60]

The Target List

A further product of the detailed planning of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, related to their responsibility for the implementation of Recommendation 12, was the identification of targets in North Vietnam suitable for air attack. They submitted a list of 91 targets to the Secretary of Defense on 30 May, describing it as the basis for an air campaign to cause the North Vietnamese government to desist from supporting the Pathet Lao and Viet Cong insurgencies and to reduce the capability of that government to renew such support in the future.

The list was divided into three categories. In Category A were targets the destruction of which would reduce North Vietnam's support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao. The targets, selected for their connection with support and infiltration activities, included airfields, supply and ammunition depots, petroleum storage, and military headquarters and barracks, plus targets discovered during armed reconnaissance along NVN highways leading to Laos. Category B targets were those whose destruction would reduce the capability of NVN forces to take action against Laos or South Vietnam. They included the remaining airfields, railroad and highway bridges, supply depots in northern NVN, petroleum storage in Hanoi and Haiphong, and aerial mining. Category C, significant industrial targets, consisted of eight plants or facilities whose devastation would effectively destroy the NVN industrial base.

The JCS estimates of the time required for available strike forces to achieve the desired 85 percent probable destruction of the targets showed it to be hardly practical to rely solely on VNAF capabilities. Theoretically the South Vietnamese air force could deal with the targets of Category A in something over seven months, disregarding the probability that the VNAF would not be able to sustain continuous combat operations for such a period. A combination of VNAF and FARM GATE B-57 operations could achieve the desired destruction of

60. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-445-64 to SecDef, 23 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/382, 23 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64)(A).

the Category A targets in a little over two months. At the fullest application of power, adding all the USAF and carrier aircraft designated as available in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, the Category A targets could be disposed of in 12 days and all three categories dealt with in 46 days. To maintain the 85 percent level of destruction, restrikes would have to be conducted for an indeterminate period against the more readily repairable facilities.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that most of the 91 targets duplicated those listed in CINCPAC's OPLANs and that Admiral Felt was charged with maintaining the detailed plans and target folders and with adding or deleting targets as current intelligence dictated. Should decision be made to launch attacks under any of the categories, full low-level reconnaissance coverage of the target system should be undertaken beforehand to update the target folders and provide data for combat mission planning. If feasible and not prejudicial to the security of friendly forces, leaflets should be dropped immediately prior to the bombings to warn civilians away from danger areas.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Secretary McNamara that air operations could be conducted against any targets drawn from the list. "The intensity of execution can range from selective strikes in an ascending order of gradually increasing military pressure to a concentration of effort designed to attain the effect of a sudden blow."

> From a military viewpoint, it is considered that the most effective application of military force will result from a sudden sharp blow in order to bring home the penalties for violating international agreements and the intent of the United States to bring a cessation of DRV support of the insurgency in Laos and RVN.[61]

The target list of 30 May illustrated in detail something the Joint Chiefs of Staff had pointed out earlier in the month: whether the United States turned to military operations against North Vietnam out of concern over the situation in South Vietnam or in Laos, the target systems attacked would be the same and their destruction would benefit the

61. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-460-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/383, 26 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64).

anticommunist cause in both countries. This observation was forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 16 May 1964, just as aggressive communist moves were setting off hostilities in Laos and raising concern that the Pathet Lao might be beginning a campaign to overrun the entire country. The increased attention that Washington officials were now forced to give to Laos brought the importance of North Vietnamese support of the insurgencies into still sharper focus. For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw military action against North Vietnam as "offering the possibility of a favorable long-term solution to the insurgency problem in Southeast Asia."[62]

62. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-442-64 to SecDef, 16 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-4, 8 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64)(A).

Chapter 10

THE CONSULTATIONS OF MAY AND JUNE, 1964

General Khanh Takes a New Tack

The policy set by the President's approval of NSAM 288 on 17 March 1964 was that the United States should for the present withhold direct military action against North Vietnam while employing every possible means to improve the stability of General Khanh's government in South Vietnam, the strength of its armed forces, and the effectiveness of its National Pacification Plan. Among the reasons that Secretary McNamara had advanced for recommending this line of action was the fact that it accorded with the views of General Khanh. During consultations with the Secretary in March, Khanh had said he wanted to give priority to securing and consolidating his base in the South before undertaking any move northward. Accordingly it was distinctly unsettling to Washington officials to receive word in early May that Khanh appeared to be changing his mind.

Having summoned Ambassador Lodge unexpectedly on the morning of 4 May, General Khanh talked at length about his country's situation. He felt that it was wasteful and illogical to go on taking losses in the fight with the Viet Cong "just in order to make the agony endure" and asked if it was not time for him to declare a state of emergency in South Vietnam and move to more drastic action. Khanh said that the state of emergency would involve a suspension of certain civil rights, a reorganization of his government that would get rid of the "politicians," a clamp-down on "French subversive activities," imposition of a curfew in Saigon, and possibly the evacuation of a large portion of its inhabitants, including American dependents. Concurrently he would announce to the Hanoi government that any further interference in the affairs of South Vietnam would be met with reprisals. Khanh specifically asked the Ambassador if the United States would be ready to undertake tit-for-tat bombing of North Vietnam in each instance of such interference.

Lacking instructions, Ambassador Lodge avoided any commitment and pointed out that the reprisals the enemy might take must be considered as well. In reply to this

Khanh asked directly whether the United States would "follow through" if Communist China intervened with ground forces. Lodge said that this was a question that could be answered only at the highest level of the US Government but that he personally could not visualize the United States sending a large land army to the mainland of Asia.[1]

The Ambassador's report of this conversation brought a prompt and concerned response from Washington. The Secretary of State said that Khanh had raised grave issues, which must be carefully weighed. Mr. Rusk detected "a trace of despair" or perhaps "an accumulation of frustrations" in the reported remarks, and he contrasted them with Khanh's attitude during the consultations in March, and more recently during the Secretary's own April visit. "Experience in Greece, Malaya and Korea demonstrates the need for a sound structure of support before active advances can be made," Secretary Rusk said, "and this would seem to mean genuine progress in South Vietnam itself before action against the North."[2]

At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC and COMUSMACV for their assessments. Admiral Felt thought Khanh's remarks indicated a temporary breakdown under pressure. He hoped it was a passing mood. CINCPAC was sure General Khanh knew that real victory could come only when the people of South Vietnam were convinced that the government could protect them and could give them social improvement and justice. "Confidence of a population is not gained quickly in one glorious battle or assault" but must be earned by steady performance.[3]

General Harkins replied in a similar vein. Among other things, he observed that it was a little late in the day to be threatening tit-for-tat retaliation for North Vietnamese "interference." "The whole philosophy of tit-for-tat is defective and reactive," he said. "If we are to threaten Hanoi, I believe we should do it on our own initiative and be prepared to exert credible, steadily increasing, damaging pressure on them."

---

1. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2108 to State, 4 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam - Trip, 9-14 May 64.
2. (TS) Msg, State 1838 to Saigon, 5 May 64, same file.
3. (TS) Msg, JCS 2025 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 6 May 64. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 070745Z May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam - Trip, 9-14 May 64.

General Harkins agreed with Khanh that the situation could not be allowed to stand without change. But the key to improvement still lay in "effective execution of the National Pacification Plan." Though a long and expensive process, effective implementation of the National Pacification Plan would bring progress, without recourse to panicky evacuations or unrealistic schemes for governing without "politicians." He hoped to consult with Khanh soon and "go over some of the hard, basic facts of life, to include the primary one that the sooner the GVN develops comparable initiative, determination, skills and aggressiveness to that which the VC display, . . . the shorter the agony that must be endured."[4]

The May Visit of the Secretary of Defense

A few days later, during the period 11-13 May, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor visited Vietnam for a fresh survey of the situation. In consultation with COMUSMACV and his Deputy, General Taylor explored the progress of the covert and sabotage operations against North Vietnam under OPLAN 34A, which still had shown no striking success. The Chairman asked for an opinion on the time that would be required to establish sufficient control in South Vietnam to warrant consideration of operations against the North beyond the scope of OPLAN 34A. General Harkins replied that by 1 January 1965 such control would have been established everywhere except in the Delta, which would not be substantially pacified until the end of 1965. General Westmoreland was less sanguine, stating that it would be at least May 1965 before acceptable control would exist north of Saigon and two or three years more before the Delta could be cleared up. Both officers wished to see some expansion of OPLAN 34A operations, but they did not favor progressing to the stronger measures against the North contained in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 until implementation of the National Pacification Plan was showing more success. General Harkins observed that it would be dangerously easy to divert the GVN from the main job of internal pacification by the attractiveness of a venture against North Vietnam.[5]

---

4. (TS) Msg, MAC 2247 to CJCS, 7 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam - Trip, 9-14 May 64.

5. (TS-GP 3) Memo, no sig. to CSA et al., "Visit of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman, JCS to RVN, 11-13 May," n.d., OCJCS File, Brown Envelope #4.

As for the National Pacification Plan, Secretary McNamara received briefings that indicated there were eleven clear-and-hold operations supposedly under way in early May in furtherance of the "oil-spot" concept. Progress was good in only five of them, however; the RVN forces committed to the others were either virtually inactive or, in two instances, giving way to the enemy. A Country Team staff report advised the Secretary that, in fourteen provinces designated as critical, there were "poor" chances of surviving VC attacks in ten and "fair" chances in the other four. Such phrases as "population appears to remain uncommitted," "morale and effectiveness of militia and SDC are poor," and "absence of firm national and province policy and capable leadership at all levels" abounded in this report.[6]

Secretary McNamara expressed concern that the total resource requirements for implementing the National Pacification Plan during 1964 had not yet been defined. He asked, also, why there were only eleven scheduled clear-and-hold operations, questioning the assumption that expansion of one "oil spot" per province was an acceptable norm. While acknowledging that the deficiencies lay principally with the GVN and its forces, he was convinced that the talents of the GVN and the US mission as a whole had not yet been fully applied to marshalling and committing integrated civil and military resources to the pacification program.[7]

Secretary McNamara had occasion to make this latter point again, during an extended consultation with General Khanh on 13 May, also attended by the Ambassador, General Taylor, and General Harkins. Khanh began the meeting by reviewing the recent course of the war. He asserted that over the past three months the GVN had reestablished control over some 2,000,000 citizens (to his US superiors, General Harkins had already sharply questioned the validity of this claim).[8]

General Khanh was satisfied with the rate of progress, considering the circumstances under which his government was working. He found particularly hampering the fact that his

6. (S) Briefing Sheets, "Questions from Para 5 of SecDef Message," Tabs 5b and 5c, SecDef Agenda Book (Gen Taylor), 10-14 May 64, OCJCS File.
7. (S) Msg, MAC J01 3846 to CINCPAC, 140220Z May 64.
8. (TS) Msg, MAC 2247 to CJCS, 7 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam - Trip, 9-14 May 64.

time was so greatly occupied with political problems, each of which had some connection with the serious religious division in his country. Besides the hostility between Catholics and Buddhists, there were conflicting factions within the Buddhist movement, all generating passions that must be brought under control before they affected the unity of the armed forces. Buddhist leader Tri Quang was cited as the prime troublemaker. Ambassador Lodge said that he and other Embassy officials would continue their efforts to influence Tri Quang to adopt a more conciliatory attitude toward the Catholics and to give greater regard to the interests of the country as a whole.

General Khanh also discussed his problems with the press. Criticism of the government by Vietnamese newspapers often expressed the views of certain "parlor politicians" in Saigon, who had no contact with the realities of the war. Other papers gave no support to the government because of their identification with specific financial or commercial interests, Khanh charged.

While keeping constant guard against a coup or assassination plot, Khanh had also to contend with "the problem of the French." US officials had consistently advised him against breaking relations with the Paris government, and he recalled that Secretary Rusk had stressed this point during the April visit. When Khanh had said that he knew certain Frenchmen were involved in subversive activities, the Secretary had advised him to expel them selectively and for cause, but not to break off diplomatic relations. This policy was now being followed. Khanh said he had ordered three Frenchmen deported the previous day, and he vowed to expel any others who spread neutralist doctrine or otherwise threatened the security of the government or the war effort.

In view of all these circumstances, General Khanh was not displeased with what had been accomplished in recent months. He thought it just to say that South Vietnam had had no effective government during most of the time since May 1963; the mobilization and training of forces and the mounting of operations had unquestionably suffered as a result of the two successive coups. But the GVN was now reasserting its authority, and he had good reason to believe that it would do so at a more rapid rate hereafter.

Under the questioning of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, Khanh then turned to a fuller exposition of his

attitude on operations against the North. When he had spoken to Ambassador Lodge about the futility of operations that merely let the agony endure, he had not meant to give the impression that he would lose patience in the long, grinding struggle that undoubtedly lay ahead. But he believed that victory could be speeded by an open declaration that South Vietnam was being attacked from the North and was accordingly on a war footing. A further declaration should be made that if these attacks did not stop within a specified period, such as two weeks or a month, South Vietnam would strike back, with blows comparable in degree and importance though not necessarily identical in form. "Whereas the North attacks us with guerrillas that squirm through the jungle, we would attack them with 'guerrillas' of our own, only ours would fly in at tree-top level and blow up key installations or mine the port of Haiphong."

General Khanh was fully aware that the consequences of such action must be considered. If North Vietnam, and perhaps Communist China, counterattacked in strength, the matter would rapidly become a problem for the United States to deal with. Accordingly, Khanh deferred entirely to US opinion on timing, or on whether attacks against the North were to be undertaken at all. Nevertheless he pointed out that the Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front were but the arms of the enemy monster; its head was in Hanoi. To destroy it quickly and effectively, a blow at the head was needed.

General Khanh was confident that RVNAF capabilities were already sufficient for the type of sea and airborne attacks he had in mind. What he sought was assurance that his country could rely on US support if a strong counterattack developed.

General Taylor at this point recalled the March conversations, in which Khanh had emphasized the need for a solid base in South Vietnam as a prerequisite for action against the North. Khanh conceded that this requirement remained, but he did not expect stability to be achieved before the end of the year. He now saw the fact that the southern base was not solid as a reason to strike against the North at once. The political and psychological impact of such action might provide the cure for weakness. Attack against the North might galvanize opinion in the South and engage his people fully in the war, he said.

Secretary McNamara then stressed the importance of raising the strength of the armed forces to the agreed

levels as rapidly as possible. Citing figures for April that showed the effort to be considerably behind schedule, he offered them not as a criticism but as introduction to his main point: the United States was prepared to help in any way it could to speed the accomplishment of this objective. If more money or materiel were needed, it would be provided whenever the requirement could be demonstrated. In this connection he agreed that the VNAF needed more fighter aircraft and said they could be delivered within three to four months.

The Secretary also emphasized the importance of prompt action on the GVN budget, for he had noted that delays in granting budgetary approval appeared to be holding up the progress of the pacification effort. Again he stressed that Khanh could count on the United States to supply any funds that were clearly needed and to cover any shortage that had been occasioned by worthwhile activity.

In closing his account of the meeting on 13 May, Ambassador Lodge noted that the exchanges had been frank and friendly throughout. General Khanh had concluded by expressing, with obvious sincerity, his appreciation for the pledges of US material support that had been made.[9]

Additional Aid Funds Requested

The assurances Secretary McNamara had given reflected faithfully the attitude of the President. A few weeks earlier Mr. Johnson had instructed his senior advisors that "in our effort to help the Vietnamese to help themselves, we must not let any arbitrary limits on budget, or manpower, or procedures stand in our way."

> We can do extraordinary things within the limit of our current appropriations and we can, if necessary, seek emergency appropriations if they are needed for success in Vietnam. We all recognize that a prompt and clear success in Vietnam would be worth a very large amount to us; and we should not shrink from using the necessary funds to obtain the result.[10]

9. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Saigon 2203 to State, 14 May 64; (TS) Memo for Record, CJCS, "Visit to General Khanh, 4-5:00 p.m., May 13, 1964," 13 May 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam - Trip, 9-14 May 64.

10. (S) Msg, State 1791 to Saigon, 28 Apr 64.

On 18 May 1964, shortly after the return of the Secretary of Defense to Washington, President Johnson addressed a request to the Congress for addition of $125 million to the $3.4 billion already proposed for foreign assistance programs in the budget then under consideration. He designated $70 million of these added funds as needed for economic aid and $55 million for military uses in South Vietnam. The President said that since the budget was prepared, two major changes had occurred in Vietnam. "First, the Viet Cong guerrillas, under orders from their Communist masters in the north, have intensified terrorist actions against the peaceful people of South Vietnam." Second, the new government of General Khanh had come to power, "bringing new energy and leadership and new hope for effective action." The Khanh government had already committed itself to programs that would require an increase of about 40 percent in GVN expenditures over the 1963 level.

> The vigorous decisions taken by the new Government of Vietnam to mobilize the full resources of the country merit our strongest support. Increased Communist terror requires it.[11]

Ultimately the President's request was substantially fulfilled. When the Congress approved foreign assistance authorizations and appropriations for FY 1965, in October, the amounts were only slightly reduced from the total Administration request for all programs, world-wide.[12]

Post-Visit Consultations

Upon his return from Saigon, General Taylor reviewed for his JCS colleagues the discussions that had taken place, including Secretary McNamara's action authorizing 25 additional aircraft for the VNAF, raising its prospective total force to 150. The Chairman was concerned over the paucity of administrative talent in the GVN, noting that it resulted in a very

11. Dept of State Bulletin, L (8 Jun 64), pp. 891-893.
12. Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964 (1965), XX, pp. 297, 300-312.

heavy workload falling on General Khanh personally. In his opinion the situation in South Vietnam was still deteriorating, but at a rate that was slowing down.[13]

The Secretary of Defense had apparently received an even less favorable impression from his visit. He concluded that the Viet Cong had "shifted into high gear" in their attempt to undermine the people's sense of security and confidence in Khanh's government and were making progress toward that end. Among the indicators that had convinced Mr. McNamara were the decreasing number of hamlets under GVN control, the rising number of VC attacks and incidents, and increasing RVNAF fatality, desertion, and weapons loss rates.[14]

The officials who had returned from Vietnam had to ponder not only the findings of their visit but the critical turn in the Southeast Asian situation arising from the communist Pathet Lao offensive in the Plaine des Jarres. Further, there was the unfinished work on a political-military scenario for the implementation of Recommendation 12 of NSAM 288. These elements merged in a renewed effort directed by Secretary McNamara, who ordered the development of a new scenario for strikes against North Vietnam. Personnel of his own office prepared the document, with technical assistance from the Joint Staff. A version dated 23 May 1964, in the form of a draft memorandum to the President, was scheduled for discussion by a group headed by the Secretaries of State and Defense at a Sunday morning meeting on 24 May.[15]

The draft memorandum explained that because of recent communist moves to extend control over Laos and to intensify Viet Cong pressures, and the belief that additional US efforts within South Vietnam would not prevent further deterioration there, the President's advisors had given detailed consideration to strikes against North Vietnam. The scenario presented

13. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Visit of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman, JCS, to South Vietnam," 15 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam - Trip, 9-14 May 64.

14. (S) Memo for Record, LTC Sidney B. Berry, Jr., "Sec/Def Conclusions, Saigon, 13 May 1964," 13 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

15. (TS-GP 3) J-3 T-102-64 for CJCS, 23 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) (A).

a step-by-step plan for political and military pressures against North Vietnam. The military attacks would probably be conducted by the VNAF initially, with the possibility of adding US aircraft, and would continue until there was clear evidence that the Hanoi government had stopped its support of insurgency in the South. "The military actions would start only after favorable action on a U.S. Congressional Joint Resolution supporting continued U.S. opposition to the North Vietnamese attempt to destroy the independece of South Vietnam." Other preparatory moves would include prepositioning of US forces in a deterrent and readiness posture, substantially as provided for in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64.[16]

At the Sunday morning meeting, which General Taylor attended, there was general agreement that the trend in Southeast Asia, and in South Vietnam particularly, was unfavorable. The discussion ranged widely and resulted in a number of changes of timing and emphasis in the Scenario. One of the most notable had to do with the Congressional support to be obtained. Within the White House this matter had already progressed to the point of drafting a Joint Resolution to be proposed. Its operative part was a declaration that the United States regarded the preservation and integrity of South Vietnam and Laos as vital to its national interest and to world peace. To this end, if the President deemed it necessary and if requested by the Government of South Vietnam or of Laos, the United States was prepared to use all measures including the commitment of armed forces to assist that government in defeating aggression or subversion supported, controlled, or directed from any communist country.[17]

The prospect of obtaining formal passage of a Joint Resolution seemed poor, less because of anticipated opposition than for reasons of timing. The Congress was facing both a heavy legislative calendar and the need to recess during the presidential nominating conventions. For the immediate future there appeared little chance of obtaining unanimous consent to lay aside the Civil Rights bill that was then being debated. Accordingly, the revised draft memorandum to the President

16. (TS) Draft Memo to Pres, "Scenario for Strikes on North Vietnam," 23 May 64, same file.

17. (TS-GP 1) J-5 T-74-64 for CJCS, 24 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

that resulted from the morning discussions omitted specific reference to a Joint Resolution and spoke instead of an "appropriate expression (probably in general terms) by Congress of its support."[18]

The revised paper also set forth in more detail the preparatory dispositions CINCPAC was to take, writing in certain points that General Taylor had gone to the meeting prepared to make. It noted specifically that movements prior to D-Day would include deployment of the B-57 squadrons from the Philippines to South Vietnam to augment FARM GATE and might involve "the initiation of low-level reconnaissance of North Vietnam if not previously begun."

General Taylor had presented the JCS view that a sharp, strong blow, employing US aircraft from the outset, would be more effective militarily than the progressive unfolding of an intensifying air campaign. Other conferees thought it important that attacks be launched on a limited scale, initially by the VNAF only, in order not to confront the North Vietnamese with a major loss of prestige in the eyes of the world. There was no dissent, however, regarding an advance to US participation if the Hanoi government did not show signs of yielding. Accordingly, the program of air strikes in the revised scenario was a progressive and expanding one, with respect both to starting with VNAF aircraft alone and to targets, stated as follows:

> Initially, mine their ports and strike North Vietnam's transport and related ability (bridges, trains) to move south; then against targets which have maximum psychological effect on the North's willingness to stop insurgency. These latter targets would comprise those related to North Vietnam's military power (e.g., POL storage, selected airfields, barracks/training areas, bridges, railroad yards, port facilities, communications) and those comprising their industrial assets.

The scenario scheduled various actions with relation to an unspecified D-Day. They extended backward as far as D-19, the date on which General Khanh's agreement to undertake

18. (TS) Memo to Pres, "Scenario for Strikes on North Vietnam," 24 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) (A).

overt South Vietnamese air attacks against targets in the North should be obtained, after giving him a guarantee of US protection in the event of enemy retaliation. The question that continued to be debated and that bore heavily on the choice of a D-Day was whether or not to accept the hazard that the Khanh government might collapse just as the United States was becoming fully committed to an extension of the hostilities, by official statements, troop deployments, and hard-won Congressional action. Or could it be presumed that striking North would halt deterioration in the South?[19]

One contribution to the continuing discussion was a memorandum by Mr. William Sullivan, Chairman of the Vietnam Coordinating Committee. He believed that "the dilemma we face in addressing the problem of Southeast Asia is not whether we should move either to stiffen the position in South Vietnam or to strike against North Vietnam. The fact is that eventually we will have to do both. The question, therefore, is which of these two measures we should do first."

Mr. Sullivan pointed out that if the United States took the militant line of insisting on communist withdrawal from newly conquered territory in Laos, it could expect to find itself facing a decision to bomb North Vietnam within a month. If on the other hand the United States tried for a political settlement regarding Laos, it could expect long delays and ultimate arrival at some imprecise political agreement that did not change the communist military position. He believed this latter course would crumple the morale of those Laotian, Thai, Vietnamese, and Filipino allies who now fully expected the United State to use the communist activity in Laos as justification for direct attacks on North Vietnam. Sullivan argued for setting aside "the logical Viscount Montgomery approach" of taking all measures to tidy the base in South Vietnam before moving to strike the North. The United States could further intensify its efforts to strengthen the Khanh government but should accept the condition that attacks against North Vietnam would be mounted "in the face of certain uncovered risks in the South."[20]

---

19. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, LTG A. J. Goodpaster, "Four Meetings on Extension of Operations Against North Viet-Nam, 24-25 May," 25 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

20. (TS) Memo by Sullivan, "Substitutes and Supplements in Southeast Asia," 24 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64. No indication has been found of the timing of this memo in relation to the other events on 24 May, but it was probably used at the morning meeting. It bore no addressee.

Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Taylor, Mr. McCone, and Mr. McGeorge Bundy met with the President on the evening of 24 May. All present were agreed that extension of the conflict northward was inevitable unless the Hanoi government desisted from its support of the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam. President Johnson apparently accepted the supposition that air attacks against North Vietnam might become necessary before the summer of 1964 had passed, and he was prepared to begin briefing the Congressional leadership, touching on three points: 1) the probable necessity of carrying the war to the North; 2) the desirability of inducing the United Nations, or at least the Southeast Asia Treaty nations, to take some action that would provide a context of international support; 3) the need for Congressional approval of the $125 million increase in aid funds that he had recently proposed.

The second of the above points was foremost in the President's mind. Before taking any drastic action, he wanted to give international bodies a full chance to find a solution, preferably through a UN-sponsored peace-keeping mission. McGeorge Bundy's reading of the President's thought, as subsequently reported, was that Mr. Johnson was ready to take action on the whole matter of "North Vietnamese behavior" with respect to Laos and South Vietnam. "If he cannot get the U.N. to do so, he will follow a course of pressure, one of the later elements of which will be military action."[21]

After further consultation among the principal advisors on 25 May, Mr. Bundy produced a new version of the memorandum, designed to fulfill the purposes the President had indicated. This draft incorporated the following advice to the White House:

I. Basic Recommendation

1. It is recommended that you make a Presidential decision that the U. S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam, under the following conditions: (1) after appropriate diplomatic and political

21. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, LTG A. J. Goodpaster, "Four Meetings on Extension of Operations Against North Viet-Nam, 24-25 May," 25 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

warning and preparation, (2) and unless such warning and preparation--in combination with other efforts--should produce a sufficient improvement of non-Communist prospects in South Vietnam and in Laos to make military action against North Vietnam unnecessary.

2. This basic Presidential decision is recommended on these premises:

(1) that the U. S. cannot tolerate the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism;

(2) that without a decision to resort to military action if necessary, the present prospect is not hopeful, in South Vietnam or in Laos;

(3) that a decision to use force if necessary, backed by resolute and extensive deployment, and conveyed by every possible means to our adversaries, gives the best present chance of avoiding the actual use of such force.

It was the best estimate of the advisors that the decision could be carried out without drawing a major military response from Communist China or from the Soviet Union. Also, if carefully handled, military action against North Vietnam should not trigger an increase in Viet Cong terrorism and military action so great as to engulf the Khanh regime.

Nevertheless, it is recognized that in making this decision we must accept two risks: (1) the risk of escalation toward major land war or the use of nuclear weapons; (2) the risk of a reply in South Vietnam itself which would lose that country to neutralism and so eventually to Communism.

In outlining the proposed sequence of actions following the basic Presidential decision the advisors would call first for establishment of communication with Hanoi (through the new member the Canadian Government was sending to the Vietnam component of the International Control Commission) and with "other adversaries of major importance (USSR, France, Red China)." The message to be conveyed was the firmness of US determination and the limited nature of the US objectives. The United States intended that communist terror and subversion in Southeast Asia should end; it did not seek the destruction

of the Hanoi regime. This step should be followed almost immediately by a conference in Honolulu, at which Washington officials would reach full understanding with Ambassador Lodge, COMUSMACV, and other US Ambassadors regarding the strategy and the degree to which it should be revealed to the governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.

Next would come action at the United Nations. After a broad presentation of the problem of communist aggression in Southeast Asia, "together with much hitherto secret evidence proving Hanoi's responsibility," the United States would seek a resolution calling for a halt to Pathet Lao aggression in Laos (since the United States was not certain of having the seven votes needed for affirmative action in the Security Council if the resolution also included South Vietnam).

The basic object of this exercise would be a double one:

(a) to give worldwide publicity to the basic problem through the voice of Stevenson, and

(b) to make it perfectly plain if we move to further action that we had done our best at the UN.

Whether the resolution was passed or vetoed, it could serve as the point of departure at a chosen time, when the United States or an ally would formally pronounce that the requirements that had been presented to the United Nations were not being met. Meanwhile consultation with the SEATO Allies would be in progress. While no support was expected from France or Pakistan, the others might join in agreement on further action, including some commitment of forces. Thereafter, the first deployments of US and allied forces toward Southeast Asia would occur. "It is our recommendation that these deployments be on a very large scale, from the beginning, so as to maximize their deterrent impact and their menace."

The requirement for a formal Congressional Resolution had been reinstated, but counsel regarding its timing was divided:

(8) A Congressional Resolution.

We agree that no such resolution should be sought until Civil Rights is off the Senate

> calendar, and we believe that the preceding stages can be conducted in such a way as to leave a free choice on the timing of such a resolution. Some of us recommend that we aim at presenting and passing the resolution between the passage of Civil Rights and the convening of the Republican Convention. Others believe that delay may be to our advantage and that we could as well handle the matter later in the summer, in spite of domestic politics.

Once favorable action on the Congressional Resolution was obtained, a further military deployment to Southeast Asia would occur. These forces would not be advanced as a bluff, but they might nevertheless so enlarge the picture of menacing preparations as finally to convince the leaders in Hanoi that the less painful course would be to cease supporting the insurgencies.

Lack of such a response, however, would bring the initial strike against the North.

> This would be very carefully designed to have more deterrent than destructive impact, as far as possible. This action would be accompanied by the simultaneous withdrawal of U.S. dependents from South Vietnam and by active diplomatic offensives in the Security Council, or in a Geneva Conference, or both, aimed at restoring the peace throughout the area. This peacekeeping theme will have been at the center of the whole enterprise from the beginning.

President Johnson apparently desired the fullest possible counsel and reflection before making the basic decision. He drew the Honolulu conference from the proposed sequence and placed it first. On the evening of 26 May he sent a message to Ambassador Lodge advising that Secretaries Rusk and

---

22. (TS) Draft Memo, McGeorge Bundy to Pres, "Basic Recommendation and Projected Course of Action on Southeast Asia," 25 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64. The available records do not show conclusively whether or not this draft memo was ever formally submitted to the President.

McNamara, General Taylor, and Mr. McCone had been instructed to join Admiral Felt "for a meeting with you and a very small group of your most senior associates in Southeast Asia to review for my final approval a series of plans for effective action." The President hoped that this meeting could occur as early as the following Monday, 1 June.[23]

On the same day, 26 May, the President began consultation with certain Congressional leaders of both parties. Under Secretary of State George W. Ball advised Secretary Rusk, then in India for the funeral of Prime Minister Nehru, that the President "will wish the Congress associated with him on any steps which carry with them substantial acts and risks of escalation."[24]

JCS Contributions to the Honolulu Conference Preparations

In the short time remaining for preparation for the Honolulu conference the Joint Chiefs of Staff made several contributions. On 30 May they responded to a requirement that had arisen during the White House consultations for fuller examination and development of the concept of "telegraphing actions," designed to assure that the contemplated deployment of US and other forces to Southeast Asia had the fullest possible psychological impact in Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that the movement of military units and other preparations could certainly contribute to the objective of applying pressures against North Vietnam and implying sterner measures to come. Indeed, even if desired, the United States could not stage a "quiet" deployment of major forces to Southeast Asia, some of them from locations almost halfway around the world. Not only would the communist nations detect the moves; "news media would pick them up; statements would be requested." The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in fact, cautioned against "over-exploitation," which could generate "irresistible demands for a premature international conference before we have accomplished our goal of causing the DRV to modify its behavior."

A draft of telegraphing actions which might be taken in connection with the alerting and

23. (TS) Msg, State 2087 to Saigon, 26 May 64, same file.
24. (TS) Msg, State TOSEC 3 to New Delhi, 27 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

movement of forces is attached. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff desire to emphasize their view that these telegraphing actions will not, by themselves, have significant impact on causing the DRV/Chinese communists to cease their aggression in Southeast Asia. Positive offensive actions must be taken to demonstrate that DRV support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao will no longer be tolerated.[25]

Also on 30 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted three different memoranda to the Secretary of Defense on aspects of the US advisory effort in South Vietnam, whose improvement and possible expansion were being considered at various levels. Within the Vietnam Coordinating Committee, for instance, study was being given to the possible infusion of a substantial number of US civilian and military personnel as advisors at all echelons of the Government of South Vietnam itself.[26] The three JCS submissions had to do solely with military advisors and were forward to Secretary McNamara as a basis for discussion with Ambassador Lodge and COMUSMACV at Honolulu.

The first JCS memorandum concerned extension of the advisory effort to the Civil Guard and the Self Defense Corps. The Joint Chiefs of Staff found that approximately 1,000 US advisory team personnel could be effectively used in a selective, phased program at the district level to provide training and operational advice to improve the effectiveness of the paramilitary units. About 500 more personnel would be needed to back up the advisory detachments at the province level with administrative and logistic support. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that COMUSMACV should be allowed to tailor and deploy the advisory teams to meet the particular requirements of any area.[27]

The second and related JCS memorandum defined the requirements of a pilot program for placing advisors with the paramilitary forces in seven critical provinces, involving about

---

25. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-469-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/384, 26 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) (A).
26. (TS-GP 1) SACSA-T-19-64 for CJCS, 23 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.
27. (S-GP 1) JCSM-465-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/388, 28 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64) (1).

300 US personnel. With respect both to this plan and the larger effort sketched in the first memorandum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized that the shortage of Vietnamese language interpreters would be a limiting factor, which could not be overcome without great effort.[28]

The third JCS memorandum on 30 May addressed the question whether greater effectiveness could be achieved by assigning US military advisors to company-sized units of the ARVN. Currently there were 1,336 US advisors serving with regular Vietnamese military units. These were fairly equally divided among corps, division or special zone, brigade or regiment, and battalion levels. There were 43 advisors with separate companies, but these were exceptions to the normal practice. The RVNAF had 525 company or company-sized units--infantry, marines, rangers, airborne, artillery, and armored. To place US advisors at this level on a permanent basis would require 1,621 additional personnel of all ranks. It would also be contrary to the advice of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. Both officers thought that an extension of the US advisory effort to the company level was neither desirable nor required.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defens of these views and noted that there were "a number of limiting factors which militate against the establishment of a program of advisors at company level." They cited "the question of acceptability of such a program to the Vietnamese, the problem of overcoming the language barrier, and the inevitability of greatly increased US casualties which would result." The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense not consider assigning US advisors below battalion level in the RVNAF.[29]

Of greater moment was the memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted giving their views on the central purpose of the Honolulu conference. An initial version of the memorandum went to the Secretary of Defense on 31 May, before his departure. Further JCS consideration on 1 June resulted in certain amendments, and the revised text of the memorandum, dated 2 June 1964, was presented to Secretary McNamara by

---

28. (S-GP 1) JCSM-464-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/387, 28 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64).

29. (S-GP 1) JCSM-466-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/389, 28 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64) (2). A fuller treatment of the US advisory effort during 1964 appears in Ch. 16.

General Taylor, in Honolulu. General Taylor designated it "an agreed JCS paper less the views of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, which I will submit later."[30]

To the Secretary of Defense the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed concern over what they considered to be "a lack of definition, even a confusion" in the US approach to the broad subject, "Objectives and Courses of Action--Southeast Asia."

> 2. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that it is their first obligation to define a militarily valid objective for Southeast Asia and then advocate a desirable military course of action to achieve that objective. Based on military considerations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the United States should seek through military actions to accomplish destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capabilities as necessary to compel the Democratic Government of Vietnam (DRV) to cease providing support to the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. Only a course of action geared to this objective can assure that the North Vietnamese support of the subversive efforts in Laos and South Vietnam will terminate.
>
> . . .
>
> 3. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are concerned that the military validity of the objective stated above may not be recognized. They note that some current thinking appears to dismiss this objective in favor of a lesser objective, one visualizing limited military action which, hopefully, would cause the North Vietnamese to decide to terminate their subversive support of activity in Laos and South Vietnam. This lesser objective is thus not geared to destruction of capability but rather to an enforced changing of policy and its implementation, which, if achieved,

30. (TS-GP 1) CM-1450-64 to SecDef, 2 Jun 64, and (TS-GP 1) JCSM-471-64 (Revised) to SecDef, 2 Jun 64, Encls A and B to JCS 2343/394-1, 2 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (28 May 64). The original version was (TS-GP 1) JCSM-471-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64 (derived from JCS 2343/394), same file.

may well be temporary in nature. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that this lesser objective just described is militarily an inadequate objective for the present situation, but would agree as an initial measure to pursue a course of action to achieve this lesser objective.

Should the national authorities choose the lesser objective, the implementing action should clearly be of a new order. If it gave the appearance of being merely an evolutionary development of previous US activity, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, "the impact on the North Vietnamese could be delayed and even diffused and uncertain."

Reluctance now to take positive action will almost inevitably increase the price and gravity of such action when it is finally taken. This situation exists because, in spite of more than two years of effort to convince a determined enemy of our determination that he will not prevail, he has clearly increased his effort and achieved improvement in his relative situation. Thus, even within the lesser second objective, the time for continuing a monologue of "messages" that repeat the substance or maintain the intensity of our past effort seems to us to be well past. If we mean to send a "message" to convey the determination which must be part of our national purpose if we really intend to prevail in this situation, we must recognize the requirement to convey directly, sharply, even abruptly, that the situation has indeed changed insofar as the United States is concerned. It appears that the way to convey that "message" now is along the following lines:

a. Select carefully a limited number of target complexes--perhaps two--in North Vietnam.

b. In selecting these target complexes, screen carefully to assure that those chosen are in fact directly and significantly

> associated with support of the effort in Laos and North Vietnam; that they represent completely valid military objectives; that they are susceptible to reasonably quick and precise destruction by air attack; that their destruction can be achieved with minimum impact on civilian populations.

The two targets that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended as meeting these criteria were Vinh, a major resupply depot supporting the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao, and Dien Bien Phu, from which the North Vietnamese transported materiel and troops into Laos on Route 11. Once the targets were chosen, planning for readiness to launch the bombing strikes should begin. It would include, "as a matter of military prudence," readiness to accomplish the fuller objective of destroying the North Vietnamese will and capabilities, should escalation occur.

In summary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said there was "no basis to be hopeful about the situation in Southeast Asia until and unless North Vietnam is forced to stop supporting the insurgent activities in Laos and South Vietnam." They repeated their view that "the best way to achieve this objective is through destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capabilities as necessary to compel the DRV to cease providing such support." Even if a lesser objective was chosen, new and positive military action should be employed to convey the US message to the enemy. The same action would meet the important need to impress allied nations with the will and determination of the United States. In this connection the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited a message from Ambassador Graham A. Martin in Bangkok, in which he had warned, barely a week earlier, that Thailand's leaders were moving toward a reexamination of the value of their commitment to the West. "At this moment they still believe we would honor our undertakings but rapid pace recent events and minimum U.S. responses is almost visibly eroding confidence manifested last October, when I first arrived," the Ambassador had written.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff urged the Secretary of Defense, at the Honolulu conference, to seek precise delineations of both the greater and the lesser objectives and their supporting courses of action, with awareness that on military grounds the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated adoption of the greater objective. Should the lesser one be chosen, the

military implementation should nevertheless be designed to signal clearly "a sharp change in US outlook and determination."

In preparation for the conference, numerous messages had also passed from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, and from the State Department to the Embassies in Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam. A message from Acting Secretary of State Ball to Ambassador Lodge on 27 May had made clear that besides deliberating on courses of action for the future, the conferees at Honolulu should be prepared to review the current status and means of improving the programs already under way to stabilize the political and military situations within South Vietnam.[31]

The Honolulu Conference, 1-2 June 1964

The gathering of US officials in Hawaii on 1-2 June included senior representatives of all agencies concerned with directing the political, military, economic, intelligence, and information aspects of the counterinsurgency effort in Southeast Asia. Headed by Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, the list of participants included General Taylor, Mr. McCone, USIA Director Carl P. Rowan, the Deputy Administrator of AID, Ambassador Lodge, Ambassador Martin, and two Assistant Secretaries of State and two of Defense. Representation from the Embassy in Laos, [redacted] Admiral Felt and his component commanders, and other high-level assistants brought the total to more than 40. In his initial communication to Ambassador Lodge, the President had noted that General Harkins was already scheduled to return to the United States on 24 June, prior to relinquishing his post and retiring. The President had instructed Lodge to bring the Deputy COMUSMACV, General Westmoreland, with him to Honolulu and "leave General Harkins in charge of the war."[32]

A four-hour plenary session opened the conference on the morning of 1 June. Thereafter, while other officials attended the meetings of five working groups on specific problems, a

31. (TS) Msg, State 2095 to Saigon, 27 May 64; (TS) Msg, JCS 2625 to CINCPAC, 28 May 64.

32 . (TS) Msg, State 2087 to Saigon, 26 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

policy group of 16 principals met in virtually continuous session through the afternoon of 2 June.[33]

Survey of the Existing Situation

In opening the general survey of the existing situation that occupied the plenary session, Ambassador Lodge characterized conditions in South Vietnam as "still generally unsatisfactory." Although the GVN under General Khanh had stepped up its military activities, the Viet Cong had matched the new level, offsetting any gains by the government. Viet Cong activity in Saigon itself had measurably increased.

The Ambassador reviewed the many lines of internal division--religious, ethnic, and political--that troubled the public life of South Vietnam. He deplored the general lack of patriotism and public spirit and the prevalent attitude of every man for himself. The Catholics constituted the strongest anticommunist group in RVN and would be the core of any effective anticommunist force, he said. Other influential groups included the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai religious sects, numbering between two and three million people. They were supporting Khanh at present, but their loyalties had proven fragile in the past. The Buddhists were harder to categorize. While they had never publicly denounced the Viet Cong, they had prevented the Viet Cong from infiltrating their ranks to any serious degree. Both the Buddhists and Catholics were cautious about public denunciation of the Viet Cong for fear that their bonzes or priests in the villages would be attacked by the terrorists.

While these internal divisions were of serious concern, Lodge saw no evidence of widespread support of communist aims and policies among the people. Although many in RVN considered Ho Chi Minh a great leader, Viet Cong support in the countryside was generated by fear of the terrorists--not loyalty to Hanoi. Lodge believed that as soon as the GVN made its counter terrorism measures effective, popular support of the Viet Cong would dwindle. He thought the public reaction would be unfavorable to any indiscriminate saturation bombing

33. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, "Special Meeting on Southeast Asia, Plenary Session, 1 June 1964," n.d., JMF 9150 (1 Jun 64) sec 1A. The following account of the plenary session is taken from this source without further citation.

of North Vietnam. But a selective bombing campaign against military targets in the North would bolster morale and "give the population in the South a feeling of unity and a sense of accomplishing something in the war."

General Khanh had managed to halt the deterioration of political stability that had begun with the Buddhist disorders in May 1963. He saw clearly the need to rally the people and the armed forces behind him and was making a determined effort to do this, by travelling widely and allowing the people to see and hear their leader. According to Lodge, General Khanh had injected new vigor into the Army and was working to give strength and spirit to the paramilitary forces.

One of Khanh's problems, that of the four generals who had been deposed when he overthrew the Minh government, appeared to be temporarily under control. General Minh himself, after some hesitation, had joined Khanh's government in a figurehead post, but Generals Dinh, Dom, Kim, and Xuan were held under house arrest. After long consideration of placing them on trial--a course that, whatever the verdict, would have refired both the country's religious hostilities and dissension within the armed forces--Khanh had released the four generals from detention and had set them up as a special staff to work together at Dalat. They were under surveillance but were not locked up. The "Dalat Generals" remained a potential source of leadership for a new coup, but in the Ambassador's judgment, Khanh had sufficient following within the RVNAF to keep him in power.

The general administrative ineffectiveness of the GVN continued. Ambassador Lodge blamed it less on poorly trained personnel than on defective, antiquated procedures inherited from the French civil service system. The lack of trained personnel willing to work at the district, village, and hamlet levels was serious, however, and was not likely to be alleviated soon.

As an over-all assessment, Ambassador Lodge thought that the situation in South Vietnam could not be expected to improve in the near future "without our introducing something new and significant into the equation."

General Westmoreland then analyzed the military and security situation in more detail, relying particularly on statistical indicators. His figures showed that GVN control of the rural population had declined slightly during the first quarter of 1964, dropping from 79 percent at the

beginning of the year to 75 percent by the end of March. The rate of decline had slowed in April and was now reversed, indicating that while the situation was grim, the prospects were not.

The New Life Rural Hamlet Program had made some gains in those areas that were subject to the impact of US money and materiel. However, in the more significant aspects of control, such as mutual trust between the GVN authorities and the hamlet dwellers, the objectives had not been reached and an actual decline had taken place. This was best illustrated, General Westmoreland pointed out, by the drop in the percentage of MAP-supported hamlet militia scheduled to be armed who had actually received weapons. The percentage of completed hamlets having the authorized number of hamlet militia squads had also fallen.

The real need was still for sustained pacification operations to establish a positive separation of the population from the Viet Cong and to restore the confidence of the people in the ability and the desire of the GVN to protect them. The personnel management of the armed forces had been in a sorry state since the 1 November 1963 coup, with demoralizing effect upon troops and officers alike. Some slight indications of improvement, including a decrease in the April desertion rate and a rise of volunteer enlistments, had been noted, however. The understrength of combat units remained the number one problem of the RVNAF.

The GVN was improving the management of its resources, General Westmoreland said. Forces were being allocated judiciously within the critical provinces and in support of the major pacification efforts. General reserve forces had been released in greater numbers to the corps, and the corps commanders were using them well. Two A-1H fighter squadrons would be operational soon, and a third was scheduled to be flying before the end of 1964. Paramilitary forces were being reorganized, as US officials had urged, under the Ministry of Defense and with a single chain of command down to the subsector level. Khanh had signed decrees on 7 and 12 May redesignating the Civil Guard as the Regional Force and the combined Self Defense Corps and hamlet militia as the Popular Force.

General Westmoreland also stated that the intensive efforts of US advisors to bring about greater RVNAF military activity had succeeded in spite of the political turmoil. The

number of small unit operations had tripled in the first three months of 1964, while battalion-sized operations had doubled. Battalion operations in which contact with the Viet Cong had been made rose to 58 percent. On the other hand only two percent of the small unit operations had made contact with the enemy.

As for further needed improvements, the Deputy COMUSMACV said US advisors were convinced that future operations must be aimed more definitely at retention and extension of control. This meant more clear-and-hold operations instead of "safaris" in which large formations started from a secure area, swept a contested area, and returned to base. In short, the philosophy and concepts of the National Pacification Plan needed translating into operational techniques. To accomplish this, and to increase the emphasis on gaining permanent control of territory and people, would be the prime objective of the US advisory program in coming months, with highest priority being given to the areas immediately surrounding Saigon.

In General Westmoreland's opinion, the military situation in South Vietnam was tenuous, but far from hopeless.

The Secretary of Defense had listened to this account of the security situation with a certain skepticism. When General Westmoreland finished, Mr. McNamara told the group that he considered the military situation somewhat worse than "tenuous." In his eyes it was approaching the "hopeless" category. As evidence he pointed to the desertion rates in the RVNAF and paramilitary forces and the failure of the GVN to meet any of the agreed force goals. Armed forces morale was very poor generally and not getting any better. The GVN had yet to deploy adequate forces into the key provinces to meet the critical Viet Cong situation there. To Secretary McNamara three facts were highly pertinent: 1) the GVN needed 17,000 recruits per month but was getting about 1,000; 2) there was no evidence of any increase in GVN control of either population or area; 3) the administration of the pacification effort was very ineffective. The GVN had only ten or twelve clear-and-hold operations going and the gist of reports on all of these was that they were making little if any progress.

General Westmoreland conceded that, despite MACV's strong recommendations to Khanh, the GVN recruiting campaign had fallen some 50 to 80 percent behind the goals sought during the month of May. The GVN found itself in competition with the Viet Cong for recruits, and even for conscripts. In at

least two instances a group of draftees had elected to join the Viet Cong rather than fight for the government.

Secretary Rusk noted that morale was a function of leadership and asked if Khanh was doing anything to improve the low morale of his forces. General Westmoreland cited Khanh's more liberal promotion policies, better pay, and prompt recognition of valor by awarding medals to deserving soldiers. One of the factors most affecting morale was lack of dependent housing for the RVNAF. Studies were in progress, and COMUSMACV hoped to be able to submit recommendations on this problem within two weeks.

The conferees also heard presentations by the chief AID and USIA officials in South Vietnam. The latter, Mr. Barry Zorthian, commented on press relations, among other subjects. He said that the American press in Saigon was as skeptical and cynical a group of newsmen as he had ever encountered. Their attitude could be traced to a feeling that they had been misled in the past both by the GVN and by US spokesmen. Under the current regulations, reporters had complete access to the battlefield and to US and GVN personnel at all levels. American newsmen were therefore in a position to obtain evidence to prove almost any point they wanted to make, as in the current stories disparaging the effectiveness and will to fight of the RVN forces.

Mr. Zorthian thought that a more effective organization and policy for handling the press, backed up by adequate facilities and resources, would be necessary before there was any possibility of obtaining more favorable reporting in US newspapers. "Today the handling of the press is so diffuse and current rules under which our military people are operating are often so unrealistic that we are not getting as good world coverage as we might."

After an extended discussion of the situation in Laos and Thailand, the conferees heard further reports on military aspects from Admiral Felt's staff. The CINCPAC J-2 presented a briefing on the North Vietnamese armed forces, which were estimated to include some 225,000 fighting troops. The NVN army divisions were not motorized in the US sense and moved mainly by foot, with about 150 trucks per division to transport supplies. The air force consisted of 76 planes, none of them fighter or jet aircraft. Chinese Communist aircraft could readily be deployed there, however, since there were five fields in North Vietnam capable of receiving jet aircraft.

General Taylor inquired regarding the status of NVN air defense and was told it would be relatively ineffective against high-flying jet aircraft but would be effective against propeller-driven planes and helicopters. General J. E. Smart, CINCPACAF, said that US aircraft could probably hit targets in North Vietnam without any losses in an initial attack, and Secretary McNamara elaborated on this point. No surface-to-air missiles were known to be located there, he said, and the North Vietnamese simply did not have the resources to provide air defense for all their key targets. It should certainly be possible to plan an air attack that would avoid running into well-defended areas.

The Policy Group Discussions

In the sessions held thereafter by the 16-man policy group General Westmoreland gave his judgment that with continuation of existing programs the situation in South Vietnam would improve slowly to the end of 1964. Ambassador Lodge reiterated his view that it would show no improvement unless some new element was introduced, such as air strikes against the North. But neither the Deputy COMUSMACV nor the Ambassador, General Taylor observed later, believed that the United States was racing against the clock or had to take action against North Vietnam before it was completely ready. Both officials opposed the idea of an extensive US civilian encadrement of the GVN administrative structure which had been considered by the Vietnam Coordinating Committee.

General Westmoreland presented his concept for a program of concentrated effort to make the pacification operations in eight critical provinces more effective. It involved setting up supervisory teams of US and GVN experts in the provinces, using about 45 US personnel (40 military and 5 USOM) in each. Intensified effort along this line, he believed, could turn the situation in all provinces in favor of the government within nine months to a year.

With reference to possible attacks on North Vietnam, Secretary Rusk emphasized the need to prepare public opinion before taking any action. He believed that such attacks would have to be limited to South Vietnamese aircraft until a Congressional Resolution was obtained but feared a prolonged debate if one was sought. In the realm of material preparation, too, it seemed to the Secretary of State that the United States was not fully ready to undertake a military action in Southeast Asia that might lead to escalation of the hostilities. He called for more

study of the logistical factors involved and a fuller assessment of the further steps that might have to be taken. His position gained support from the opinion offered by both Admiral Felt and General Westmoreland that 1 November 1964 was the optimum date for US readiness to launch attacks against North Vietnam.[34]

After the Honolulu Conference

The deliberations of US officials at Honolulu on 1-2 June produced no recommendations for pronounced change in national policy. The principal effect was a rededication to intensified effort in the furtherance of existing programs and existing planning, under the precepts of the still-controlling NSAM 288. At no point had the conferees come to grips with the question of future operations in the terms the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to Secretary McNamara: a precise delineation of objectives and their supporting courses of action. Probably the conference was too large, and the time necessarily spent by the principals in hearing reports from the five working groups too great, for this to have been accomplished in any event.

General Taylor placed a number of requirements on the Joint Staff as a result of the conference, particularly along the line of more searching investigation of logistical requirements and readiness to support OPLAN 37-64 and other CINCPAC plans. Staff action was needed, also, to carry out instructions of the Secretary of Defense regarding the equipment for a ROAD infantry brigade prepositioned at Korat, Thailand. All items that were not transportable by air were to be supplied within 30 days, so that the brigade could be ready for combat within six days after being ordered to move. Additionally, the Secretary had directed that equipment for a ROAD brigade prepositioned on Okinawa be reconfigured within 60 days to support the unit in any of the anticipated areas of operations in the Asian-West Pacific area. CINCPAC was charged with reviewing and commenting on the various alternative concepts for air action against North Vietnam that had been developed,

34. (TS) Memo for Record, CJCS, "Highlights of Honolulu Conference," 2 Jun 64, OCJCS File M/R envelope.

including objectives, target systems, timing, weight of effort, and other factors.35

The primary action resulting from the conference, however, was toward implementation of the concept General Westmoreland had presented for a concerted US effort to intensify the GVN's pacification activities in eight critical provinces. On 5 June, in a joint State-Defense-AID message, Washington official asked Ambassador Lodge to supply specific proposals and scheduling for the following actions that they regarded as having been agreed upon at Honolulu: 1) move additional RVN troops into the eight "super-critical" provinces; 2) develop and carry out hamlet-by-hamlet oil spot and clear-and-hold operation plans for each of the approximately 40 districts within the provinces; 3) introduce a system of population control, by curfews, identification papers, and other measures; 4) build up the provincial police forces; 5) expand the information program by distributing 40,000 radio receivers and by other measures; 6) develop an economic aid program tailored to the needs of each province (medicines, school construction materials, etc.); 7) assign 434 US personnel, initially from in-country, consisting of 320 provincial and district military advisors, 40 USOM advisors, and 74 battalion advisors (two eac for 37 battalions); 8) transfer military personnel to fill USO shortages where necessary; 9) establish joint US-GVN teams to monitor the pacification program at both the national and provincial levels.36

Ambassador Lodge replied that the plans were not so firm as was apparently believed in Washington. At Honolulu, General Westmoreland had been speaking from a draft working paper that was then awaiting Country Team study and was only now receiving it. In particular the Ambassador did not consider that the number of US personnel to be employed had been settled at Honolulu.37

---

35. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/124, 5 Jan 64, JMF 9150/3100 (4 Jun 64).

36. (S) Msg, State 2184 to Saigon, 5 Jun 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 64. SecDef, who had approved this message, informed JCS that it constituted a decision to which their three memoranda of 30 May on aspects of the US advisory effort had contributed; (S-GP 4) 1st N/H of JCS 2343/387, 10 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64).

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 2435 to State, 8 Jun 64; (S) Msgs, Saigon 2442 and 2444 to State, 10 Jun 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 64.

The other policy elements that had been under consideration in Washington prior to the Honolulu meeting--such as selection of NVN target systems, reconnaissance over Laos, action at the United Nations, contact with Hanoi through a Canadian emissary, and a possible Congressional Resolution--continued to be discussed and developed during June. Earlier, on 22 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos, instituted on 19 May as YANKEE TEAM, be continued "on an orderly basis," at a rate of about two a week. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that complete low-level coverage of North Vietnam, as a one-time effort, should be accomplished as soon as possible in order to provide targeting intelligence for CINCPAC's strike plans. They requested authorization for Admiral Felt to conduct this aerial reconnaissance on or about 27 May. The request was not granted, but, as has already been recounted, low-level reconnaissance over Laos did become a continuing program, by agreement with the Royal Laotian Government.[38]

On 5 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a new and more detailed recommendation that low-level reconnaissance of North Vietnam be undertaken, this time for a different purpose. They designated five supply and infiltration routes leading into Northern Laos and the Laotian corridor to South Vietnam that they considered should be kept under "meaningful surveillance." The Secretary of Defense was advised that after CINCPAC had accomplished a complete initial coverage, further flights over certain portions of the routes would be required; their frequency would depend on "information obtained from the initial coverage, the risk factor, and the value of these operations from a political point of view." On 15 June Secretary McNamara noted the JCS recommendation and directed that plans to carry out such reconnaissance be kept in readiness for implementation on short notice.[39]

---

38. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-444-64 to SecDef, 22 May 64, Encl to JCS 2344/80, 22 May 64, JMF 9155 (22 May 64). For the continuation of YANKEE TEAM operations, see Ch. 9.

39. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-489-64 to SecDef, 5 Jun 64, Encl to JCS 2343/412-1, 5 Jun 64; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Initial Low-Level Reconnaissance Operation into North Vietnam (S)," 15 Jun 64, Att to JCS 2343/412-2, 17 Jun 64; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jun 64) (1).

Meanwhile the continuing air reconnaissance over Laos had generated one instance of the type of positive military action to demonstrate US determination that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been recommending. One US reconnaissance aircraft was shot down by ground fire over Laos on 6 June 1964. The flights the following day were the first accompanied by armed escort, but one of the fighter escorts was knocked down, with the pilot subsequently recovered. On orders from Washington, CINCPAC launched eight F-100 aircraft on a strike mission against a communist antiaircraft installation at Xieng Khouang, Laos, on 9 June. It was designed as a single sharp act of retaliation to make the point that US forces would continue the reconnaissance operations and would fire when fired upon.[40] By that date the noncommunist forces in Laos, with US materiel assistance, were holding their own against the Pathet Lao, and there appeared to be some prospect of a negotiated settlement.

Action at the United Nations

In the pre-Honolulu consultations the President had indicated strong interest in arranging for a UN peace-keeping mission in Southeast Asia. No full-scale effort was mounted to obtain such a UN commitment, but some of the objectives of this course were achieved, and its feasibility was tested, and perhaps discounted, by other action carried forward by Ambassador Adlai Stevenson in New York.

On 13 May the Government of Cambodia had called for an early meeting of the UN Security Council to consider Cambodia's charges of "repeated acts of aggression" against its territory by US and South Vietnamese forces. The Government of South Vietnam had already acknowledged, with appropriate regrets, that in the heat of battle its forces had crossed the ill-marked frontier in pursuit of Viet Cong raiders on 7 and 8 May and on earlier occasions. The United States had offered apology for the fact that a US military advisor had accompanied an RVN force on a similar intrusion in March.[41]

---

40. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 55-64, 9 Jun 64. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1011-64 to CJCS, 17 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64.

41. The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 170-171.

In speeches before the Security Council on 21 and 26 May and on 4 June, Ambassador Stevenson expanded the US answer to the charges into a forceful denunciation of the aggressive actions of North Vietnam in Southeast Asia.

> The recent difficulties along the frontier . . . are only superficially and accidentally related to the Republic of Viet-Nam. They are deeply and directly related to the fact that the leaders and armed forces of North Viet-Nam, supported by Communist China, have abused the right of Cambodia to live in peace by using Cambodian territory as a passageway, a source of supply, and a sanctuary from counterattack by the forces of South Viet-Nam . . . .
>
> . . .
>
> It is the outrageous, the persistent military action of the Hanoi regime which constitutes the longstanding threat to the peace of Southeast Asia and to the territorial integrity of the other nations of that region. That, and that only, is the cause of the war in Southeast Asia.

He urged that the United Nations place its peace-keeping experience at the disposal of Cambodia and South Vietnam and said that the United States would welcome some form of UN-sponsored border patrol force.[42]

The resolution passed on 4 June was less impressive, however. The strongest action the Security Council was willing to endorse was the dispatch of an investigative mission to the RVN-Cambodian border area, composed of representatives from Brazil, the Ivory Coast, and Morocco, with instructions to "consider such measures as may prevent any recurrence of such incidents" and report to the Security Council within 45 days.[43]

The further history of the mission was not unfavorable to US interests, however. The radio voice of the National Liberation Front had already reviled the United Nations for

---

42. Dept of State Bulletin, L (8 Jun 64), pp. 907-913; L (15 Jun 64), pp. 937-941; L (29 Jun 64), pp. 1002-1004.
43. Dept of State Bulletin, L (29 Jun 64), p. 1004.

listening to "slanders" against the patriotic Viet Cong forces from the lips of the US imperialists and their lackeys. It continued to do so, adding a vow to oppose with force any entry of UN representatives into South Vietnamese territory. When the mission reported on 28 July 1964, it advised the Security Council that unarmed UN civilian observers could monitor the border from the Cambodian side but could not expec to function within South Vietnam because of Viet Cong hostility.[44]

Elsewhere in the realm of diplomacy, the new Canadian member of the Vietnam component of the International Control Commission had arrived in Southeast Asia and on 18 June had held an extended conversation with the North Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong. High officials in Washington were aware that the Canadian diplomat had conveyed the message of US determination to oppose North Vietnamese aggression and support of insurgency, with its corollary that the United Stat did not have destruction of the Hanoi regime as a further goal and sought no wider war. He had also made known his availability as a channel for transmission of any proposal the Hano leaders might wish to send to Washington.[45]

Further Thought on a Congressional Resolution

Among the Washington officials concerned with US policy i Southeast Asia the desirability of seeking a Congressional Resolution as prior sanction for the stronger measures that might become necessary was generally accepted, though the question of optimum timing was still unsettled. This was the central point addressed by Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy in a memorandum that was scheduled for discussion on 15 June by the same group of advisors, headed by Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, whose thought had given impetus to the Honolulu conference.[46]

Mr. Bundy's first paragraph briefly set the scene:

> Now that we have worked through the immediate problem of the shooting down of our aircraft over

44. Douglas Pike, Viet Cong (1966), pp. 473-474. NY Times 29 Jul 64, 2.
45. (TS) Memo, W. H. Sullivan to SecDef, "Canadian Consultations in Hanoi," 22 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64.
46. (TS) Memo, McGeorge Bundy to SecState and SecDef, 15 Jun 64, same file.

> Laos and have Souvanna Phouma's clear understanding that reconnaissance flights may continue over the Plaine des Jarres and 'South Laos' and with escort as necessary, we should now draw back and examine the total picture as it may develop in the next three to four months and what our central plan should be.

"We do not expect at the present time to move in the near future to military action against North Viet-Nam," he wrote, but some important change in conditions, largely beyond US control, might compel reconsideration. For instance, a marked deterioration might occur in South Vietnam that would dictate a forecast "more gloomy than the one that was reached at Honolulu," or the Pathet Lao might break loose in another strong offensive.

"We have entered a negotiating track on Laos." At best, it might lead ultimately to a trailing off of hostilities and a restoration of something like the status quo ante among the several Laotian factions, a strengthening of Souvanna's position, and perhaps even an improvement in the effectiveness of the International Control Commission. The negotiations might be inconclusive or, at worst, might take a turn that the United States could not avoid opposing so forcefully as to regenerate the crisis.

The United States could not weaken in these negotiations without demoralizing the Khanh government, but if they were protracted, this, too, might arouse concern in Saigon "that we are moving toward negotiated solutions for both Laos and South Viet-Nam." Hence, Secretary Bundy believed, the United States must find continuing means of demonstrating its firmness to Souvanna, to Khanh, "and, above all, to Hanoi." And always there was the possibility that the situation in South Vietnam, on its own, could deteriorate to the point where action against the North appeared the only solution.

> For all of these reasons there is a very strong argument for a continuing demonstration of US firmness and for complete flexibility in the hands of the Executive in the coming political months. The action that most commends itself for this purpose is an immediate Congressional Resolution, subject to the following conditions:

a. A formula must be devised, in consultation with the Congressional leadership, that would ensure rapid passage without extended and divisive debate. The draft resolution must support any action required but must at the same time place maximum stress on our peaceful objectives and our willingness to accept eventual negotiated solutions, so that we might hope to have the full support of the school of thought headed by Senator Mansfield and Senator Aiken and leave ourselves with die-hard opposition only from Senator Morse and his very few cohorts.

b. Timing must be considered. Because of proximity on either side to the Republican convention, July appears very difficult. Early August is likewise difficult because the Congress will probably be rushing to complete other measures and adjourn before the Democratic convention. We thus conclude that the only feasible time for presentation would be shortly following the conclusion of the Civil Rights debate, i.e. during the week of June 22. . . .

It may be argued that a Congressional Resolution under present circumstances faces the serious difficulty that there is no drastic change in the situation to point to. The opposing argument is that we might well not have such a drastic change even later in the summer and yet conclude--either because of the Polish consultations [on Laos] or because of the South Viet-Nam situation--that we had to act.

Accordingly, the Assistant Secretary of State recommended that the President be advised to begin consultations with the

Congressional leadership on an urgent basis regarding the draft Joint Resolution that was attached.[47]

The evidence available does not indicate the outcome of the discussion among the principal advisors on 15 June, but it is probable that they remained divided on the desirability of seeking Congressional action in the near future. The proposal was not formally introduced in the Congress at that time. That the question remained an active one may be surmised, however, from the fact that the President asked the Department of State on 22 June for an analysis of the Chief Executive's legal authority to send US forces to South Vietnam.[48]

General Taylor's Recommendations on Patterns of Attack

When the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted their memorandum on the central purpose of the Honolulu conference to the Secretary of Defense on 2 June, General Taylor had termed it "an agreed JCS paper less the views of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, which I will submit later."[49] His own memorandum went to Secretary McNamara on 5 June. General Taylor reviewed the main points of the JCS submission, which had defined two courses of action--one a primary and recommended course and the other a lesser course. "As I understand the distinction between the two alternatives," the Chairman wrote, "the first calls for a concurrent attack upon North Vietnamese will and capabilities in order to induce the North Vietnamese to cease their attack upon their neighbors and in addition, by destroying in large part their military capabilities, to assure that they cannot resume these attacks." The second alternative placed less emphasis on destruction of capabilities, being designed chiefly to induce the enemy to change his policy.

---

47. (S) "Second Draft," Asst SecState(FE), "Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation: Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution," 12 Jun 64, in folder attached to (TS) Memo, McGeorge Bundy to SecState and SecDef, 15 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64.

48. (S) Memo, Deputy Legal Adviser to SecState, "President's Request re Legal Basis for Sending United States Troops to Viet-Nam," 26 Jun 64, same file.

49. (TS-GP 1) CM-1450-64 to SecDef, 2 Jun 64, and (TS-GP 1) JCSM-471-64 (Revised) to SecDef, 2 Jun 64, Encls A and B to JCS 2343/394-1, 2 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (28 May 64).

General Taylor believed this was not "an accurate or com plete expression of our choices" and that there were three patterns on which the attack against North Vietnam might be initiated. In descending order of weight they were: 1) a massive air attack to destroy all significant military target and render the enemy incapable of further support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao; 2) a lesser attack on some significant part of the military target system in North Vietnam to convin the enemy that it was in his interest to stop aiding the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao and, if possible, to obtain his cooperati "in calling off the insurgents"; 3) "demonstrative strikes" against limited military targets to show US readiness and intent to pass to the more drastic alternative attack pattern

General Taylor opposed launching the maximum attack at t outset. He held that it would be unnecessarily destructive merely to change the enemy's will and would lessen the chance of gaining cooperation from Hanoi in calling off the insurger The maximum pattern would pose such a challenge to the Communist Bloc as to raise considerably the risks of escalation. The Chairman favored the second pattern, but he sensed that political considerations would dispose the responsible US civilian leaders to prefer the third one. He noted that the third pattern of attack could be accomplished by VNAF aircrai alone, "perhaps stiffened by FARM GATE."[50]

General Taylor recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a plan for the demonstrative strikes defined in his third alternative. On 10 June Secretary McNamara informed the Chairman that he concurred in this recommendation.[51]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned the major planning activity in response to this directive to CINCPAC.[52] Subsequently it became merged with a broader effort toward refine ment of the target lists for attack against North Vietnam,

---

50. (TS-GP 1) CM-1451-64 to SecDef, 5 Jun 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/394-1, 8 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (28 May 64).
51. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 Jun 64, Att to JCS 2343/394-2, 15 Jun 64, same file.
52. (TS) Msg, JCS 6888 to CINCPAC, 16 Jun 64.

carried on both at CINCPAC Headquarters and in Washington. As will be recounted, the result, in August, was transformation of the 91-target list the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 30 May into a new document identifying 94 targets.

CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64

Meanwhile another product of CINCPAC's planning had been received. On 1 June Admiral Felt submitted CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64, "Military Operations to Terminate Aggression in Southeast Asia." As a plan for US military action, primarily with air and naval forces, against sudden large-scale Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese aggression, it responded to the interest shown by the Secretary of Defense in this subject in February.

The plan provided for early, massive employment of US air and naval power to defend the general line of the Mekong River and to inflict "punitive and crippling blows" against mainland China. The initial ground defense of Southeast Asia would be limited to delaying actions by local national forces, subsequently reinforced by US and allied ground units. At the outbreak of hostilities US air forces would at once attack enemy strength in Southeast Asia and South China, achieve local air superiority in areas of ground action, and give close air support to friendly ground forces. At the same time, naval forces would bombard coastal areas and gain control of sea lanes. Deployments of US and allied ground forces to Thailand and South Vietnam would begin "in the minimum strength required to conduct a definitive ground defense" of critical points along the Mekong line. Following the initial stage, ground and amphibious operations would strike against the invaders and ultimately eject communist forces from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam.

As sufficient forces were generated, PACOM air and naval forces, supported by SAC, would "effect deliberate intensification of the conflict by punitive and crippling offensive operations against selected targets in other areas of Communist China to the degree necessary to terminate the confict." While every effort would be made to implement the plan with conventional weapons, US forces would have the capability to employ [nuclear and] controlled fragmentation munitions weapons on a highly selective basis if necessary to accomplish the mission.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64, subject to minor modifications, on 29 July.[53]

Status of Recommendations 11 and 12, NSAM 288

On 24 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff again addressed the Secretary of Defense regarding the status of Recommendations 11 and 12 of NSAM 288. They noted that the required US military planning had been accomplished, specifically in COMUSMACV OPLANs 98 and 98A, for covert and overt cross-border operation into Laos, to implement Recommendation 11, and in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, treating both cross-border operations and the strikes against North Vietnam called for by Recommendation 12. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were concerned over the general lack of progress beyond that point. While Recommendation 11 authorized hot pursuit and ground operations into Laos under varying circumstances, the Department of State so far had sanctioned only limited covert intelligence-collection patrols. While the planned operations depended primarily on RVN forces, there had been no discussion as yet with the South Vietnamese government and no move toward combined US-GVN planning and training. The same lack of consultation with the GVN affected the readiness to implement Recommendation 12.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that Secretary McNamara seek the concurrence of Secretary Rusk that "non-committing negotiations" be begun with the GVN, so that readiness could be advanced by instituting combined planning and training. As a collateral benefit, awareness that such activity was going on could add to the pressures felt by the communist leaders in Hanoi.[54]

Resignation of Ambassador Lodge

The further working out of this proposal, and of other pending matters, occurred after an extensive shifting of the assignments of key military and diplomatic personnel. At his

53. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64, 1 Jun 64, JMF 3146 (1 Jun 64) sec 1. (TS-GP 3) SM-1215-64 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 64, Encl to JCS 2054/635-6, 17 Jul 64, same file, sec 2.

54. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-541-64 to SecDef, 24 Jun 64, Encl. to JCS 2343/415, 21 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jun 64).

press conference on 23 June the President had read the letter by which Henry Cabot Lodge tendered his resignation as Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam. "I do so entirely for personal reasons," the Ambassador had written on 19 June, and he reaffirmed his support of existing US policy. The President announced that he intended to nominate General Maxwell D. Taylor to succeed Lodge as Ambassador. He would also name the current Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Mr. U. Alexis Johnson, to serve in the new post of Deputy Ambassador. To fill the position of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, vacated by General Taylor, the President designated General Earle G. Wheeler.[55] Subsequently, General Wheeler assumed the duties of Chairman on 3 July 1964, with General Harold K. Johnson becoming Chief of Staff, Army.

These changes happened to coincide with others of importance. On 30 June Admiral Felt had been relieved as Commander in Chief, Pacific, by Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Jr., who had been serving as CINCPACFLT. About a week earlier General Harkins had returned to Washington, and Lieutenant General William C. Westmoreland had assumed the duties of COMUSMACV. General Harkins was established as a consultant in the office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the period until his retirement on 1 August.[56] At the request of Ambassador Taylor, Mr. Sullivan was transferred to Saigon in July to serve on the Embassy staff. The President named Mr. Michael Forrestal to succeed him as Chairman of the Vietnam Coordinating Committee in Washington.

At the press conference on 23 June the President restated and reaffirmed the US policy.

> I have said before that there is danger in Southeast Asia. It is a danger brought on by the terrorism and aggression so clearly, if secretively, directed from Hanoi. The United States intends no rashness and seeks no wider war. But the United States is determined to use its strength to help those who are defending themselves against terror and aggression. We are a people of peace--but not of weakness or timidity.

---

55. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (13 Jul 64), pp. 46-47.
56. (U) CM-1437-64 to SecState et al., 18 Jun 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 64.

The South Vietnamese were a proud people, Mr. Johnson said. "The task of building their peace and progress is their own; but they can count on our help for as long as they need it and want it."[57]

57. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (13 Jul 64), p. 47.

Chapter 11

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR'S FIRST MONTH

Ambassador Taylor Takes Charge

Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor arrived in Saigon on 7 July 1964. He assumed his new post with greater powers than had been granted to any of his predecessors. The President's letter of instruction, besides assigning full responsibility to the Ambassador for all the US programs in South Vietnam, contained the following statement: "I wish it clearly understood that this overall responsibility includes the whole military effort in South Vietnam and authorizes the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate." President Johnson left the means of exercising control over COMUSMACV's activities to Ambassador Taylor's discretion, telling him to work out arrangements that made his authority effective but did not unduly burden him in the exercise of his other functions.[1] Moreover, the US establishment that Taylor came to head had been greatly strengthened by creation of the post of Deputy Ambassador, occupied by a top-notch career diplomat, U. Alexis Johnson, and by the addition of other talent, such as that of Mr. Sullivan.

Against these advantages were to be ranged a formidable set of circumstances, for it was General Taylor's fate to assume the Ambassadorship on the eve of one of the most difficult periods in the entire history of the US endeavor in South Vietnam. General Khanh, under an accumulation of burdens, pressures, and uncertainties, was shortly to turn fractious and unpredictable. The course he took during the remainder of 1964 frequently contravened US policy and precipitated a continuing domestic crisis in South Vietnam. To a remarkable degree, Khanh's actions fulfilled the program he had sketched to Ambassador Lodge on 4 May but had later seemed to set aside in deference to US counsel. It included declaration that his country was being invaded by the North Vietnamese, attempts to rally his people by calling for a "March North," and a scheme for reorganizing the government. The last of these was the most hurtful. It sent the government of South Vietnam

1. (S) Msg, State 20 to Saigon, 2 Jul 64.

reeling through a series of changes in form and personnel, each attended by public discontent, Buddhist and student demonstrations, and faltering governmental control. The result was frustration of the US desire to see a strong and stable government in South Vietnam that would implement an effective pacification plan and prove a reliable partner in any stronger actions against the North that became necessary.

These untoward events still lay in the future when Ambassador Taylor made his first official call on General Khanh, on 8 July. Khanh greeted him cordially, expressed satisfaction at his appointment, and pledged the "frank cooperation of a soldier." The Ambassador, in turn, promised to deal frankly with Khanh in every way. The two men agreed that all efforts of their respective governments should be fully coordinated. Upon learning of the new US Mission Council into which Ambassador Taylor had organized his key subordinates, Khanh undertook to form an analogous council to work with the US group. He said the Americans should be more than advisors; they should participate actively in the making and implementing of plans, not only in the field but in the GVN ministries in Saigon as well. Cooperation should be limited only by the need to avoid situations that would lend credence to the familiar communist charge that the GVN was only a puppet of the Americans.[2]

At that time, in early July, the US Embassy's assessment was that Khanh still had not succeeded in mobilizing his country's resources behind him in a determined effort against the Viet Cong. Although fairly secure in his position of leadership, he had not noticeably increased his popular support and did not even command the loyalty of all his ministers. Nevertheless, a certain stability had been attained, with the country's grave political problems temporarily under control. In the military field, US advisors were growing cautiously optimistic as the improved organization of the RVNAF and paramilitary forces began to take effect. During June there had been a slight increase in the number of men under arms, a significant drop in desertions, better coordination among the services of the RVNAF, and increased aggressiveness and tenacity in ARVN operations.[3]

2. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 56 to State, 8 Jul 64. The changes in Embassy organization and procedures introduced by Amb Taylor are described more fully in Ch. 16.
3. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 87 to State, 13 Jul 64.

As for assessment of the enemy situation, General Westmoreland in mid-July submitted a revised estimate of the organization and strength of Viet Cong forces. It confirmed the existence of the following VC elements: 5 regimental headquarters, 46 battalions, 132 separate companies, and 29 separate platoons. The strength of these confirmed VC units was computed at about 31,000--a higher figure than previously estimated. It was believed to result from a marked improvement in the quantity and quality of intelligence information being obtained rather than from an actual increase in enemy strength.[4]

Secretary Rusk expressed concern over reports of growing VC strength and aggressiveness in the northern provinces, evidenced by battalion-size attacks on two Special Forces camps and a hamlet within a short period of time. A supply convoy had recently been ambushed. Meanwhile most of the intelligence teams that had been sent into Laos had not been heard from and their apparent fate indicated that the enemy strength in southern Laos must be sizable. The Secretary of State asked Ambassador Taylor to consider the feasibility of additional air and ground reconnaissance to obtain hard intelligence on the VC situation in the northern provinces and adjacent areas in southern Laos.[5]

The Ambassador replied that the increased estimate of enemy strength and the recent upward trend of VC activity in the northern provinces should not "occasion overconcern." "We have been coping with this strength for some time without being accurately aware of its dimensions," Taylor wrote. As for the heightened tempo of operations, the Ambassador thought there was "considerable reason to believe that the VC command thinks we are about to shift larger forces to the Saigon area than the modest transfer actually planned and that these are holding attacks to pin forces in the north." Nevertheless, there was need to expedite the combined US-GVN effort, and the US Mission Council was studying the military personnel requirements that General Westmoreland had developed for execution of the pacification plan in the critical provinces around Saigon and for subsequent operations up to about July 1965. Ambassador Taylor thought that US military strength in South Vietnam should probably be increased to around 21,000 men during the next six months to meet projected needs.[6]

4. (S) Msg, Saigon 107 to State, 15 Jul 64.
5. (TS) Msg, State 130 to Saigon, 14 Jul 64.
6. (S) Msg, Saigon 108 to State, 15 Jul 64.

Major Increase in US Military Personnel

General Westmoreland had developed his requirements for additional manpower in two steps. As an immediate result of the discussions at Honolulu on 1-2 June, he had obtained the agreement of the Khanh government to accept US military advisors at the battalion level throughout the RVNAF and to extend the advisory effort in the eight critical provinces to the district level. On 25 June General Westmoreland submitted the manpower requirement for this undertaking to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Within a total of over 900 men, the following spaces would be above current allotments and would require authorization:

	Army	USMC	Total
Officer	141	1	142
Enlisted	548	10	558
Total	689	11	700 [7]

After study, and receipt of CINCPAC's concurrence in the request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the augmentation be approved. They noted, however, that this and other personnel assignments to USMACV were forcing the Services to make critical adjustments in their manpower posture. The Army contribution of 689 men, for instance, was the approximate equivalent of a ROAD infantry battalion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary to give priority consideration to raising the Service manpower ceilings to accommodate these unprogrammed requirements.[8]

On 16 July General Westmoreland submitted a broader request, for additional personnel, units, and equipment to support the pacification program in South Vietnam over the next year. When combined with several other increments already requested and currently under review in Washington, COMUSMACV's submission set the command's total requirement for new personnel at about 4,200 officers and men, drawn from all Services. The largest of the pending requests was the one for 700 battalion and

7. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J32 5380 to JCS, 25 Jun 64, JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64), sec 2.

8. (S-GP 4) JCSM-632-64 to SecDef, 24 Jul 64 (derived from JCS 2428/360-5), same file, sec 3.

district-level advisors. There were other personnel increments, however, either pending or already approved but not yet supplied, that had not at first been taken into account. When recomputed several days later, COMUSMACV's total requirement for new personnel stood at 4,772. These were to be added to an existing strength of slightly over 16,000.

While the prime purpose of COMUSMACV's program was to place more advisors in the field, their increase would generate a substantial further requirement for administrative and logistical personnel and for helicopters and airlift support. Under the program the number of lower-echelon field advisors would be almost doubled, as would the number of locations involved, and each of the latter would be at the end of communications and supply lines. General Westmoreland called for augmentation of his cargo airlift capability by one squadron of USAF C-123s for what he called his "wholesale" delivery system, and an additional company of 16 Army Caribou aircraft for "retail" delivery. Three C-123 squadrons were currently located in South Vietnam. Demands for their services exceeded their normal capabilities, and these squadrons had consistently overflown their programmed 60 hours a month since the beginning of 1964. General Westmoreland pointed out that here, as elsewhere throughout the support base, introduction of advisors in the numbers contemplated would impose demands that could not be met by further overutilization of existing facilities and services.

COMUSMACV also asked for two Army airmobile companies, each with 25 UH-1B helicopters, and two airlift platoons, each with 10 helicopters of the same type. When added to his existing forces, this increase would come close to fulfilling the need General Westmoreland recognized for one airmobile company to fly in support of each of the ARVN's nine divisions, plus one company as a corps-level quick reaction reserve in both the III and IV Corps, and another for general reserve in the Saigon and Delta area. Some of these aircraft he planned to use in "an armed helicopter configuration," mainly as escort for other helicopters engaged in troop and cargo lift. He also sought one medical helicopter ambulance detachment, with five UH-1Bs. This would double COMUSMACV's medical evacuation support capability, rectifying the existing shortfall and meeting needs that would arise from the increase and wider dispersion of US advisory personnel.

General Westmoreland observed that helicopters had proved exceedingly valuable to ARVN corps, division, and sector commanders and to US advisors for command, control, liaison, and

conduct of early reconnaissance in advance of convoys and reaction forces. The most damaging blows struck by the Viet Cong were ambushes of tactical formations and attacks on hamlets and outposts. To provide timely reinforcement of positions under attack, COMUSMACV was planning in conjunction with the RVNAF to establish "quick reaction heliborne forces, in each division area, capable of reinforcing beleaguered friendly elements with company size forces in one hour."

Among the unit increases requested by COMUSMACV was an increment that would allow the constitution of a Special Forces Group on a PCS basis, as opposed to the TDY status on which the Special Forces teams already in South Vietnam were serving. The battalion-size attacks that the Viet Cong had been mounting against Special Forces camps in the mountain border areas had demonstrated the need for reinforcements to fill out the half-strength detachments currently assigned to these camps. An increase of 592 US Army Special Forces personnel would bring their total to 1,299; organization as a Special Forces Group would provide effective command and control over their enlarged capabilities.[9]

Ambassador Taylor immediately supported COMUSMACV's request, noting that the personnel, unit, and equipment requirements had been developed "in the light of plans to intensify pacification in certain priority areas and to improve operations throughout the country." Since the aggressiveness and capabilities of the Viet Cong seemed to be rising, he saw a need for substantial improvement in ARVN reaction at the battalion level, for quicker responses in "counterambush" operations. The Ambassador also endorsed the introduction of a Special Forces Group on a PCS basis. This step should make it possible "to carry on an effective offensive counter-guerrilla program--something we have done only to a limited degree in the past," he wrote on 17 July. Barring unforeseen contingencies, the increases now sought "should meet the US military personnel requirement for pacification operations for approximately the next twelve months."[10]

---

9. The basic submission was (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J31 6180 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 64. The above discussion also draws on the subsequent detailed justifications contained in (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 6227 to CINCPAC, 17 Jul 64, and (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J1 7044 to JCS, 28 Jul 64.

10. (S) Msg, Saigon 125 to State, 17 Jul 64.

On 20 July CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he also generally supported COMUSMACV's proposals.[11] On the same day the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed a similar view during a meeting with the Secretary of Defense, but they reserved their final recommendations until more detailed justification had been received from the field. Among the further materials received was General Westmoreland's proposed schedule for introduction of the units, personnel, and equipment into South Vietnam. The phase-in dates fell generally in October, though some extended over a period ending in December, and the introduction of the Special Forces Group would not be completed until 1 February 1965. Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assess the ability of the Services to meet COMUSMACV's proposed schedule and to examine the possibility of accelerating it to the point of completing the movement of all units by 30 September 1964.[12]

The JCS reply to the Secretary of Defense, in a memorandum dated 4 August, presented the advice of the Services that in some instances COMUSMACV's proposed schedule could not be met on an orderly basis. The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a revised schedule for the phase-in, citing in this connection General Westmoreland's statement that the dates he had proposed should not be considered overriding if meeting them would involve sacrifice of quality or adequate preparation. The JCS schedule would set back most of the unit arrival dates to November or December. COMUSMACV's schedule for the arrival of personnel not associated with unit movements was generally acceptable, however, and could be met with minor exceptions.

The implications involved in accelerating the program so that all movements were completed by 30 September were examined in detail. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that "almost without exception, the Services can meet the desired acceleration if the costs of the serious interference with Service training, testing, and combat readiness are accepted."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that the contemplated expansion of US forces in South Vietnam would require construction of additional living accommodations and airfield facilities,

---

11. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200036Z Jul 64.
12. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J1 7044 to JCS, 28 Jul 64. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/431, 2 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64).

at an estimated cost of $6,500,000, with the construction taking five months from the receipt of funds. COMUSMACV had stated that existing airfield facilities, including maintenance hangars and parking areas, were already being utilized to capacity. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the requirement of five months for construction "could be a critical factor, limiting accelerated introduction of the increased US effort into South Vietnam by 30 September 1964." They implied that COMUSMACV should be asked to determine the effect of this limitation before a decision for accelerated introduction was made.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that MAP funds be authorized to meet the construction requirements generated by the deployments. They also renewed their previous recommendation that Service manpower ceilings be raised to accommodate COMUSMACV's unprogrammed personnel requirements.

Differences among the Joint Chiefs of Staff required that the central recommendation of their memorandum of 4 August be stated as a split view. The Chairman, the Chief of Staff, Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations recommended to the Secretary of Defense that authority be granted to deploy all the units listed by COMUSMACV, on the revised movement schedule proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps affirmed their support of the dispatch of "any additional US forces whose potential contribution to the war justifies their introduction," and they endorsed the recommendation that General Westmoreland's request be fulfilled, subject to two exceptions.

It was the view of General LeMay and General Greene that "COMUSMACV's justification for introducing 77 additional helicopters and an additional CV-2B Caribou Company requires further clarification." With respect to the helicopter augmentation, "there needs to be clearer understanding as to intended utilization in a transport role as opposed to the armed configuration." They noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already agreed that the manner in which armed helicopters were being employed in South Vietnam required investigation. To the Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant the fundamental question that should be answered was "whether the necessary close air support can be provided by VNAF/USAF fixed wing aircraft, either presently in South Vietnam or which may be programmed therefor." Without this information there was an inadequate basis for action on COMUSMACV's helicopter request. As for the proposed Caribou

augmentation, they wished to defer action until General Westmoreland had more fully defined the nature and magnitude of his airlift needs.[13]

The Secretary of Defense announced his decisions in a memorandum dated 7 August. Although recognizing that an accelerated deployment schedule would cause problems for the Services in certain areas, he directed that it be adopted. In view of the urgent need for additional US support for the Republic of Vietnam, "the resulting temporary reductions in U.S. capabilities, training programs and exercises are considered acceptable." Secretary McNamara ordered that all the units, personnel, and equipment requested by COMUSMACV be prepared for deployment to reach South Vietnam by 30 September 1964, with a few exceptions that he listed for deferred arrival. The views of General LeMay and General Greene on the introduction of additional helicopters and Caribou aircraft had been considered, he wrote; "I have concluded that these items should be supplied to COMUSMACV." General Westmoreland should be queried, however, regarding his ability to absorb the increases on the indicated schedule; where necessary, he should designate more acceptable arrival dates. The Secretary of Defense authorized use of MAP funds to meet construction requirements. The JCS recommendation that Service manpower ceilings be raised to accommodate COMUSMACV's unprogrammed requirements would be considered as a separate matter, he wrote. (During the remainder of 1964 the Joint Chiefs of Staff received no direct written reply to this recommendation.)[14]

When queried by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Westmoreland recommended strongly against compressing the shipment of men, units, and equipment into the time remaining before 30 September. He said that such a rapid build-up would overload existing facilities and create administrative problems beyond his capacity to handle in an orderly manner. Ambassador Taylor and CINCPAC supported him in this objection. Accordingly

13. (S-GP 4) JCSM-665-64 to SecDef, 4 Aug 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/431, 2 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64). The question of the use being made of armed helicopters was part of a larger question that had been raised in Congress and in the press regarding the degree to which US personnel were engaging in combat operations; for fuller discussion, see Ch. 16.

14. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Additional Support for Republic of Vietnam on an Accelerated Basis," 7 Aug 64, Att to JCS 2343/431-1, 10 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64).

the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted a new phase-in schedule submitted by COMUSMACV. The Chairman informed the Secretary of Defense by memorandum on 14 August that it would yield a buildup of US personnel on the following progression:

1,955 by 1 October 1964
3,595 by 1 November 1964
4,566 by 1 December 1964
4,680 by 1 January 1965
4,747 by 1 February 1965 [15]

Well before this, on 21 July, the Secretary of State had informed Ambassador Taylor that "highest authority has approved in principle, subject to further review of details, the requested increase in authorized military strength to about 22,000." In a further message two days later he said that Washington officials thought announcement of the forthcoming major increase in US assistance should be made initially in Saigon, perhaps through a brief joint statement by the Ambassador and General Khanh. "Believe this would tend to focus attention on US-GVN partnership and might go some way towards satisfying General Khanh's continuing need for evidence of our support," Secretary Rusk wrote.[16]

Ambassador Taylor agreed fully that Khanh should be a party to the announcement. In fact, he suggested to the Secretary of State on 25 July that Khanh make the formal announcement in the name of the GVN while he, Taylor, stood by to follow with a "backgrounder" statement. "This will enable Khanh to present the Vietnamese people with a solid achievement of increased US material support and hopefully serve in some small degree to undercut the pressures on him reported in separate telegrams."[17]

General Khanh announced the increase in US support in broad terms on 27 July. News accounts added the rounded figures and other details released in Washington. The United States would send 5,000 men to South Vietnam over the next few months, raising the existing military mission from 16,000

15. (S-GP 4) CM-80-64 to SecDef, 14 Aug 64, Att to 1st N/H to JCS 2343/431-1, 18 Aug 64, same file.
16. (S) Msg, State 205 to Saigon, 21 Jul 64; (TS) Msg, State 224 to Saigon, 23 Jul 64.
17. (TS) Msg, Saigon 215 to State, 25 Jul 64.

to 21,000, an increase of more than 30 percent. The New York Times saw this as "further evidence of the deep concern in Washington about the trend of the war" but said it did not signal a US decision "to carry the war into North Vietnam or to throw American units into combat." News accounts noted that the decision marked a definite abandonment of the goal of substantial US withdrawal from South Vietnam by the end of 1965, which the White House had announced in October 1963. (In actuality, a message from the Office of the Secretary of Defense had instructed CINCPAC to cease planning on this basis on 8 April 1964.)[18]

When certain other pending increases were approved, the total authorized US military personnel for South Vietnam stood at 22,226 on 14 August 1964.[19]

Disturbing Moves by General Khanh

The references to General Khanh's situation in the messages exchanged by Ambassador Taylor and Secretary Rusk bespoke their disquiet over the recent actions of the South Vietnamese leader and other members of his government. The first instance of assertive and unpredictable behavior had occurred at a news conference on 14 July. There GVN military officials, without prior coordination with COMUSMACV, had charged that infiltration from the North was increasing at a rapid rate. Apparently trying to create the impression of a major invasion, they told the press that organized regular North Vietnamese military units were being sent into South Vietnam.[20]

Ambassador Taylor immediately set up a press briefing at which COMUSMACV's Chief of Staff denied that there was any evidence of infiltration by organized units and attempted to dampen the excitement caused by the GVN statements. Ambassador Taylor told his Washington superiors that he was at a loss to understand General Khanh's motives in sponsoring public

18. NY Times, 28 Jul 64, 1. (S-GP 4) Msg, DEF 963028 to CINCPAC, 8 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3360 (25 Jan 63) sec 5. The changed basis for planning projections of US strength in South Vietnam is treated more fully in Ch. 16.

19. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Extension of US Advisory Assistance (U)," 14 Aug 64, Att to JCS 2428/360-7, 18 Aug 64, JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 3.

20. (S) Msg, Saigon 109 to State, 15 Jul 64.

statements of purported invasion, "which are not borne out by intelligence which presumably is the same as that available to us."

Before the Ambassador had an opportunity to confer with Khanh, the GVN leader took a more drastic step. On 19 July at a rally marking the tenth anniversary of the Geneva Accords, which the GVN labeled the "Day of Shame," General Khanh addressed a Saigon crowd estimated at more than 70,000 people. Khanh told his audience that the Geneva Accords, "born of Communist-Colonialist collusion," had divided the Vietnamese nation. Having failed to take over the South by force of arms, Peking and Hanoi were now trying to gain the same end through a newly convened Geneva Conference (communist spokesmen had recently endorsed proposals by the UN Secretary-General for a negotiated settlement). Vowing that South Vietnam would not allow its freedom to be bartered away in the negotiations of others, Khanh then launched into the "March Northward" theme, claiming that all his people supported a strategy of attack.

In an anniversary proclamation on the following day, Khanh declared that if VC aggression continued, the South Vietnamese government would "intensify the war to achieve total victory in order to liberate all the national territory." At the same time, Khanh's Secretary of State called for a "March North," and on 21 July the Deputy Prime Minister referred to the northward march again in an address concluding the observance of "Shame Week," as the GVN had now officially designated the period.[21]

Immediately following Khanh's first address, Secretary Rusk had reminded Ambassador Taylor of the importance of "keeping General Khanh as far as possible on the same track as ourselves regarding possible action against North." If the United States should find it necessary to strike against North Vietnam in response to significant escalation by Hanoi, it would want to be in the position of responding to new aggression rather than appearing to be carrying out previously planned and publicized offensives.[22]

The excitement aroused by the observance of Shame Week was not to run its course without further incidents, however.

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 245 to State, 29 Jul 64.
22. (S) Msg, State 192 to Saigon, 20 Jul 64.

It had refired anti-French sentiment, particularly among student groups. Students paraded in the streets of Saigon, burned effigies of General de Gaulle shaking hands with Ho Chi Minh, and defaced a French war memorial in the center of the city. In the early hours of 21 July, half a hundred students attacked the French Embassy compound, setting fire to a vehicle, breaking windows, and tearing up the ground floor offices of the Chancery. Police looked on without interfering.[23]

Ambassador Taylor reported to the State Department on 21 July that the GVN was continuing to feed distorted stories to correspondents and that Saigon newspapers were now accusing the United States of hiding the facts about North Vietnamese infiltration.[24]

At a press conference on 22 July the commander of the VNAF, Nguyen Cao Ky, made still stronger statements in an apparent attempt to prove that the "Go North" slogan was no hollow threat. He revealed that his planes had been dropping combat teams into North Vietnam on sabotage missions, thus publicly acknowledging the operations under OPLAN 34A. Further, General Ky declared that the VNAF was prepared to bomb North Vietnamese cities at any time; it had been training for this mission for three years.[25]

Reports reaching US officials through other channels added to their concern. In private, it was said, Khanh had declared that his country was tired of war, that pacification would take too long, and that the issue must be resolved promptly, either by attack on the North or by negotiation. He was said to be determined to "incite" the United States to action. General Ky, in turn, reportedly believed that the GVN must make its own decisions, since considerations arising from the presidential election campaign were paralyzing the US will.[26]

Ambassador Taylor and his Deputy, Alexis Johnson, confronted General Khanh and his principal aides on the morning of 23 July, expressly to straighten out the difficulties

23. (S) Msg, Saigon 245 to State, 29 Jul 64.
24. (C) Msg, Saigon 158 to State, 21 Jul 64.
25. (C) Msg, Saigon 172, 22 Jul 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 435.
26. (S) Msg, Saigon 186 to State, 23 Jul 64.

arising from Khanh's "March North" theme and General Ky's unfortunate remarks. The Ambassador emphasized that Ky's statements to the press could cause great damage. They were an admission against interest, giving aid to the enemy's propaganda by acknowledging GVN responsibility for the activities under OPLAN 34A. By alerting North Vietnam, they could make future operations more difficult. Ky's revelations and aggressive tone would certainly alienate some of the third countries from whom the GVN was seeking support.

General Khanh conceded that a propaganda advantage had been given to the enemy, but he argued that Hanoi's leaders would gain nothing of operational importance since they already knew perfectly well what was going on. After discussion, Khanh agreed that the damage might be lessened by having the GVN issue a formal "clarification." The Ambassador furnished a draft statement that he suggested be used.[27]

Later in the day the South Vietnamese Ministry of Defense issued a communique to the effect that Ky's statement had expressed the personal views of a single military leader and did not reflect official opinion. It was not the text the Ambassador had supplied, and US attempts to modify the wording before issuance were rejected, with a clear intimation that the GVN did not like being made to appear a puppet that reversed statements of its leading officials whenever they did not please the United States.[28]

At the morning meeting Ambassador Taylor had turned next to the more serious matter of Khanh's speeches calling for an attack on North Vietnam. He told Khanh that the combination of recent events gave the appearance of a GVN campaign to push the US Government into a course of action it was not ready to adopt. He pointed out the ill effects of such an impression. Khanh replied that he had no thought of bringing pressure on the United States; he had promised to be a loyal ally and expected to behave as one. But he held forth eloquently on the weariness of his people after twenty years of a war that had no end in sight. The war must be won soon because South Vietnamese patience had its limits. Khanh cited the recent capture of North Vietnamese personnel who said they were draftees assigned to regular army units. He insisted that the United States must recognize that, with this turn, the war had

27. (S) Msg, Saigon 180 to State, 23 Jul 64.
28. (S) Msg, Saigon 193 to State, 24 Jul 64.

entered a new phase to which "we should respond with new measures." In reporting this conversation to the Secretary of State, the Ambassador wrote that Khanh did not specify what new measures he had in mind, but "I am sure he was thinking of reprisal bombings."[29]

State Department officials speculated that Khanh's actions might merely be an expression of frustration over recent military difficulties, in which case the steadying influence of Ambassador Taylor should be sufficient to restore his resolution in pursuing the pacification program. They saw a more disturbing possibility, however. Khanh's advocacy of action against the North might be a reaction to pressures from neutralist opinion, and might indicate that such opinion was on the rise. The Ambassador was asked to be particularly alert for evidence of growing neutralist sentiment in Saigon and for any hint of North Vietnamese contact with dissidents among the deposed generals, former GVN officials, or exile groups. Also, despite the recent difficulties, Ambassador Taylor was to make every effort to remove any doubt in Vietnamese circles that the United States continued to support Khanh.[30]

Ambassador Taylor Proposes Combined Planning

In an extended assessment on 25 July, Ambassador Taylor said that Khanh appeared to have launched a deliberate campaign to associate the United States with increased military pressures on North Vietnam, disregarding the embarrassment it would cause his ally. Recalling Khanh's discussions with Ambassador Lodge in May, Taylor surmised that Khanh had been thinking for a long time about some dramatic move to raise his people's morale and to bring the war effort to a more decisive phase. It was possible that Khanh had given his "March North" speech merely to whip up public enthusiasm and aid recruiting. More likely, in Taylor's opinion, Khanh was trying to commit the United States to a program of reprisal bombing as a first step to further escalation of hostilities against North Vietnam. It was even possible that by "March North," Khanh meant literally to begin a military offensive to reunify Vietnam as soon as he felt the United States was inextricably involved.

29. (S) Msg, Saigon 185 to State, 23 Jul 64.
30. (S) Msg, State 235 to Saigon, 24 Jul 64.

In sum, Khanh, after nearly six months in office, seems to have reached the conclusion that the frustrating and ineffective instruments of government at his command are not adequate to master the Viet Cong by counter-insurgency means alone. He and his colleagues seem to have decided that they can bring cessation of Viet Cong harassment only by bringing direct pressure to bear on the North. If they are unsuccessful in getting us more directly involved, it is difficult to judge at this stage how strong pressures would become within the GVN to seek a negotiated solution.[31]

The dangers of this situation were evident. The more strongly the United States sought to dissuade Khanh from his current line of thought, the more unpredictable his actions might become. And it could not yet be judged how deeply the "March North" fever had taken hold. "One maverick pilot taking off for Hanoi with a load of bombs," Ambassador Taylor wrote, "could touch off an extension of hostilities at a time and in a form most disadvantageous to US interests."

To the Secretary of State, the Ambassador proposed a means of containing the frustrations of the GVN leaders and channeling their fervor into a more useful effort. He suggested that the United States offer to engage in combined contingency planning with the GVN for various forms of military action against North Vietnam. Such planning activity would not only force GVN officials to confront the realities that lay behind Khanh's slogan; it also could provide a basis for any military action the United States might subsequently choose to take against the North. Further, it would give US officials an opportunity to probe the thought of Khanh and his associates more deeply. In proposing combined planning to the GVN, Ambassador Taylor said, the United States must make absolutely clear that it was assuming no commitment to carry out the plans.[32]

Qualified approval of this concept reached Ambassador Taylor on 26 July in a joint State-Defense message that authorized him to make the proposal at his discretion. But he was to tell Khanh that the planning must be closely held, with only a "small and select joint group" involved. There must be absolutely no security leak. Further, the Washington authorities

31. (S) Msg, Saigon 213 to State, 25 Jul 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Jul 64).
32. (TS) Msg, Saigon 214 to State, 25 Jul 64, same file.

believed Taylor should not put this offer in writing but should make his points orally, underscoring that the United States assumed no commitment to carry out the plans, when made.[33]

Ambassador Taylor replied that while security leaks would of course be undesirable, limiting the planning to a small and exclusive group would not realize the full benefit of such planning. Breadth of participation was desirable in order to let Khanh's military critics know that he was getting cooperation from the United States in a field in which he had taken the initiative. Some of these same generals and officials needed to be made aware of the requirements for preparation that the planning would identify. And as a practical matter, if the planning was to be effective, ample staff assistance would be required.[34]

Armed both with discretionary power to propose combined planning and with authority to suggest that Khanh make the initial announcement of the forthcoming increase in US advisory support, Ambassador Taylor went to confer with the GVN leader on 27 July. Khanh turned the discussion again to the need for pressure against North Vietnam. "Once more," the Ambassador reported to Washington, "it came out clearly that he is thinking about reprisal tit-for-tat bombing rather than a movement north with land forces or massive bombing to effect total destruction of Hanoi and all its works." Khanh wanted to strike the North in order to encourage his people and to hasten Ho Chi Minh toward the conclusion that his support of the Viet Cong should end. Khanh recognized that at some point he would need the cooperation of Ho Chi Minh to end VC activities in the South.

This line of talk gave the Ambassador his opportunity to bring up the proposal for combined contingency planning. Khanh appeared pleased but surprised to receive it, and he asked for several days to think it over. Khanh also said that he intended to declare a "state of emergency" within a short time but agreed to consult Ambassador Taylor before doing so.[35]

---

33. (S) Msg, State-Defense 253 to Saigon, 25 Jul 64, same file.
34. (S) Msg, Saigon 225 to State, 27 Jul 64.
35. Ibid.

JCS Recommendations for Additional Action

The Ambassador's messages had of course received intensive consideration in Washington. At a NSC meeting on 25 July, General Wheeler had been instructed to have the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepare, as a matter of urgency, a list of those military actions that would: 1) "reduce the frustration and defeatism of the RVN leaders by undertaking punitive measures against the enemy outside the borders of the RVN"; 2) contribute militarily to the success of the counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam; 3) entail minimum risk of escalatory measures by the enemy; and 4) require minimum US participation in a combat role.[36]

Of the several actions examined by the Joint Staff in the swift course of this study, only three met all criteria. They were: 1) air strikes against Laotian infiltration routes into South Vietnam; 2) cross-border ground operations against the infiltration system; 3) selected air strikes against prime military targets in North Vietnam, using non-US, unmarked aircraft. By a memorandum on 27 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara of their findings, analyzing each of the three courses of action and furnishing detailed supporting data.

Air strikes, including armed reconnaissance missions, against communist installations and traffic in the Laos Panhandle would reduce but not stop the flow of support to the Viet Cong. Such actions would, however, "signal sharply to Hanoi and Peking that they must pay a higher price to continue the subversion effort." While the VNAF could conduct these strikes alone, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that FARM GATE resources should be added to heighten the level of effort. Use of FARM GATE aircraft would also "ensure effective US direction of this sensitive operation in both planning and execution."

As for the second course, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that reconnaissance and punitive cross-border ground operations into Laos could locate, harass, and perhaps destroy communist installations and troop formations. Even moderate success would increase the already sizable problems of the enemy in supplying men and materiel to the Viet Cong and would reinforce the signal to Hanoi. Intelligence

36. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/426, 26 Jul 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Jul 64).

probes and raids by RVN Special Forces and Rangers and overt attacks by units of the VNAF Airborne Brigade up to battalion size were suggested. For these efforts to achieve worthwhile results, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that US advisors must accompany the RVN units.

The third course of action was, in fact, an extension of the operations that had been going on since February 1964 under OPLAN 34A. As conducted so far, this had been "a modest, covert, psychological and punitive campaign" against North Vietnam, in which no air strikes had yet been mounted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said that air missions by unmarked aircraft with non-US crews "to mine selected harbors and rivers and to strike prime military targets" could punish the enemy and, again, "signal sharply" to Hanoi and Peking.

Since these actions had been chosen as unlikely to trigger a communist response escalating the conflict in Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not recommend moving US combat units into South Vietnam or nearby at the present time. They observed that "the introduction of US combat forces which would sit idle could well have a psychological impact on both friends and enemies the reverse of that desired."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that the three courses of action they had described could prove militarily and psychologically beneficial to the war effort in South Vietnam, provided they did not siphon off needed resources or otherwise distract the attention of GVN leaders from their main mission, winning the counterinsurgency battle. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, nevertheless, that "these actions would not significantly affect communist support of Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam," and they noted that some of the actions might have counterproductive results in Laos from a political point of view. They recommended that Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland be asked to comment.[37]

Subsequently, copies of the JCS submission were provided to the Secretary of State, Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV, but further consideration was to occur in circumstances changed by enemy action.[38]

---

37. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-639-64 to SecDef, 27 Jul 64, Encl to JCS 2343/426, 26 Jul 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Jul 64).

38. (TS-GP 3) 1st N/H to JCS 2343/426, 3 Aug 64, same file.

Action in the Gulf of Tonkin

Since late 1962, destroyers under CINCPAC's command had conducted patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin from time to time, chiefly for intelligence collection purposes, under the code word designation DESOTO. The patrolling ships were frequently subjected to communist air or surface surveillance. The most recent DESOTO patrol had been in early March 1964 when CINCPAC recommended in July that another one be scheduled to investigate North Vietnamese coastal activity. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved, directing that the patrol begin not later than 31 July.[39]

In fulfillment of this mission the US destroyer MADDOX was operating in international waters off the North Vietnamese coast on 2 August 1964. Toward midafternoon, local time (020750Z), the ship's radar detected three torpedo boats approaching at high speed. When the boats closed to 9,000 yards with apparent hostile intent, the MADDOX fired three warning shots and then opened fire with its 5-inch battery when these were disregarded. The North Vietnamese boats pressed their attack, launching two torpedoes and firing machine guns. The MADDOX evaded the torpedoes but was hit by one bullet, whose recovery provided physical evidence of the attack. Meanwhile the destroyer's battery had scored a direct hit on one enemy boat. At 020828Z, four aircraft from the carrier TICONDEROGA joined the action and attacked the PT boats, two of which were fleeing toward the shore while the third lay dead in the water and burning. The MADDOX retired southward to rendezvous with the destroyer C. TURNER JOY.[40]

On 3 August the United States Government announced that it took an extremely serious view of this unprovoked attack on a US naval vessel operating on the high seas.

> The United States Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Viet-Nam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences

39. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, pp. 367-368.

40. Ibid., pp. 368-369. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 100-64, 3 Aug 64.

which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against United States forces.[41]

On the same day the President issued the following statement:

> I have instructed the Navy:
>
> 1. to continue the patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Viet-Nam,
> 2. to double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already on patrol,
> 3. to provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers, and
> 4. to issue orders to the commanders of the combat aircraft and the two destroyers,
>
> (a) to attack any force which attacks them in international waters, and
> (b) to attack with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it.

These instructions had already been passed to CINCPAC by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the further provision that surface pursuit of the enemy would not approach closer than 11 nautical miles to the mainland and US aircraft were not to penetrate North Vietnamese airspace.[42]

The MADDOX and C. TURNER JOY maintained the patrol on 3 August without incident. On the evening of 4 August, however, while the destroyers were near the center of the Gulf, about 65 miles from land, an undetermined number of PT boats closed for an attack. In the darkness the two destroyers evaded torpedoes and the C. TURNER JOY engaged targets seen on radar only, although return fire and enemy searchlight beams were observed. Target identification by aircraft arriving from the TICONDEROGA was hampered by low ceilings. When the enemy broke off the engagement after two hours, the C. TURNER JOY

41. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (24 Aug 64), p. 258.
42. Ibid., p. 259. (S) Msgs, JCS 7680 and 7681 to CINCPAC, 2 Aug 64.

claimed one boat sunk by its guns and another damaged. Neither destroyer was hit and there were no US casualties.[43]

In the highest councils in Washington there appears never to have been any doubt that US retaliation must follow any second North Vietnamese attack on US warships in international waters. On 4 August, upon receipt of the first alert that attack on the DESOTO patrol might be imminent, an ad hoc group consisting of the Secretary of Defense, the Deputy Secretary, the Director, Joint Staff, the Director J-3, and several J-3 officers met at 1000 to consider possible action. Using the existing North Vietnamese target list, the group developed options for retaliatory attacks, with particular attention to installations directly related to the hostile action, namely, North Vietnamese PT and gunboat bases and their supporting POL facilities.

News that the destroyers were actually engaging the enemy reached the group at about 1100. The discussion shifted to a meeting of the Secretary of Defense with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also attended by the Secretary of State and Mr. McGeorge Bundy. When Secretaries Rusk and McNamara departed about 1145 for a scheduled NSC meeting, they were prepared to recommend to the President that retaliatory action take the form of air strikes against North Vietnamese PT/PGM bases and associated POL storage. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to send detailed recommendations to the White House as quickly as possible. In their further deliberations the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to recommend that the United States carry out severe retaliation on 5 August against several listed bases and the POL tanks in the Vinh area.

The Secretary of Defense met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff again at 1500, bringing word that the President had approved their recommendations, with some modification. He had added two base areas to the target list but had decided that, except for striking the storage tanks, the US attacks would be mounted against the boats only, not against the bases or port facilities.[44]

---

43. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 102-64, 5 Aug 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, pp. 369-370.

44. The above account is drawn from (TS) J-3 Working Paper, "Command and Control of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, 4-5 August 1964," 26 Feb 65, J-3 Records.

At 042115Z August (1715 EDT) the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to conduct a one-time maximum effort attack at first light on 5 August against the POL facilities at Vinh and against "SWATOWs and PT boats located at bases Port Wallut, Hon Gay, Phuc Loi and Quang Khe and at Loc Chao estuary." Further, he was to conduct armed reconnaissance against boats found beyond the 3-mile limit. Carrier aircraft only were to be used, with all planes avoiding Hainan Island and keeping at least 50 miles from the border of Communist China. The JCS message also directed continuation of the DESOTO patrol but deferred any OPLAN 34A activities for 24 hours.[45] The retaliatory operation received the nickname PIERCE ARROW.

Less than four hours later the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC and other commanders to undertake a comprehensive series of air, sea, and ground force deployments and movement alerts, drawn from the list in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 and designed to advance forces toward or into Southeast Asia in order to discourage enemy reaction to PIERCE ARROW and to improve US readiness for immediate operations against North Vietnam if necessary. Perhaps the most significant of the moves was the deployment of two B-57 squadrons from the Philippines to Bien Hoa in South Vietnam, where they remained after the immediate emergency had passed.[46]

Late on the evening of 4 August in Washington the President addressed the American people by radio and television. He reported the occurrence of the second deliberate North Vietnamese attack and declared that such acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States "must be met not only with alert defense but with positive reply."

> That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight. Air action is now in execution against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Viet-Nam which have been used in these hostile operations.

President Johnson was sure that this latest act of communist aggression would cause all Americans to redouble their determination to fulfill the US commitment to the people and

45. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7720 to CINCPAC, 042115Z Aug 64, JMF 9155.3/3230 (64).

46. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7729 to CINCPAC, CINCSTRIKE, and CINCSAC, 050043Z Aug 64, JMF 9155 (26 Jun 64) sec 2. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 102-64, 5 Aug 64.

government of South Vietnam. "Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. . . . We still seek no wider war."[47]

The President actually spoke at a time between the launching of strike aircraft from the TICONDEROGA (050243Z) and from the CONSTELLATION (050500Z) and before any of them had reached the target areas.[48] A total of 64 sorties were flown in the PIERCE ARROW operation, with those scheduled against Port Wallut diverted to Hon Gay because of unfavorable weather. It was estimated that the POL facility at Vinh/Ben Thuy was 90 percent destroyed; of 30 SWATOWs and PT boats sighted, 8 were destroyed, 6 severely damaged, 10 moderately damaged, and 4 lightly damaged. Two US aircraft were lost through enemy action.[49]

The Joint Congressional Resolution

Among the consequences flowing from the aggressive actions of the North Vietnamese in the Gulf of Tonkin, the one of greatest permanent importance was the passage by the Congress of the Southeast Asia Resolution. The President, who had already consulted legislative leaders of both parties on 4 August, sent a message to the Congress the following day. He reviewed the 10-year history of the commitments undertaken by the United States in Southeast Asia, including its SEATO obligations, and the military responses to communist attacks on US forces that had been found necessary.

> As the President of the United States I have concluded that I should now ask the Congress, on its part, to join in affirming the national determination that all such attacks will be met, and that the United States

47. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (24 Aug 64), p. 259.

48. The official explanation given later was that the speech had been timed to advise the enemy that the incoming strike aircraft had a limited and specific mission and were not the first wave of an all-out attack that might include Communist China; at the same time the forewarning was judged insufficient to permit the PT bases to be cleared. The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 148-149.

49. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 102-64 and 103-64, 5 and 6 Aug 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 372.

will continue in its basic policy of assisting the free nations of the area to defend their freedom.

As I have repeatedly made clear, the United States intends no rashness, and seeks no wider war. We must make it clear to all that the United States is united in its determination to bring about the end of Communist subversion and aggression in the area. We seek the full and effective restoration of the international agreements signed in Geneva in 1954, with respect to South Vietnam, and again in Geneva in 1962, with respect to Laos.

I recommend a resolution expressing the support of the Congress for all necessary action to protect our Armed Forces and to assist nations covered by the SEATO Treaty. At the same time, I assure the Congress that we shall continue readily to explore any avenues of political solution that will effectively guarantee the removal of Communist subversion and preservation of the independence of the nations of the area.

The President cited an additional reason for passing the resolution, "at a time when we are entering on 3 months of political campaigning. Hostile nations must understand that in such a period the United States will continue to protect its national interests, and that in these matters there is no division among us."[50]

A joint resolution was immediately introduced. Apart from the preamble, which referred to the recent events, it was virtually identical to the text that had been discussed in earlier months among the President's advisors. Its operative sections, as introduced and as ultimately approved, were the following:

> Resolved . . . That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.
>
> SEC. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance

50. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 261-263.

of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

SEC. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.[51]

Secretaries Rusk and McNamara testified together in support of the resolution before a joint meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees on the morning of 6 August. Secretary Rusk cited precedents and stressed the similarity of the proposed resolution to those passed in earlier years, copies of which were supplied for comparative purposes.

As I have said before, we cannot now be sure what actions may be required. The Formosa resolution of 1955 was followed by the use of United States warships to escort supply convoys to the offshore islands in 1958; the Middle East resolution was followed by President Eisenhower's sending of troops to Lebanon in 1958; the Cuba resolution was followed by the well-known events of October 1962. I do not suggest that any of these actions may serve as a parallel for what may be required in Southeast Asia.[52]

Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, assumed the major responsibility for explaining and supporting the resolution on the floor of the Senate. He recommended "prompt and overwhelming endorsement," believing that passage was necessary to make clear to the

51. Ibid., p. 268. PL 88-408 (H.J. Res. 1145), 78 Stat. 384, approved 10 Aug 64.
52. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 267-268.

communist powers "that their aggressive and expansionist ambitions, wherever advanced, will meet precisely the degree of American opposition which is necessary to frustrate them." Specifically, "the intent is to prevent the continuing aggression that now exists against South Vietnam."

The questions of other Senators returned more than once to the matter of whether or not the resolution constituted an advance authorization and approval for the deployment of US combat forces, perhaps in large numbers, to South Vietnam. Senator Fulbright found nothing in the wording that contemplated or encouraged such a course. "I personally feel it would be very unwise under any circumstances to put a large land army on the Asian Continent," he said, but "the language of the resolution would not prevent it." Admittedly, the resolution authorized whatever action the President as Commander in Chief found necessary. Senator Fulbright said it was his hope, fully shared by the President, that the combined effect of the resolution and the incisive military action that had been taken would be to deter North Vietnam from further aggression.

On 7 August the House of Representatives approved the Southeast Asia Resolution by a vote of 416 to 0. The Senate vote was 88 to 2 for the resolution, with all 10 of the absent Senators announced as favoring it. While some misgivings had been expressed by others, only Senators Morse and Gruening opposed the resolution outright. They thought it embodied a dangerous and unnecessary enlargement of the President's authority. Senator Morse called the resolution "a predated declaration of war"; Senator Gruening said it authorized "escalation unlimited."[53]

The United Nations and Communist Countercharges

Meanwhile, before the UN Security Council Ambassador Stevenson had charged North Vietnam with deliberate aggression against US naval forces and had defended the PIERCE ARROW retaliatory attacks as an act of self-defense fully consonant with international law and the United Nations Charter. In his speech on 5 August Ambassador Stevenson sought no specific Security Council action but dwelt instead on the ultimate goal

53. Congressional Record, vol. 110, pt 14, 5-7 Aug 64, pp. 18133, 18399-18407, 18462, 18469-18470.

of the United States in Southeast Asia: peace. "We want nothing more, and nothing less, than the assured and guaranteed independence of the peoples of the area." This end could readily be achieved whenever the Hanoi regime ceased its aggressive support of insurgency and agreed to abide by the Geneva Accords and Agreements. "Any time that decision can be put in enforceable terms," Stevenson said, "my Government will be only too happy to put down the burden that we have been sharing with those determined to preserve their independence."[54]

The Hanoi regime had already acknowledged attacking the MADDOX on 2 August, claiming that the ship had invited assault by intruding beyond the claimed 12-mile territorial limit and by providing protective cover for an RVN naval raid on two North Vietnamese islands on the night of 30-31 July (an OPLAN 34A mission). United States officials had denied that the DESOTO patrol bore any relationship to "whatever may have been going on in connection with these islands." As for the second attack in the Tonkin Gulf on 4 August, Hanoi denied its occurrence, charging that the United States had fabricated the incident to justify the "illegal" strikes against the North Vietnamese PT bases.[55]

Threats of grave consequences were heard from both Peking and Hanoi. Observable communist action appeared to be directed toward improving North Vietnam's air defenses, however. On 7 August it was determined that 36 MIG 15 and 17 aircraft had appeared at the Phuc Yen air field, probably with Chinese Communist pilots.[56]

The View from Saigon

General Khanh had been informed of the US intention to mount the PIERCE ARROW operation, in part through a message from President Johnson, delivered by the Ambassador, that read, "The measures I have ordered are intended to make unmistakably clear to the Communist leaders in Hanoi that the United States defends its rights and that our commitment to assist

54. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 272-274.
55. The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 149-150. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (7 Sep 64), p. 335.
56. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 373.

your country in preserving her freedom and independence cannot be shaken . . . ."[57] General Khanh was greatly heartened by the US action. Ambassador Taylor also outlined for him the force movements and alerts, including the deployment of two B-57 squadrons to South Vietnam, that the United States was undertaking to strengthen its position in Southeast Asia. Khanh responded that the United States need not seek permission to send its forces into his country, particularly if time was pressing.[58]

The Embassy assessed the reaction of the Vietnamese people to the US attacks on North Vietnam as highly favorable. To many the action indicated a stronger US commitment to Southeast Asia than they had formerly believed existed, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Dai Viet spokesmen hailed the event. But as the week passed with no further direct US action, Embassy observers sensed a let-down. The Vietnamese public did not readily grasp the US intention that the attacks be viewed by Hanoi as a measured and specific response establishing that US forces could not be molested with impunity, rather than as the opening round in continuing hostilities between the United States and North Vietnam.[59]

General Khanh had seized the occasion for further moves in his campaign to convince his people that they were engaged in direct hostilities with the North Vietnamese. In decrees issued on 7 August he declared a state of emergency, warned of imminent attack from the North, and instituted drastic measures for control of the population. The decrees suspended many of the normal rights of citizens and gave the governing Military Revolutionary Council unusual powers. Private homes could be searched at any hour without warrant; strikes and certain demonstrations and meetings were banned. Citizens could be detained without trial, and any violation of public order or "national security" was placed within the jurisdiction of military courts. The Embassy reported that "terrorists, people who indulge in sabotage, speculators harmful to the national economy, caught red-handed, will be sentenced to death" without

57. (S) Msg, State 342 to Saigon, 4 Aug 64.
58. (S) Msg, Saigon 310 to State, 5 Aug 64.
59. (C) Msg, Saigon 329 to State, 7 Aug 64; (C) Msg, Saigon 342 to State, 15 Aug 64.

right of appeal. Three days later GVN officials announced the beginning of an air raid shelter program in Saigon.[60]

The date of the decrees, 7 August, marked the end of Ambassador Taylor's first month of service, during which he had gained a ready appreciation of the pressures and uncertainties under which General Khanh was working. The Ambassador's initial courtesy calls on the three civilian Vice Premiers of the GVN had confirmed that none of them was deeply loyal to Khanh. Vice Premier Hoan, who was a leading member of the Dai Viet political party, complained that the ministers and vice premiers were not kept informed of what Khanh was doing and could not gain his approval for important projects. Vice Premier Do Mau spent the interview in portraying himself, in Taylor's words, as a "useful alternative" to Khanh, while Vice Premier Oanh "condescendingly pointed out" Khanh's inadequacies.[61] It was probable that these three men had been prominent in Khanh's thought in May when he had spoken of "getting rid of the politicians."

The loyalty of Khanh's military associates was not assured, either. To the Ambassador, Khanh complained particularly about General Minh, who had been induced to remain in the government as Chief of State after Khanh's coup in January. This had been done, Khanh said, in the interests of national unity and to capitalize on Minh's reputed popularity with the public, but at the cost of some dissension elsewhere in the military ranks. Khanh charged that General Minh was uncooperative, however, absenting himself from cabinet meetings and making no attempt to discharge his responsibilities. Minh's lack of enthusiasm for the "March North" had deepened Khanh's suspicions that Minh was supporting the partisans of the "French neutralism solution." Meanwhile a powerful bloc of generals headed by Defense Minister Khiem and Chief of Staff Thieu were pressing Khanh to get rid of Minh. Members of this bloc, Khanh asserted, were closely allied with the Dai Viet political party. The Dai Viet, according to Khanh, had no particular policy with regard to the war, merely a party objective of acquiring the sources of power and hence a desire to penetrate the armed forces.[62]

---

60. (U) Msg, Saigon 344 to State, 7 Aug 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 437.

61. (S) Msg, Saigon 65 to State, 9 Jul 64; Msg, Saigon 96 to State, 14 Jul 64.

62. (S) Msgs, Saigon 126 to State, 17 Jul 64; 152, 21 Jul 64; 203, 24 Jul 64.

General Khanh had suggested that the Ambassador could help him by doing two things: getting the word about that the United States opposed any further coups, and talking with General Khiem and some of his supporters about the undesirability of partisan politics within the armed forces. Ambassador Taylor had promised to do what he could on both counts. As he observed to Washington, Khanh "was and is our boy for the cold-blooded reason that we see no substitute leader capable of carrying forward the pacification campaign."[63]

By early August there was some progress to point to, also. Khanh had followed through on his intention of designating GVN officials with responsibilities paralleling those of particular members of the US Mission Council, with whom they would consult directly and continuously. On 5 August a tentative beginning had been made, under Defense Minister Khiem and General Westmoreland, on combined planning for military pressures against North Vietnam.[64] Combined planning at another level, which Ambassador Lodge had instituted as one of his last services, had been in progress since early July. The task was to devise plans for pacifying the critical provinces around Saigon by expansion of the "oil spot" outward. On the GVN side, members of the planning staff came from the 7th Division, the Capital Military District, and the III Corps; MACV and USOM furnished the other members, with the senior US advisor to the III Corps heading the US contingent.[65]

By 10 August this plan was well advanced, designated HOP TAC by the Vietnamese and PICA I (Pacification Intensification in Critical Areas) by the Americans. Ambassador Taylor pointed out that the urban area centered around Saigon and Cholon was of paramount strategic importance. It contained about 40 percent of South Vietnam's population, almost all of its limited industrial capacity, and its centers of social and political power. The US Mission hoped that the planning and implementation of HOP TAC would exercise Khanh's government in a way that improved its functioning, that effective social, economic, and administrative services would be developed in the affected areas, and that "some pragmatic military successes" would be achieved that would raise morale and drive the Viet Cong from the nation's heartland.[66]

---

63. (S) Msg, Saigon 203 to State, 24 Jul 64.
64. (S) Msgs, Saigon 245 to State, 29 Jul 64; 310, 5 Aug 64.
65. (S) Msg, Saigon 96 to State, 14 Jul 64.
66. (S) Msg, Saigon 377 to State, 10 Aug 64.

In a general survey for his Washington superiors on 10 August, Ambassador Taylor noted that US advisors in the field held a more favorable view of the military situation than US officials in Saigon. The personnel strength of the RVNAF and paramilitary forces had begun to rise slowly and the trend was continuing. By January 1965, the Ambassador predicted, their total number would come close to the year-end target strength of 446,000. The US advisors judged more than 90 percent of ARVN battalions to be at least "marginally effective." The VNAF was being equipped with A-1H aircraft on schedule; three squadrons would be combat-ready by 30 September and a fourth by December.

But the Viet Cong had also shown improvement, the Ambassador wrote.

> In terms of equipment and training, the VC are better armed and led today than ever in the past. Infiltration continues both from Laos and Cambodia and there is no indication that the VC are having difficulty in replacing their losses in men and equipment. However, there is no reason to believe that in the coming months, they will wish to risk their past gains in an overt military confrontation with GVN forces . . . .

The Viet Cong would continue their tactics of terrorism and harassment with the aim of creating such demoralization in South Vietnam as to force acceptance of a political settlement favorable to them. Rather than seeking to conquer by conventional military means, the enemy looked to neutralization and a coalition government as the road to communist domination.

The most variable and uncertain element under assessment was the government of South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor observed that the Khanh government "has lasted six months and has about a 50/50 chance of lasting out the year, although probably not without some changed faces in the cabinet."

> Khanh's state of mind will be an important factor in the future conduct of the war and in his relations with the representatives of US policy. He and many of his colleagues are finding it very difficult to face up to the long years of slow hard slugging which is all they see ahead under the present rules of operational conduct.
>
> In the coming months, we may expect to face mounting pressures from the GVN to win the war by direct attack on Hanoi, which, if resisted, will create frictions and

irritations which could lead local politicians to serious consideration of a negotiated solution or local soldiers to a military adventure without US consent.

Ambassador Taylor concluded his report of 10 August by recommending that US efforts during the coming months be directed as follows: 1) do everything possible to bolster the Khanh government; 2) improve the pacification program by concentrating on critical areas such as the provinces around Saigon; 3) undertake "show-window" social and economic projects in secure rural and urban areas; 4) keep the American public informed of what the US Government was doing and why; 5) prepare to implement contingency plans against North Vietnam with optimum readiness by 1 January 1965.[67]

The last of these points repeated a recommendation the Ambassador had made the previous day, in a message devoted more specifically to military measures. In the 9 August message he noted that all OPLAN 34A activities would remain under suspension until further notice from Washington. The appearance of MIG 15 and 17 aircraft in North Vietnam must be taken into account, but since they were presumed not to have all-weather or night interception capabilities, Ambassador Taylor believed the United States should accept the risk of nighttime operations and daylight activities in international waters. He recommended maintaining the DESOTO patrols and continuing airsweeps over international waters with authority to engage enemy boats and aircraft under relaxed rules of engagement, which he thought justified by the recent attacks on US vessels.

Ambassador Taylor recommended that the United States begin armed reconnaissance missions over the Laos Panhandle, progressively attacking the most clearly identified infiltration facilities. Pilots should have authority to strike specified fixed targets, to attack road traffic in delimited areas, and to conduct fire-suppression attacks against AA defenses. His final recommendation was that the United States prepare to undertake some of the air strikes against North Vietnam provided for in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, after completing the following actions: 1) set forth publicly and effectively the evidence of continued infiltration and control of the insurgency from North Vietnam; 2) accomplish combined planning with the GVN; and 3) establish evidence of sufficient progress

67. (S) Msg, Saigon 377 to State, 10 Aug 64.

in the pacification of provinces around Saigon to warrant undertaking a new military commitment. Ambassador Taylor thought fulfillment of this program would set the target date for beginning bombing operations against North Vietnam at about 1 January 1965. In effect, his message called for implementation of some of the actions that had been listed under Recommendations 11 and 12 of NSAM 288.[68]

Study of Courses of Action in Washington

Ambassador Taylor's recommendations were a contribution to the intensive consultations going on in Washington. At a White House meeting of senior advisors with the President on 10 August there was general agreement that the US Government must decide in the very near future the best course of action to be taken in Southeast Asia and the means of implementing it. General Wheeler informed his JCS colleagues that the following key questions had been raised:

a. What, if any, actions should be undertaken in the Laos Panhandle?

b. Should the tempo of Operations Plan 34A operations be increased?

c. Should we initiate a tit for tat program of retaliation, or should we do something more, against North Vietnam? If so, what and when?[69]

The secretaries of State and Defense had undertaken to pursue these questions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff likewise began preparing their views on 10 August, but before completion of this major exercise they submitted a preliminary expression when commenting on a draft policy paper circulated by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William P. Bundy.

Secretary Bundy's paper, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," dated 13 August, identified the next ten days or so as "a short holding phase" during which the United States

68. (TS) Msg, Saigon 364 to State, 9 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64) sec 1.
69. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Chairman's Debrief of 10 August White House Meeting," 10 Aug 64, same file.

must avoid any actions that could be considered provocative or that would obscure the responsibility for escalation of the hostilities, should the North Vietnamese turn to stronger action. DESOTO patrols and new OPLAN 34A activities, for instance, would be withheld. Thereafter, toward the end of August, the United States must take up more active measures.

Among the elements of the situation now confronting the United States, the prime one was the conclusion Secretary Bundy had drawn from Ambassador Taylor's reports: "South Vietnam is not going well." There was a major problem of maintaining the morale of General Khanh and other GVN leaders. The US retaliation for the attacks in the Tonkin Gulf had lifted that morale temporarily but had also raised expectations; "morale could easily sag back again if the VC have successes and we do nothing further." A second element was the progress along the "negotiating track" on Laos, which in some respects was running ahead of US desires. Should the move toward a conference on Laotian problems gain greater momentum, the United States might have to refuse to participate, in order to avoid a seriously unfavorable impact on GVN morale.

The attitude of the communist leaders in Hanoi and Peking was the third element. The recent US response had undoubtedly convinced them that similar retaliation would follow any further attacks on US forces. The communists "are certainly not persuaded that they must abandon their efforts in South Vietnam and Laos," however, and might still doubt that the United States would take stronger actions in response to infiltration or increased VC activity.

> Basically, a solution in both South Vietnam and Laos will require a combination of military pressure and some form of communication under which Hanoi (and Peiping) eventually accept the idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in the foreseeable future. But military pressure could be accompanied by attempts to communicate . . . provided always that we make it clear both to the Communists and to South Vietnam that military pressure will continue until we have achieved our objectives. After, but only after, we have established a clear pattern of pressure hurting the DRV and leaving no doubts in South Vietnam of our resolve, we could even

accept a conference broadened to include the Vietnam issue.

Secretary Bundy then listed certain limited pressures that could be applied against North Vietnam from late August through December. OPLAN 34A activities could be continued and might be openly acknowledged and justified by the GVN. Combined planning with the GVN could be pressed, with word of its existence deliberately leaked for Hanoi's benefit. Training of VNAF pilots in jet aircraft could be speeded and publicised. DESTOTO patrols could be resumed, carefully dissociated from the 34A operations, and specific tit-for-tat bombing or mining actions could be mounted in response to any special VC or NVN activity, such as terrorist attacks on US dependents. Lastly, cross-border operations into the Laos Panhandle could be conducted on a limited scale. The VNAF might strike at selected targets in the infiltration areas, existing US aerial reconnaissance would continue, and suppressive missions might be added. Secretary Bundy ruled out ground operations, however. To be successful they would require greater forces than the GVN could spare from the pacification effort, and he did not believe use of US of Thai forces should be considered at present.

Admittedly, Secretary Bundy wrote, these limited actions did not add up to "a truly coherent program of strong enough pressure either to bring Hanoi around or to sustain a pressure posture into some kind of discussion." All fell short of systematic military action against North Vietnam. The United States might decide to move on to such action some time during the period through December, in response to some incident or because of deteriorating conditions in South Vietnam, perhaps brought on by greatly increased infiltration. If not, planning should continue for beginning on the date suggested by Ambassador Taylor, 1 January 1965. In this connection. "our present thinking is that systematic action against the DRV might start by progressive attacks keyed to the rationale of infiltration routes and facilities, followed by other selected military-related targets."[70]

70. (TS-GP 3) Third Draft, W.P. Bundy, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 13 Aug 64, Att to JCS 2343/441-1, 13 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (11 Aug 64).

The Joint Chiefs of Staff delivered their comments in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 14 August. They expressed general agreement with the policy and courses of action contained in the Bundy paper, provided that the more serious pressures of systematic military action were applied, "as necessary," along with the limited pressures. Here they repeated the language of the JCS submission of 2 July, to which General Taylor, as Chairman, had not been a party. Inclusion in the program of attacks on targets in North Vietnam would have the objective of "destroying the DRV will and capabilities" to continue support of insurgent forces in Laos and South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the recent strikes in response to the Tonkin Gulf attacks had "conveyed to both friend and enemy the measure of US resolution in Southeast Asia. The sudden advantage gained by this military action must be retained." The actions proposed, if promptly pursued, should sustain the US advantage and maintain the higher morale that had been generated among South Vietnam's leaders. Referring to the study begun on 10 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary that they were preparing fuller recommendations on military courses of action as a matter of urgency.[71]

Meanwhile, Washington officials had passed the Bundy paper to Ambassador Taylor with a request for his judgment on whether or not the program it outlined would maintain the morale of the GVN leadership. By this date, also, it was established that the Ambassador would return to Washington to take part in important consultations near the end of August.[72] Ambassador Taylor drafted his reply to the immediate message just as a sharp break in the relatively stable political situation in Saigon was under way. All further consideration was to proceed with increasing attention to a distrubing new factor--the progressive deterioration that followed from General Khanh's mid-August attempt to restructure the government of South Vietnam.

---

71. (S-GP 3) JCSM-701-64 to SecDef, 14 Aug 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/441-2, 13 Aug 64, same file.

72. (TS) Msg, St te 439 to Saigon, 14 Aug 64. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Further Actions in Southeast Asia," 12 Aug 64, JMF 9050 (18 Aug 64) sec 1.

Chapter 12

US ACTION AWAITS GOVERNMENTAL STABILITY

The GVN Degenerates

General Khanh informed a US Embassy official on 8 August 1964 that he was considering the promulgation of a provisional constitution, which would reorganize the government of South Vietnam for more effective operation. He viewed this as a "logical follow-up" to his assumption of extraordinary powers under the emergency decree issued on 7 August, in the wake of the US retaliation against North Vietnam for the Tonkin Gulf attacks. Information received by the Embassy in following days indicated that Khanh regarded General Minh, the incumbent Chief of State, as the main hindrance to effective government. Khanh intended to get rid of Minh by abolishing his current position and offering him the post of Ambassador to the United Kingdom. The governmental reorganization would provide an opportunity to ease out other unwanted personalities and would create a legislative body without undergoing the hazards of a general election.[1]

Khanh soon revealed his ideas to Ambassador Taylor in greater detail and on 14 August provided the text of the proposed constitution for review and comment. The Military Revolutionary Council (MRC) would be replaced by a legislative assembly. Of its 150 members, 60 would be appointed military officers, 60 elected by provincial councils, and 30 appointed by Saigon politicians. The constitution would establish a President as the single executive, eliminating the existing Chief of State and Vice Premier positions.

Ambassador Taylor reported to Washington that while the language of the document was rather brief and authoritarian and likely to arouse criticism in the US press, "Khanh and his military colleagues have decided that this sort of change is indispensable." Taylor told the State Department that he would not make any substantive suggestions to Khanh but would try to get the wording improved to make it "more palatable

1. (C) Msgs, Saigon 355 to State, 8 Aug 64; 388, 11 Aug 64.

both in Vietnam and abroad." He acknowledged that the document was likely to be viewed as an "unduly permanent formalization of military takeover." "Whether we like it or not," the Ambassador wrote, "this is the constitutional form which the MRC fully intends to impose and we see no alternative but to make the best of it." The Department of State approved the course he intended to follow.[2]

On 16 August, the MRC proclaimed the new constitution and elected Khanh President of the Vietnamese Republic. Existing ministries were to continue in a caretaker capacity until the new government began to function. While declaring that the new constitution was a move toward the fuller practice of democracy, Khanh reserved virtually absolute powers to the presidency for the duration of the emergency he had already proclaimed as Premier.

Strong public reaction set in on 19 and 20 August when, on the first anniversary of the Diem regime's Pagoda Raids, Buddhist crowds demonstrated against "the new dictatorship." In Hue and in Saigon, students also marched in protest against both the arbitrary elevation of Khanh to the presidency and the terms of the new governing charter. In an attempt to meet their objections, Khanh promised that a majority of his cabinet ministers would be civilians and that some provisions of the emergency decrees would be relaxed. These assurances calmed neither the students nor the Buddhists, and their demonstrations turned more violent, flaring at times into direct clashes between Buddhists and Catholics. Khanh's government made no attempt to suppress the rioting and restore order.[3]

On the morning of 24 August, Buddhist leaders Tri Quang, Thich Minh, and Tam Chau presented Khanh with a list of demands whose acceptance would have largely nullified the new constitution. Among the Buddhist objections was the claim that former Diemists had undue position and influence in the government. They therefore demanded that all "Can Lao elements" be dismissed, "even if wearing Dai Viet labels." A national program of passive resistance was threatened if the demands were not met, and further Buddhist demonstrations were already scheduled.

---

2. (S) Msgs, Saigon 415 and 419 to State, 15 Aug 64; (S) Msg, State 446 to Saigon, 15 Aug 64.

3. The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 154-155. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 438.

Khanh put off replying to the Buddhist demands and discussed them with Ambassador Taylor before entering consultations with the MRC. While saying the decision rested with Khanh, the Ambassador suggested that it would be a mistake to give in to a minority group on issues of such importance; to do so would only invite further demands. Taylor reported to Washington that Khanh was particularly concerned about possible widening of the conflict between Buddhists and Catholics, which might extend to the armed forces.[4]

Washington officials attempted to back Ambassador Taylor's efforts by issuing statements on 24 August; the New York Times summed them up as indicating that the US Government "would take an extremely serious and negative view of any move to oust the regime of President Nguyen Khanh."[5] By that hour, however, 25 August was already well advanced in Saigon--the day on which the MRC formally withdrew the proclaimed constitution. The caretaker government continued, but General Khanh had agreed to vacate the premiership pending the choice of a new head of government by the MRC. Divisions had appeared within the Military Revolutionary Council. Some members felt Khanh had already gone too far in offering concessions to the Buddhists; others were reluctant to see the MRC abolished, as both the proposed constitution and the more recent concessions provided. Still others, it was suspected, entertained personal ambitions that could best be furthered if Khanh were discredited.[6]

As the MRC members sought to decide on a new form of government and a new leader, Ambassador Taylor called on General Minh at the latter's request. "What Minh really wanted to know," Taylor reported to Washington, "was the answer to the 64 dollar question--if someone other than Khanh is elected, what will be the attitude of the US Government?" In reply the Ambassador stressed two points: 1) The US Government was opposed to any substantial change of government since such change was bound to disrupt the military effort; 2) the United States firmly supported Khanh and had no number-two candidate. If Khanh should lose, this would be most disappointing to the United States and would occasion a searching review of US policy toward South Vietnam.[7]

---

4. (S) Msg, Saigon 542 to State, 24 Aug 64.
5. NY Times, 25 Aug 64, 10.
6. (S) Msg, Saigon 561 to State, 26 Aug 64.
7. (S) Msg, Saigon 572 to State, 26 Aug 64.

The outcome was a compromise that deferred to a considerable extent to the US attitude. On 27 August, the MRC named a triumvirate to head the government; it was composed of Generals Khanh, Minh, and Khiem, with Khanh still holding the title of Premier. But the riots and demonstrations continued, with clashes between Buddhists and Catholics reaching new intensity. On 29 August, it was announced that Khanh had suffered a "breakdown" and was relinquishing his post temporarily. Dr. Nguyen Xuan Oanh was appointed acting Premier. The government finally moved in troops to restrain the civil disorders.

In their contacts with the press, Embassy spokesmen made clear that they expected Khanh to resume his place at the head of the government, and they avoided denying that the US Government might have to reconsider its role in South Vietnam if he did not.[8] Meanwhile, Ambassador Taylor was in frequent touch with Khanh, who was resting at Dalat. The failure of his attempt to change and improve his government had left Khanh depressed and unsure of himself, aware that his "strongman" reputation had been tarnished. In support of the Ambassador's efforts to revive Khanh's spirit and get him to return to his duties, President Johnson sent a personal message on 2 September. The President promised Khanh the continued full support of the United States and added, "It seems to me urgently necessary to have you present in Saigon just as soon as you can possibly get there."[9]

General Khanh did return to the capital to resume the premiership on 3 September. He very soon reached an agreement with the Buddhists, however, that amounted to a substantial capitulation. Accepting a Buddhist formula, Khanh pledged that the government would be reorganized during a two-month transition period. By the end of October the country's military leaders would be prepared to withdraw and devote themselves to direction of the war effort, leaving an entirely civilian government in control.[10]

---

8. NY Times, 30 Aug 64, 2.

9. (TS) Msg, Saigon 684 to State, 30 Aug 64. (S) Msg, Saigon 698 to State, 1 Sep 64. (TS) Msg, State 714 to Saigon, 2 Sep 64.

10. The United States in World Affairs, 1964, pp. 155-156.

Ambassador Taylor's Recommendations of 18 August

The train of events just described had barely begun on 18 August, when Ambassador Taylor dispatched his comments to Washington on the policy paper drafted by Assistant Secretary of State Bundy. At that time it was possible to expect that the new constitution, just proclaimed, would lead to a stronger government in South Vietnam. The Bundy paper of 13 August had outlined a series of "lesser pressures" that could be applied against North Vietnam during the period from late August through December, while preparing for stronger actions with a target date of 1 January 1965.[11]

Ambassador Taylor's message on 18 August started from the assumption--also implicit in the Bundy paper--that the existing programs of the counterinsurgency effort were not sufficient to maintain GVN morale or to offer reasonable hope of eventual success against the Viet Cong. "Something must be added in the coming months," the Ambassador wrote, and he discussed two possible courses of action. The less severe actions of his Course A were broadly similar to Secretary Bundy's program of lesser pressures and would have the following objectives: 1) gain time for Khanh to develop a stable and effective government; 2) maintain morale in South Vietnam, particularly among GVN officials; 3) hold North Vietnam in check and restrain the buildup of VC strength by infiltration from the North; 4) develop a posture of maximum readiness for deliberate escalation of the pressures against North Vietnam by 1 January 1965.

In view of the "considerable measure of risk" that he saw in the situation, Ambassador Taylor said that US officials must be wary of becoming deeply involved in a course of action "until we have a better feel of the quality of our ally." If possible, the United States should avoid hostilities with North Vietnam "if our base in South Vietnam is insecure and Khanh's army is tied down everywhere by the VC."

> It is to our interest to gain sufficient time not only to allow Khanh to prove that he can govern, but also to free Saigon from the VC threat which presently rings it and assure that sufficient GVN ground forces will be available to provide a

11. The Bundy paper and the comments made on it by the JCS are treated in Ch. 11.

Under Course of Action B the implementation of the US program would not await evidence of improved performance by Khanh's government. The operations to be mounted would be the same as under Course A, but execution would be accelerated, awaiting only US readiness and employing US forces and means almost exclusively. Accordingly, there would be an increased likelihood of US involvement in ground action.

Ambassador Taylor recommended commitment of the US Government to Course of Action A. "However, we should always bear in mind the fragility of the Khanh Government and be prepared to shift quickly to Course of Action B if the situation requires."[12]

The JCS Recommendations of 26 August

Since the NSC meeting on 10 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been engaged in developing their recommendations for military action in Southeast Asia. With the receipt of Ambassador Taylor's message of 18 August, they returned the draft JCS memorandum to the Joint Staff for revision to take the Ambassador's views into account. The further stages of JCS consideration were influenced by the reports of the public disturbances and governmental changes in South Vietnam and by a CIA evaluation that these events marked the beginning of a new and dangerous period.[13]

To Washington officials the news of withdrawal of the RVN constitution left the status of Khanh's leadership in considerable doubt. Seeking clarification of the confused political picture, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a tele-con with General Westmoreland on 25 August. His first-hand report offered little encouragement that governmental stability would soon be restored.

> Events of the last few days, during which Khanh has been unwilling to exercise powers legally his to curb excesses, has caused sharp cleavages and deep suspicions within ranks of MRC. Conversely the

12. (TS) Msg, Saigon 465 to State, 18 Aug 64, OCJCS File, Black Book, "Vietnam Conference Sep 64, Vol I/II."
13. (TS) J-3 Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "JCS 2343/444-1 - Recommended Courses of Action - Southeast Asia (U)," 29 Aug 64, JMF 9130 (18 Aug 64) sec 2.

> Buddhist leadership has been remarkably successful in political action tactics to divide and conquer.

General Westmoreland expected that, "despite some disenchantment with Khanh," the MRC would soon reelect him head of the government (as part of the triumvirate arrangement, as it turned out), but that the Buddhists would continue to press their demands, probably with success.

> How long Khanh will last is largely up to the military leadership. It may not be very long. In any case, the lessening roles of capable Catholic civil and military executives and the withdrawal of the Dai Viets from the government will further thin out an already inadequate structure.

General Westmoreland predicted that unsettled conditions would continue for several months, allowing little progress in the pacification effort. "Indeed, there is a distinct possibility of progressive deterioration."[14]

COMUSMACV's assessment weighed heavily upon the thought of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the two successive sessions on 26 August at which they reached final agreement on their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. The report had deepened General LeMay's conviction that the United States must take forceful action against North Vietnam. "I do not believe that we can afford to risk the possible collapse of our position in Asia. There is too much at stake," the Chief of Staff, Air Force, told his colleagues. "I am convinced that direct US offensive operations are necessary, that they entail far less risk to the US than continuing on our present course, and that they have every prospect of success."[15]

In the memorandum that the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent to Secretary McNamara on 26 August they endorsed Ambassador Taylor's proposed Course of Action B. They held that, in the light of the recent political deterioration in South Vietnam, this course was "more in accord with the current situation" and that the accelerated program of actions it listed was

---

14. (S) "Resume of Questions and Answers, Telecon with General Westmoreland, 25 August 1964," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul-Aug 64.

15. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM-732-64 to JCS, 26 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64) sec 1.

"essential to prevent a complete collapse of the US position in Southeast Asia."

> Additionally, they do not agree that we should be slow to get deeply involved until we have a better feel for the quality of our ally. The United States is already deeply involved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that only significantly stronger military pressures on the DRV are likely to provide the relief and psychological boost necessary for attainment of the requisite governmental stability and viability. . . . Failure to resume and maintain a program of pressure through military actions could be misinterpreted to mean we have had second thoughts about Pierce Arrow and the events leading thereto, and could signal a lack of resolve.

Accordingly, the United States should continue in the posture of increased readiness attained by the deployments during the Tonkin Gulf episode and should pursue the following objectives: 1) improvements in South Vietnam, including emphasis on implementing the HOP TAC Plan; 2) interdiction of North Vietnam's lines of communication to the Viet-Cong through Laos by operations in the panhandle and through Cambodia by strict control of the waterways leading therefrom; 3) denial of VC sanctuaries in the Cambodian border area through hot pursuit operations into Cambodia; 4) increased pressure on North Vietnam through military actions, including resumption of DESOTO patrols and OPLAN 34A missions.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, however, that more direct and forceful actions than these would, in all probability, be required. They favored readiness to mount air strikes and other operations against military targets in North Vietnam as "prompt and calculated responses" to any notable actions by the Viet Cong, or by the Pathet Lao in Laos--substantially the tit-for-tat retaliation that Ambassador Taylor had recommended be held in reserve.

All of the military actions mentioned so far should be implemented at once, even though the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that such a program would not necessarily provide decisive end results. They reiterated the view contained in the JCS submission of 2 June:

> The military course of action which offers the best chance of success remains the destruction of the

DRV will and capabilities as necessary to compel the DRV to cease providing support to the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 26 August by recommending, in summary, that:

a. The following military actions receive priority (not necessarily in the order listed):

(1) Continuation of the Pacification Program in RVN with emphasis on the Hop Tac program to establish the security of Saigon and its surroundings;

(2) Continuation of the present forward deployment of US combat units;

(3) Resumption and intensification of OPLAN 34A operations with emphasis on maritime operations and with initiation of air operations against selected targets when practicable. OPLAN 34A operations should remain covert for the time being.

(4) Resumption of Desoto patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin;

(5) Operations against the VC LOC, including staging base areas and infiltration routes in the Laos Panhandle by:

(a) The RLAF;

(b) GVN [redacted] forces in cross-border operations with US support as required;

(c) US Armed aerial reconnaissance, attacking infiltration installations.

(6) Retaliatory actions by GVN/US forces against appropriate targets in the DRV in response to stepped up Viet Cong/Pathet Lao actions should such occur.

(7) Institution of "hot pursuit" operations into Cambodia.

b. The following related actions be taken:

(1) Institution of strict controls on the Mekong and Bassac rivers;

(2) Direct action against the Viet Cong leadership in RVN.

c. Since the above actions will probably not in themselves accomplish our objectives of compelling the DRV to respond favorably, we should be prepared to:

(1) Commence deployment of remaining Category III OPLAN 37-64 forces;

(2) Commence a US air strike program against targets in North Vietnam in accordance with current planning.

In light of recent developments in South Vietnam and the evaluations furnished by COMUSMACV, the Joint Chiefs of Staff conclude that accelerated and forceful action with respect to North Vietnam is essential to prevent a complete collapse of the US position in Southeast Asia. They consider that a decision as to specific actions and the timing of these actions is urgent and recommend that conversations with Ambassador Taylor focus on this issue with a view to its early resolution.[16]

Two days later the Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed that a copy of their memorandum had been furnished to the Department of State. Together with the earlier JCS comments on the Bundy draft policy paper, it would be carefully considered in the current interdepartmental discussions and in the conferences to be held after Ambassador Taylor's return to Washington.[17]

---

16. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-746-64 to SecDef, 26 Aug 64 (derived from JCS 2343/444-1), JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64) sec 2.

17. (TS-GP 3) Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, "Recommended Courses of Action - Southeast Asia (U)," 28 Aug 64, Encl to JCS 2343/444-2, 31 Aug 64, same file. The earlier JCS comments, treated in Ch. 11, were contained in (S-GP 3) JCSM-701-64 to SecDef, 14 Aug 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/441-2, 13 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (11 Aug 64).

The 94 Target List

Supporting the readiness of the United States to launch some of the stronger actions recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff was a revised list of targets in North Vietnam suitable for air attack. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had furnished it to the Secretary of Defense on 24 August. Commonly referred to as the 94 Target List, it was to figure prominently in the consultations of the Washington policy-makers over the following months.

The new list resulted from refinement and development of the one the Joint Chiefs of Staff had provided the Secretary on 30 May 1964. The 94 targets were those identified as most critical to North Vietnam's support of insurgency operations and to the country's military capabilities and industrial output. They were grouped in five categories: Category A - Airfields; Category B - Lines of Communications (bridges, railroad yards, and shops); Category C - Military Installations (barracks and headquarters, ammunition depots, POL storage, supply depots, communications facilities, and port facilities); Category D - Industrial Installations; Category E - Route Armed Reconnaissance. The supporting studies and data included a detailed analysis of each target, examples of possible weapons and sortie requirements to achieve the desired damage objective, and a list of available forces.

The 94 Target List had been approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a target data base for use in current military planning, and CINCPAC had been directed to develop and submit strike plans for four patterns of attack against North Vietnam. In ascending order of severity, they were as follows:

a. Demonstrative strikes against a few military targets to show US readiness and intent to pass to alternatives b, c, or d, below.

b. An attack on some significant part of the military target system in the DRV for the dual purpose of convincing the enemy that it is to his interest to desist from aiding the VC and PL and, if possible, of obtaining his cooperation in calling off the insurgents in the RVN and Laos.

c. An air campaign against significant military targets in the DRV with the objective of destroying them and, with them, the DRV capabilities to continue military support to the VC and PL.

d. A full-scale air campaign against significant military and industrial targets in the DRV with the objective of destroying them and, with them, the DRV will and capabilities to continue assistance to the VC and the PL.

Forces to be applied to each pattern, as appropriate, ranged from VNAF aircraft only to the full resources that might be deployed in implementation of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that air operations could be conducted against any of the targets on the list. "The intensity can range from selective strikes in ascending order of gradually increasing military pressure to a full-scale air campaign against significant military and industrial targets." The Joint Chiefs of Staff then repeated the professional opinion they had first expressed three months earlier:

> From a military viewpoint, it is considered that the most effective application of military force will result from a sudden sharp blow in order to bring home the penalties for violating international agreements and the intent of the United States to bring a cessation of DRV support of the insurgency in Laos and the RVN.[18]

Further Elaboration of the JCS Views

During a JCS discussion with the Secretary of Defense on 31 August, he asked to be provided with a program of military action with respect to South Vietnam, with an estimate of its outcome. In effect, this was a request for a more detailed exposition of the recommended course of action the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted on 26 August. In JCS discussions of the draft reply first produced by the Joint Staff, begun on 4 September, differing opinions were expressed on some aspects of the recommended course.[19]

---

18. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-729-64 to SecDef, 24 Aug 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/383-2, 18 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) sec 2. The earlier JCS submission of 30 May 64 has been described in Ch. 9. The planning tasks assigned to CINCPAC fulfilled the requirements imposed by SecDef approval of the recommendations submitted by GEN Taylor on 5 Jun 64, discussed in Ch. 10.

19. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/452, 3 Sep 64; (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/452," 4 Sep 64; JMF 9155.3 (3 Sep 64).

The Chief of Staff, Army, noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had gone on record a number of times asserting that "the military course of action which offers the best chance of success remains the destruction of the DRV will and capability as necessary to compel the DRV to cease providing support to the insurgencies in the RVN and Laos." Yet he saw a growing body of evidence supporting the view that "the VC insurgency in the RVN could continue for a long time at its present or an increased intensity even if North Vietnam were completely destroyed."

> Therefore, although I believe that actions against North Vietnam, against appropriate targets and in appropriate phasing, could have a deleterious effect upon the VC in the RVN, I also believe that the war against the insurgency will be won in South Vietnam and along its frontiers.

General Johnson recommended deletion from the draft reply of a sentence that again repeated the previous JCS opinion. Rather than saying that attacks against North Vietnam would offer the best chance of success, he would substitute language that called them one of the "essential elements of the program." General Johnson wished to place at least equal emphasis on cross-border operations into the Laos panhandle, conducted on a scale sufficient to realize the objective of "destroying all VC/PL depo staging areas, and way-stations on the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex, and of stopping the flow of men and materiel into Southern Laos and the RVN."

The Chief of Staff, Army, also believed that the full program of attacks against targets in North Vietnam outlined in the draft reply "should not be applied except in the event of DRV and/or CHICOM armed intervention against RVN or in Laos." General Johnson thought this proposition followed inescapably from a further statement of the draft reply, to the effect that if it were found necessary to implement the program in full, reaction by the North Vietnamese or Chinese Communists in the form of large-scale aggression would be "more than likely." He said that if moderate pressures did not cause North Vietnam to stop supporting the Viet Cong,"it is illogical to conclude that . . . more severe pressures would have any other effect but to increase and intensify the support of the VC insurgency."[20]

Comments submitted by the Chief of Staff, Air Force, on the same day treated many of the same points but took a different view. General LeMay not only supported repeating the JCS opinion

20. (TS-GP 1) CSAM-472-64 to JCS, 4 Sep 64, same file.

that the best chance of success lay in the destruction of North Vietnamese will and capability; he would add a positive recommendation that "the specific course of action designed to achieve this objective, the destruction of 94 targets in North Vietnam, be implemented immediately." As for the expected enemy reaction, General LeMay believed that "large-scale CHICOM aggression as a result of actions taken to destroy the DRV will and capability to continue support of the insurgents in SVN and Laos is unlikely provided the action of the US reflects determination, strength, and resoluteness." He thought such an enemy reaction likely only if "the US actions reflect an intention to introduce and employ substantial ground forces in a defensive type action." If the United States gave evidence of willingness to meet the Chinese Communists on the ground in Southeast Asia, this would tend to encourage them to attack.[21]

During their meetings on 4 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that the immediate product required of the Joint Staff was a Talking Paper for their use in discussions with the Secretary of Defense and Ambassador Taylor on 8 September. It would be based on the draft paper under discussion and on comments to be submitted by the Services. The Talking Paper, of course, would not have the status of an approved JCS position. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would come to agreement on their formal reply to Secretary McNamara's request for a program of military action later, in the light of the discussion on 8 September.[22]

The Talking Paper, when produced on 7 September, did not depart significantly from the JCS position already on record. Its main contribution lay in the several appendices, which gave detailed programs for military pressures against North Vietnam, cross-border operations, and intensified action within South Vietnam and also discussed possible enemy responses and the counteractions available.[23]

Other Preparations for the Taylor Visit

Early in September, just before Ambassador Taylor's departure for the consultations in Washington, General

21. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-759-64 to JCS, 4 Sep 64, same file.
22. (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/452," 4 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Sep 64).
23. (TS-GP 1) J-3 TP 159-64 for JCS, 7 Sep 64, same file.

Westmoreland gave him an appraisal of the military situation, sending a copy also to General Wheeler. The key military issue of the moment, COMUSMACV said, was preservation of the structure, effectiveness, and unity of purpose of the RVN armed forces in the face of the current political disturbances in South Vietnam. "The officers' corps must be assured that its members will not be punished or expelled from the armed forces if they faithfully execute the orders of constituted authority in connection with the maintenance of law and order." Officers of the RVNAF must feel secure against purges based solely on their political or religious affiliation. General Westmoreland said that if the government did not reject the demands of pressure groups for military resignations, it was possible that the armed forces would collapse in disunity, or, finding their situation intolerable, "make a desperate move to regain power. Neither course of action is compatible with the objectives we seek."

Apart from this central concern, General Westmoreland was encouraged by the progress and prospects in purely military matters. In the last few months there had been measurable improvement in RVNAF strength and means and in operational methods. More improvement was in sight. Barring a substantial increase in North Vietnam support to the Viet Cong, the RVNAF should clearly outstrip the enemy in overall effectiveness. General Westmoreland cited increases in manpower and morale, resulting from such reforms begun earlier in the year as better pay, a better-organized promotion system, new awards and publicity for heroic actions, and the greatly expanded dependent housing construction program. The recent strengthening of the US advisory effort was also having its effect.

There were numerous military problems to which COMUSMACV was giving special attention, ranging from leadership deficiencies at the company, platoon, and squad levels to the development of a viable paramilitary concept and force structure. He told the Ambassador that all these problems were "susceptible to solution assuming that political stability can be achieved."[24]

The review of the situation that Ambassador Taylor sent to Washington on the eve of his departure indicated that this was an assumption far from certain of being fulfilled. He informed the Secretary of State that his review and recommended course of action was intended as a "basic document" for use in the Washington discussions.

---

24. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4830 to CJCS, 6 Sep 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep-Oct 64.

Ambassador Taylor observed that US officials must necessarily be disappointed by the political turmoil in RVN but they need not be surprised. The social, political, religious, and ethnic crosscurrents in the country made turbulence unavoidable. The recent events had been instructive regarding the limits of the perfectibility of institutions in a country such as South Vietnam, and the United States had gained that feel for the quality of its ally and of Khanh's leadership that the Ambassador had spoken of earlier. "Only the emergence of an exceptional leader could improve the situation," Taylor wrote, "and no George Washington is in sight."

The United States could anticipate, at worst, a coalition government that tried to accommodate all shades of opinion and, in consequence, satisfied none. Such a government might reach some accommodation with the communist National Liberation Front, draining away the political energy supporting the pacification program. At best, a GVN might emerge that was capable of holding against the Viet Cong. With good luck and strong US backing this government might manage to achieve some limited success in implementing HOP TAC. But very likely, in Taylor's opinion, it would be unable to direct the total pacification program successfully and would seek more and more to have the United States take over the major responsibility for fighting the Viet Cong and North Vietnam. "The politicians in Saigon and Hue feel today that the political hassle is their appropriate arena: the conflict with the VC belongs to the Americans," he noted.

The Ambassador saw two alternatives. The United States could acquiesce in the development of a popular front government, which might "in due course" require a US withdrawal from South Vietnam, or the United States could assume an increased active responsibility for the outcome. To Ambassador Taylor, Vietnam's significance in relation to the total world responsibilities of the United States clearly ruled out accepting the passive course. "If we leave Vietnam with our tail between our legs," he wrote, "the consequences of this defeat in the rest of Asia, Africa, and Latin America would be disastrous."

The political deterioration in South Vietnam had brought Ambassador Taylor's views closer to those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who favored the Course of Action B of his message of 18 August. The Ambassador now held that the United States could not afford to await the unlikely achievement of a strong, stable GVN as a prerequisite to starting direct military pressures against North Vietnam. It must be satisfied merely to have a viable government, evidencing some promise of permanence.

In reviewing the timing factors Ambassador Taylor said it would be two or three months at the earliest before a government could be set up in South Vietnam that could enforce order in the cities and resume the pacification program at something like its past level. The "March North" fever had dwindled during the political disorders, and the United States no longer need hasten its plans in order to satisfy the impatience of GVN officials to close with the enemy. The problem of maintaining GVN morale continued, however, and might be met by the same measures that were necessary to keep North Vietnam on notice that the United States was not lessening its resolve. He recommended resuming DESOTO patrols and OPLAN 34A activities and undertaking modest cross-border operations.

Ambassador Taylor believed the United States should concentrate its efforts until about 1 December 1964 toward setting up a viable government, at the same time shoring up morale and keeping the enemy in check. During this period the United States should develop the capability to carry out attacks, on short notice, in the Laotian corridor and against North Vietnam under CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64. It should be ready also to exploit any opportunities presented by the communists, similar to the Gulf of Tonkin attacks, to initiate military pressures against North Vietnam under favorable conditions of world opinion.

Under the Taylor program, provided the objective of a reasonably stable government had been attained, the United States would be ready about 1 December to escalate the pressures against North Vietnam, with the aim both of holding the GVN together and raising its morale and of creating conditions for negotiated termination of hostilities on favorable terms. Before beginning these pressures, US and allied military forces should be deployed to meet possible Chinese Communist or North Vietnamese reaction. The attacks on Laotian infiltration routes and appropriate targets in North Vietnam would then commence, mounted largely by US aircraft, with the VNAF employed against targets out of range of the enemy MIGs. "The attacks should be orchestrated in such a way as to produce a mounting pressure on the will of the Hanoi High Command, designed to convince the latter to desist from further aid to the VC and Vietminh and to agree to cooperate in calling off the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos."

During these operations the United States could expect little help from the GVN, other than ground defense of its own territory. Even if Hanoi's leaders ultimately withheld

their support of the insurgents, there would still remain many serious problems in South Vietnam, and US assistance would be required there for a long time. "We see no quick and sure way to discharge our obligations honorably in this part of the world," Ambassador Taylor concluded. "This forecast is fairly grim but the alternatives are more repugnant. We feel that we should take the offensive generally along the lines recommended herein and play for the international breaks."[25]

Discussions Leading to the Presidential Decision: NSAM 314

Upon his arrival in Washington, Ambassador Taylor entered into discussions with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and General Wheeler. On 8 August Assistant Secretary of State Bundy recorded the consensus reached by this group in a memorandum for review and decision by the President. The views presented were very similar to those in the Ambassador's recent message.

It was agreed that General Khanh would probably continue to head the South Vietnamese government and that he might make some headway during the next two to three months in restoring its effectiveness. "The best we can expect is that he and the GVN will be able to maintain order, keep the pacification program ticking over (but not progressing markedly), and give the appearance of a valid government." During that period the GVN would be too weak for the United States to risk any deliberate escalation that would involve a major role for, or threat to, South Vietnam. A level of action must be maintained, nevertheless, that demonstrated to the communist enemy the continued resolve of the United States and the GVN.

The group of advisors recommended that DESOTO patrols be resumed immediately and OPLAN 34A operations shortly afterward. "Limited GVN air and ground operations into the corridor areas of Laos should be undertaken in the near future, together with Lao air strikes as soon as we can get Souvanna's permission." The United States should be prepared to respond with tit-for-tat retaliation against North Vietnam in the event of any attack on US units or "any special DRV/VC action against SVN." Retaliation of the first type should follow the model of the PIERCE ARROW strikes, being directed against specific targets related to the means the enemy had used in his attack; the

25. (TS) Msg, Saigon 768 to State, 6 Sep 64.

response to special enemy action against South Vietnam should be "aimed at specific and comparable targets."[26]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the Bundy memorandum at their meeting on 8 September, establishing their position for use by the Chairman at a White House meeting scheduled the following morning. General Wheeler then recorded the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum addressed to the Secretary of Defense.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that DESOTO patrols should be resumed shortly after Ambassador Taylor's return to Saigon, under rules of engagement that allowed pressing the effort to destroy any attacker. The US vessels should complete the first patrol and clear the Gulf of Tonkin before the GVN resumed marine operations (MAROPS) along the North Vietnamese coast under OPLAN 34A. The Chairman differed from the other JCS members regarding the handling of MAROPS thereafter. The four Service members believed these 34A operations should remain covert until they had become "so intertwined" with the DESOTO patrols that the two were properly associated, "or until the US is prepared openly to support MAROPS militarily." General Wheeler favored the concept that had been developed during the consultations with Ambassador Taylor: The GVN would resume MAROPS and, upon Hanoi's first public condemnation of their occurrence, would openly acknowledge the operations and justify them by publishing the facts on VC infiltration and supply by sea. The Chairman believed that ending the covert status of the 34A operations would remove limitations on the scope and effectiveness of MAROPS and on the routing of DESOTO patrols and would lift a condition that could inhibit the nature and extent of the response to any attack on US forces in the Gulf.

With respect to actions directed toward Laos, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended something more extensive than the "limited GVN air and ground operations" listed in the Bundy memorandum. Such operations should be launched soon "against the VC LOC in the Laotian corridor to include attacks against staging bases and infiltration routes," and should be supplemented by US armed reconnaissance flights. Also, an attempt should be made to arrange for Thai participation in ground action in the corridor area.

---

26. (S-GP 1) Memo, ASecState(FE), "Courses of Action for South Vietnam," 8 Sep 64, Encl to JCS 2343/457, 9 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (9 Sep 64).

The JCS position for use at the White House meeting included a comment on the term "tit for tat," which "could be interpreted to limit too narrowly our response to an attack on US units or any specific DRV/VC action against SVN." The Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested avoiding the term and saying "we should be prepared to respond as appropriate against the DRV . . . ."

The memorandum containing the JCS views closed with the following:

> 6. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that the present in-country pacification plan, including the foregoing actions, is not enough in itself to maintain national morale or to offer reasonable hope of eventual success. Military action by GVN and US forces against the DRV will be required.
>
> 7. The Chief of Staff Air Force and Commandant of the Marine Corps believe that time is against us and military action against the DRV should be taken now. They concur that the American public should support any action taken by the United States Government against the DRV. They consider that, linked to the next significant incident, we should commence a retaliatory GVN and US air strike program against the DRV in accordance with the 94 target plan. In this regard, they consider that a battalion-size VC attack on South Vietnam should be construed as "significant."

The view of the Chairman, the Chief of Staff, Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations, given in paragraph 8, was that "we must respond appropriately against the DRV in the event of an attack on US units," but they did not recommend making this the occasion for starting a program of attacks against the full 94 Target List.[27]

General Wheeler used the memorandum when presenting the JCS views at the White House meeting on 9 September. To President Johnson, Ambassador Taylor, and the other advisors he stressed the thought in paragraph 6, and he read paragraphs 7 and 8 in full.[28] The decisions reached by the President

---

27. (TS-GP 1) CM-124-64 to SecDef, 9 Sep 64, Att to JCS 2343/457-1, 9 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (9 Sep 64).

28. (S) Note to Control Div, "The 9 September White House Meeting on Southeast Asia," 9 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Sep 64).

were issued the following day as NSAM 314. He had approved substantially the program of action recommended by the group of senior advisors. The modifications that might be traced to the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were inclusion of the possibility of US armed reconnaissance flights over the Laotian corridor area and avoidance of the term "tit for tat."

In NSAM 314, 10 September 1964, the following actions were directed:

1. U.S. naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin will be resumed promptly after Ambassador Taylor's return. They will operate initially well beyond the 12-mile limit and be clearly dissociated from 34A maritime operations. The patrols will comprise two to three destroyers and would have air cover from carriers; the destroyers will have their own ASW capability.

2. 34A operations by the GVN will be resumed after completion of a first DeSoto patrol. The maritime operations are by far the most important. North Vietnam has already publicized them, and is likely to publicize them even more, and at this point we should have the GVN ready to admit that they are taking place and to justify and legitimize them on the basis of the facts of VC infiltration by sea. 34A air drop and leaflet operations should also be resumed but are secondary in importance. We should not consider air strikes under 34A for the present.

3. We should promptly discuss with the Government of Laos plans for limited GVN air and ground operations into the corridor areas of Laos, together with Lao air strikes and possible use of U. S. armed aerial reconnissance. On the basis of these discussions a decision on action will be taken, but it should be recognized that these operations will in any case have only limited effect.

4. We should be prepared to respond as appropriate against the DRV in the event of any attack on US units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN.

Further, the President reemphasized the importance of economic and political actions having immediate impact in South Vietnam, such as pay raises for civilian personnel and demonstration projects in the cities and selected rural areas. He stressed again that "no activity of this kind should be delayed

in any way by any feeling that our resources for these purposes are restricted. We can find the money which is needed for all worthwile projects in this field."

The final paragraph of NSAM 314 indicated the underlying thought of the Washington policymakers:

> These decisions are governed by a prevailing judgment that the first order of business at present is to take actions which will help to strengthen the fabric of the Government of South Vietnam; to the extent that the situation permits, such action should precede larger decisions. If such larger decisions are required at any time by a change in the situation, they will be taken.[29]

Thus the directive left the time for "larger decisions" indeterminate, with no mention of the 1 December date Ambassador Taylor had proposed. The course indicated was essentially a holding operation, chosen in the belief that it would be unwise to move voluntarily to more direct military action against the North without the assurance that a reasonably stable government was functioning in South Vietnam. It was apparent that the delay to allow time for Khanh to strengthen his government had not been considered unacceptable; on the other hand, the option of striking against North Vietnam was not foreclosed.

A DESOTO Patrol with Equivocal Results

Pursuant to NSAM 314, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 September authorized CINCPAC to conduct a three-day DESOTO patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin, beginning on 15 September, Saigon time. The approved rules of engagement were precisely those the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended in the memorandum used by the Chairman at the White House meeting, in the following terms:

> In the event of hostile attack, the patrol ships and aircraft are directed to fire upon the hostile attacker with the objective of insuring destruction. Ships are authorized to pursue the enemy to the recognized three mile territorial limit. Aircraft are authorized hot pursuit inside territorial waters (three miles) against surface vessels and into hostile airspace

29. (TS-GP 1) NSAM 314, 10 Sep 64, Encl to JCS 2343/458, 10 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Sep 64).

(includes DRV, Hainan Island and Mainland China) against attacking aircraft when necessary to achieve destruction of identified attack forces. Ships and aircraft will confine their actions to the attacking ships and/or aircraft.[30]

After delays owing to weather conditions, the patrol conducted by the destroyers MORTON and EDWARDS got under way and proceeded uneventfully until the night of 18 September. The two destroyers were steaming in column in the darkness when radar sightings indicated fast-closing contacts on both bows. On this basis, and without visual sighting of any enemy craft, the MORTON and EDWARDS opened fire to repel the apparent attack. Carrier aircraft joined them shortly but were unable to locate any targets. The destroyers' batteries fired more than 100 rounds at radar-detected targets before the images broke up or disappeared.[31]

When the first reports of this action reached Washington, retaliatory attacks immediately came under consideration. Less than three hours after the initial radar sightings, General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that "if we can establish that an intentional attack has in fact been made on DeSoto Patrol, our response must be substantial." He listed the types of air attacks against North Vietnam that might be ordered and requested Admiral Sharp to alert appropriate forces. Within the hour a JCS message to CINCPAC sought answers, "required ASAP at highest levels," to such questions as "Was it intentional attack? Was target firing? What was the target?"[32]

Five hours later a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff superseded the Chairman's initial message and directed Admiral Sharp to be prepared to conduct air operations during daylight hours on 19 September against five specific targets in North Vietnam selected from the 94 Target List. To mount the estimated 80 strike sorties required, he was authorized to employ any available US air resources except FARM GATE.[33]

---

30. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8518 to CINCPAC, 10 Sep 64, same file.

31. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 376.

32. (TS) Msg, JCS 8789 to CINCPAC, 181508Z Sep 64; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8790 to CINCPAC, 181550Z Sep 64; OCJCS File, "RVN Incidents, Tonkin Gulf, 18 Sep 64."

33. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8806 to CINCPAC, 182035Z Sep 64, same file.

Thirteen hours after the incident there was still no conclusive evidence that an attack had taken place on the DESOTO patrol. No debris or other physical evidence was found during an exhaustive search of the area in daylight. The Joint Chiefs of Staff first deferred the prospective retaliatory strikes until first light on 20 September, then informed CINCPAC they would not be conducted.[34]

Meanwhile, the three-day DESOTO patrol had been concluded without further alarms. On 19 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Admiral Sharp to await further instructions before scheduling another.[35]

On the following day, General Wheeler requested CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to furnish him their views on the worth of DESOTO patrols. Both commanders came strongly to the defense of the operations, citing their value as a source of technical and other forms of intelligence on NVN techniques and capabilities. Admiral Sharp added that the patrols asserted "our right to go any place we desire on the high seas . . . a right we must never give up." General Westmoreland hoped the resumption of the DESOTO patrols was not to be delayed by an extended reassessment of their value, for he saw the result as an "exhuming of US paper tiger image privately if not publicly in the eyes of interested parties in this part of the world." COMUSMACV reported continued improvement in the military aspects of the US endeavor in South Vietnam. "The disturbing feature is the political situation which is becoming increasingly unglued."[36]

The Rise of Doubts Regarding General Khanh

The intention underlying the Presidential decisions recorded on 10 September in NSAM 314 had been to allow time for the development of governmental stability in South Vietnam before the United States undertook more positive action against the North. The course of events within the country during the remainder of the month was to raise considerable doubts that the US purpose could be achieved. Even before Ambassador Taylor

---

34. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 190152Z Sep 64. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8839 to CINCPAC, 18 Sep 64. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8863 to CINCPAC, 19 Sep 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 377.

35. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8869 to CINCPAC, 19 Sep 64.

36. (TS) Msg, JCS 4593 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 20 Sep 64; (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 210025Z Sep 64; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MACV 5147 to CJCS, 21 Sep 64.

could return to his post, dissident officers staged another coup. The commanders of the IV Corps and the 7th Division moved about ten battalions into Saigon in the early morning hours of 13 September and seized control of the capital. General Khanh was in Dalat and thus out of reach of the rebels.

Throughout the day the coup leaders, Generals Duc and Phat, broadcast over radio Saigon, revealing in the process their own lack of unity. General Phat called for Khanh's arrest, charging treasonable failure to carry on the fight against the Viet Cong successfully. General Duc apparently wanted to enforce reforms on the Khanh government without overthrowing it, calling for a purge of traitors, reestablishment of national unity, and vigorous prosecution of the war. Khanh, using a transmitter in Dalat, broadcast counterappeals for loyalty and suppression of the revolt. While some commanders held back, apparently awaiting a clearer indication of the outcome, others rallied to Khanh's side. General Nguyen Cao Ky, the VNAF commander, opposed the coup from the beginning and sent aircraft to make low-level passes over locations where the coup forces were emplaced.[37]

Early in the affair the Secretary of State had sent a message to Deputy Ambassador Johnson, in Taylor's absence, calling on him to make the strongest possible representations to all key leaders. It was imperative that the situation not reach the point of open conflict between elements of the RVNAF. "The picture of petty bickering among Vietnamese leaders has created an appalling impression abroad and causes friends of South Vietnamese freedom all over the world to wonder how serious South Vietnamese are about their freedom and security and what there is for others to support," Rusk said. Ambassador Johnson was to impress on the coup leaders the consequences of their action and seek the return of the tactical units to their assigned areas. Generals Duc and Phat should be told bluntly that the United States had no faith in them as prospective heads of a government for South Vietnam, and that it firmly supported Khanh.[38]

Ambassador Johnson had already been speaking in this vein to General Phat. Meanwhile, Khanh remained at Dalat. US

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 931 to State, 22 Sep 64.
38. (S) Msg, State 654 to Saigon, 13 Sep 64.

officials were in touch with him, but he appeared to have no plan of action. Khanh requested that US Marines be landed at Nha Trang and Vung Tau, but he was unable to suggest what mission they should perform.[39]

The outstanding figure was General Ky, who by his firm stand kept the coup from succeeding. A hot-headed man, Ky had to be dissuaded by American officers from bombing the Saigon radio station. The coup's leaders were in frequent communication with Ky in an effort to win him over, but without success. Having been given authority by Khanh to negotiate on his behalf, Ky received General Duc at his headquarters on the morning of 14 September. After their meeting there was a press conference presided over by Ky at which he announced, "There has been no coup." He told reporters that the events of 13 September had been "the result of the aroused patriotism of members of the armed forces." The two generals had been misguided, but now they "understood." General Khanh flew back to Saigon and in a broadcase statement assured the people that his forces were in control.[40]

In commenting on 15 September on the collapse of the coup, Admiral Sharp noted that "General Ky's star has become brighter. He was a major moderating force and principal spokesman for the government. It wouldn't be too surprising to see him play parts of greater importance in the future."[41]

Less than a week after resolution of the coup episode, the Khanh government encountered new internal troubles. On the night of 19-20 September the Montagnard Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) rebelled at four camps in Darlac Province in the highlands of South Vietnam. The CIDG was composed of tribesmen under Vietnamese officers, with US Special Forces teams and advisors attached. Resentful of a long history of being treated as inferiors by the Vietnamese, the Montagnards apparently planned to murder their officers and attack the provincial capital. About 40 Vietnamese personnel were killed at the outset of the revolt. ARVN forces responded by blocking roads in the area and taking up defensive positions, preparatory to the government's next move.

The US Special Forces personnel stationed in the CIDG camps, US advisors with the ARVN units, and Ambassador Taylor and

39. (S) Msgs, Saigon 833 and 836 to State, 13 Sep 64.
40. (U) Msg, Saigon 843 to State, 14 Sep 64; (C) Msg, Saigon 848 to State, 14 Sep 64; (S) Msg, Saigon 931 to State, 22 Sep 64.
41. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 150318Z Sep 64.

General Westmoreland all took major parts in attempting to end the rebellion without further bloodshed and preventing a permanent breach between the Montagnards and the government. When this was substantially achieved on 28 September, General Khanh expressed gratitude to the Ambassador for the assistance provided. During the earlier and more critical stages, however, Ambassador Taylor had had to contend with a strong suspicion on Khanh's part that US Special Forces advisors had instigated or assisted the revolt and with charges that US activities in the highland area were designed to make the Montagnards consider themselves "American soldiers" rather than elements of the GVN forces.[42]

Meanwhile, there had also been a 48-hour general strike in Saigon and a noncommunist insurrection against the government in Qui-Nhon Province, where Khanh was able to reassert control by the end of September. During the month General Khanh assumed for himself the additional position of Minister of Defense and began work on the promised transition to a civilian government. The triumvirate announced that a High National Council would be formed to draft a provisional constitution and select a provisional national assembly by the end of October. General Minh was in charge of the task of choosing the 17 members of the Council.

In an assessment communicated to Washington while the Montagnard revolt was going on, Ambassador Taylor said that recent developments had "demonstrated a faster rate of deterioration of governmental processes than I would have predicted." General Khanh in his combined role as Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Commander-in-Chief still made all the decisions, and no one else in the government had emerged as a strong figure. Khanh was particularly vulnerable to pressure groups, however, because of the pattern he had established by giving in to the Buddhists and the students and because of his "lame duck" staus owing to the pledge of military withdrawal from the government by 1 November.[43]

The Buddhist leader, Tri Quang, apparently exerted increasing influence on Khanh. In his own dealings with Tri Quang, Ambassador Taylor had found him a powerful personality. The Buddhist leader had emerged during the distrubances in August as "one of the major power factors in South Vietnam," apparently committed to "creating a government wholly responsive to his

42. (S) Msgs, Saigon 921 to State, 22 Sep 64; 952, 25 Sep 64; 985, 29 Sep 64. (TS-GP 1) Command History USMACV, 1964, pp. 122-124.
43. (S) Msg, Saigon 938 to State, 24 Sep 64.

will." The Buddhists often spoke of "a Vietnamese solution" to the country's problems, and there was reason to suspect that Tri Quang's advice to Khanh had a neutralist, and certainly an anti-American, tone.[44]

Another influence on Khanh, however, was that of the "Young Turks," a term that encompassed most of the younger generals of the RVNAF, all of whom had attained their rank since the ouster of Diem in November 1963. Their futures depended on a successful prosecution of the war and on having a government that made this endeavor its first business. The influence of the Young Turks had risen with the abortive coup of 13 September, for by remaining loyal to Khanh they had saved him from downfall and placed him under obligation to heed their advice.[45]

The attempted coup had also heightened the religious tensions in the country, owing particularly to inflammatory accounts in the Vietnamese press that described it as the attempt of a Catholic-Diemist-Can Lao-Dai Viet coalition to seize the government.[46]

From the Ambassador's reports, CINCPAC concluded that the United States might soon be faced with a further deterioration of the GVN. In a message to General Wheeler on 26 September, he suggested that Khanh was ineffective as a leader and that his continuation in office would further erode the morale of both the government and the armed forces. "Perhaps now is the time to tell Khanh point blank that if he cannot reverse the present downward trend, then we will have to withdraw our support for him," Admiral Sharp wrote. He suggested General Minh as a successor to Khanh, should the latter resign or be deposed. CINCPAC did not want the United States to "go down with a losing horse" simply because "we cannot think of an alternative."[47]

The recommendations that Ambassador Taylor sent to Washington two days later were compatible with CINCPAC's views. The Ambassador pointed out that the problem facing the United States was how to assure adequate political leadership until

44. (S) Msgs, Saigon 700 to State, 2 Sep 64; 872, 16 Sep 64.
45. (S) Msg, Saigon 923 to State, 24 Sep 64.
46. (S) Msg, Saigon 988 to State, 29 Sep 64.
47. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 260406Z Sep 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep-Oct 64.

1 November when, presumably, the High National Council would have formed a provisional government, while at the same time keeping up an effective defense against the Viet Cong. "Fundamental to this consideration," the Ambassador said, "is how we are to view Khanh who, up to now, has enjoyed our confidence and has received our unqualified public and private support." He noted that the United States had bailed Khanh out of serious trouble at least twice in recent times; "the question now is whether he is worth saving again either for the long or short term."

General Khanh was still working hard, but he was discouraged and lacked his old zest and confidence. In gaining the support of the Buddhists and the Young Turks he had alienated other factions within the armed forces and had incurred the hostility of the Dai-Viet, the Can Lao, and portions of the Catholic population. A majority of the officer corps apparently still supported him, because of Khanh's continued US backing and the absence of a strong rival.

> We must hang on, keep up the war and play for political breaks. If we can get a reasonably good provisional government before the end of the year we are back in business. I suspect Khanh will not survive as head of government but if he can be retained as Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief he may be able to give effective military leadership to the pacification effort.

Ambassador Taylor recommended that the United States: 1) continue to press for a satisfactory governmental solution through the work of the High National Council; 2) be prepared to drop Khanh if he got into irreparable trouble; 3) view General Minh as a short-term substitute for Khanh; 4) press on with the pacification program; and 5) continue to prepare for offensive actions against North Vietnam as planned.[48]

Apparent progress could be reported on the Ambassador's fourth point. General Khanh had taken personal charge of implementation of the HOP TAC Plan for pacification of the provinces surrounding Saigon. He had agreed with Ambassador Taylor that after further preparations during the remainder of the month, HOP TAC would be formally initiated on 1 October.[49]

48. (TS-GP 1) Msg, Saigon 972 to State, 28 Sep 64.
49. (S) Msg, Saigon 903 to State, 18 Sep 64.

Cross-Border Operations

In NSAM 314, 10 September 1964, the President had directed that discussions begin promptly with the Government of Laos concerning limited South Vietnamese air and ground operations into the corridor areas, together with Lao air strikes and possible US armed reconnaissance flights. While Ambassador Unger carried forward his part of this task in Vientiane, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed recommendations concerning the prospective military operations, which they forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 30 September. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary seek approval for immediate implementation of the air strike plan that they submitted in a detailed appendix. It would employ Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) T-28 aircraft and US YANKEE TEAM flights, without any South Vietnamese participation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that VNAF and FARM GATE resources were already fully committed to the pacification program in South Vietnam and should not be levied upon except for missions supporting the cross-border ground operations. The 22 confirmed targets in Laos should be allocated on the basis of 17 to the RLAF and five bridges to YANKEE TEAM, with US aircraft also flying flak suppression missions for the RLAF and providing high cover against the possibility that enemy air forces might attempt to interfere.

A further target--the most significant, militarily, of any yet detected--was Mu Gia Pass, but it lay in North Vietnam, just beyond the Laotian border. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that political considerations prevented sending either the RLAF or YANKEE TEAM against it at present, but they recommended that the decision be reconsidered whenever the political situation allowed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended that authority be granted to implement the plan they submitted for ground operations into the Laos corridor. South Vietnamese forces would perform the operations, initially only in the central of three designated areas, but with provision for expansion into the other two as capabilities increased. The plan provided that penetrations would not exceed 20 kilometers and that the GVN forces employed would not exceed two company equivalents in any one operational area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff attached one condition. They believed that successful execution of the program was possible only if US advisors were authorized

to accompany the GVN units; otherwise, "no further consideration should be given to the conduct of such ground operations." The VNAF could be relied on for air support, with provision for use of FARM GATE or other US air resources in an emergency exceeding VNAF capabilities.[50]

On 6 October Ambassador Unger reported from Vientiane that in his discussions with RLAF officials they had proposed certain modifications in the target list. The Lao also had requested cover by US jet aircraft for RLAF strikes on four targets close to the North Vietnamese border and had suggested YANKEE TEAM attacks on four heavily defended targets. The following day a joint State-Defense message authorized Ambassador Unger to urge the Lao to begin the program of air strikes in the Laos Panhandle, limiting themselves to targets suitable for their T-28 aircraft without US air cover or fire support. He was also to inform them that US strikes against certain difficult targets were to be anticipated but had not yet been authorized.[51]

In the light of these developments, and of a recommendation received from Ambassador Taylor that US participation in the cross-border air operations be authorized, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again addressed the Secretary of Defense on 13 October. They found all the Lao requests and target modifications acceptable, and they recommended that US aircraft provide both high cover and flak suppression for the RLAF strikes and that US forces be used against targets that were beyond the RLAF capability.

In supporting their views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the United States was responsible for initiating the air strike proposal. Failure to provide US assistance as requested could result in losses to the RLAF in both manpower and aircraft that would be unacceptable to the Laotian Government. The governments of both Laos and Thailand could view US reluctance to support the RLAF operations as a demonstration of US weakness and lack of resolve. Hence the Joint Chiefs of Staff held that "US participation in the air operations in Laos is essential to the success of the operation, politically and militarily."[52]

---

50. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-835-64 to SecDef, 30 Sep 64 (derived from JCS 2343/467), JMF 9155.3 (25 Sep 64).
51. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2344/98, 11 Oct 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Oct 64).
52. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-870-64 to SecDef, 13 Oct 64, App A to JCS 2344/98, 11 Oct 64, same file.

Replying on 21 October to the two JCS submissions regarding cross-border operations, Secretary McNamara wrote that ground operations had not yet been authorized, but planning should proceed along the lines the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended. As for the air strike program, the extent to which US participation had been authorized to date was set forth in the joint State-Defense message dispatched to Ambassador Unger on 13 October.[53] The message endorsed the eight-day program of RLAF strikes in the Panhandle, to begin 14 October, that the Ambassador's efforts had produced, and it authorized support by US combat air patrols (CAP) where necessary. "CAP would not be used to suppress or retaliate to ground AAA." In the message Washington officials acknowledged that YANKEE TEAM suppressive strikes against certain difficult targets "are part of the overall concept" but said that consideration was being deferred until the results of the first RLAF strikes could be evaluated.[54]

On 16 October Ambassador Unger reported that the RLAF would probably complete strikes against the first thirteen targets in the corridor by 23 October. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 20 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the targets remaining beyond these thirteen were militarily the most significant, and they renewed their recommendation that US air forces participate in the attacks, as the Lao had requested. The Secretary of Defense replied on 29 October that the three successive JCS memoranda on cross-border operations had been provided to the Department of State and would be kept under constant review.[55]

The JCS Recommendations of 27 October 1964

Following the consultations in Washington that had culminated in the issuance of NSAM 314 on 10 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had turned to further development of their position on courses of action in Southeast Asia.

---

53. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Cross Border Operations," 21 Oct 64, Att to JCS 2344/98-1, 22 Oct 64, same file.

54. (S) Jt State-Def msg, State 330 to Vientiane, 13 Oct 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Oct 64).

55. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-889-64 to SecDef, 20 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2344/101); (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "US Support, Laos Operations," 29 Oct 64, Encl to JCS 2344/101-1, 30 Oct 64; JMF 9155.2 (17 Oct 64).

Specifically, at their meeting on 14 September, they directed the Joint Staff to examine possible actions, both within South Vietnam's borders and beyond, that might be added to the list recommended to the Secretary of Defense in the JCS memorandum of 26 August. As this study progressed, views expressed by individual members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were added to the Joint Staff's field of consideration.[56]

On 25 September, for example, the Chief of Staff, Army, recommended to his colleagues that they broaden the JCS advice being rendered to higher authority by giving more attention to political courses of action in South Vietnam. This seemed necessary to General Johnson because "the communist 'war of liberation' being fought against the people of South Vietnam is in very large measure a political struggle -- a struggle for the loyalty and support of the population." While he would press the implementation of all military measures already approved, particularly the cross-border operations into Laos, General Johnson wished the Joint Chiefs of Staff to address the problems of lack of governmental stability, low leadership morale, and inadequately trained civil service in South Vietnam, acknowledging that "solutions to these problems are critical to the eventual termination of the insurgency." One of his suggestions was that the United States propose concluding a Mutual Defense Treaty with the GVN. "Such a treaty, on the order of the treaty with Korea, would provide the needed legal base to commit the Government of South Vietnam to a closer identification with United States objectives, and also provide the necessary foundation for subsequent agreements on combined operations beyond the frontiers of South Vietnam."[57]

General Johnson's paper, together with the written comments of the Chief of Staff, Air Force, was referred to the Joint Staff for consideration in connection with its work on "Additional Courses of Action in Southeast Asia."[58] While sharing General Johnson's concern over governmental deterioration in South Vietnam, General LeMay did not believe that "the problem is one to be resolved by political actions or by the combination of political/economic/psychological/military actions proposed by the Army." He thought the Army viewpoint represented

56. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/149, 22 Oct 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64).
57. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/470, 30 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (25 Sep 64) (1).
58. (C-GP 1) 1st N/H of JCS 2343/470, 9 Oct 64, same file.

"a considerable dilution of the firm stand the Joint Chiefs of Staff have taken" in all their recommendations since 2 June, which had consistently pointed to the need for military action against North Vietnam. Convinced that "time is not on our side," General LeMay believed that the problem of governmental instability had to be approached in this way, also. "It appears to me that waiting for the more secure political base is a lost cause and ignores the necessity for positive military action now to insure establishment of a secure political base."[59]

General LeMay also took exception specifically to General Johnson's statement that the military policies and actions currently being pursued within South Vietnam were "probably the optimum that can be provided." He cited various restrictions, particularly the fact that the United States was not employing the B-57 and F-100 jet aircraft it had in the country in support of the counterinsurgency effort. At that time the Chief of Staff, Air Force, already had before his colleagues a memorandum suggesting that they recommend to the Secretary of Defense the use of at least the B-57s against the Viet Cong within South Vietnam, in carefully defined circumstances.[60]

The question of use of the jet aircraft that had been deployed in South Vietnam as part of the US posture of readiness assumed during the Tonkin Gulf incidents already had a history of consideration. COMUSMACV had recommended employing the B-57s and F-100s in a sustained campaign against the Viet Cong on 29 August. CINCPAC had reserved judgment on the proposal pending further study. "We must remember," Admiral Sharp advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 31 August, "that it would be immediately obvious that U.S. jet aircraft were in use against the VC. This would be a step in escalation. With a government in Saigon that changes almost daily, I question if we are ready to commit U.S. forces any further than we already have." Ambassador Taylor endorsed this view a few days later.[61]

One of the decisions made by the highest authority on 9 September (not included in NSAM 314) had been that the US jet aircraft would not be utilized for the present. Answering

---

59. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-19-64 to JCS, 9 Oct 64, same file.
60. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/476, 7 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (6 Oct 64).
61. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MACV-J3 8887 to CINCPAC, 29 Aug 64. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 310100Z Aug 64. (S-GP 3) J-3 Briefing Sheet for CJCS on JCS 2343/476, 13 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (6 Oct 64).

In SNIE 10-3-64, dated 9 October, the intelligence community analyzed "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Actions." Communist leaders in Hanoi and Peking were presumed to have noted the same trends favorable to them in South Vietnam that the earlier SNIE had sketched. Accordingly, it was in the enemy's interest to avoid any action that might change the favorable cast of the situation, and this, the US experts held, was compatible with an underlying Chinese Communist aversion to becoming involved in hostilities with the United States. The two communist countries were thought, nevertheless, to be willing to continue supporting the Viet Cong, even at the risk of causing a limited US retaliation against North Vietnam, "probably on the calculation that victory is near in the South and that they could through political counteraction prevent prolonged or expanded US attacks in the North."

It was the intelligence view that North Vietnam would not attack the DESOTO patrols again unless they were conducted in a highly provocative manner. The communist response to US or GVN air action against infiltration targets in the Laos Panhandle would probably amount only to political and propaganda moves, some improvement of defenses, and VC sabotage raids against US and GVN air bases. If the US or the GVN mounted cross-border ground operations, the communists might move more forces into the area.

The highest level of action considered in the SNIE was a systematic program of gradually intensifying US and VNAF attacks against targets in North Vietnam. The intelligence authorities believed that in the opening stages the enemy would try to dissuade the United States from further attacks by a combination of "apparent concessions," efforts to heighten international pressures for negotiation, and actions designed to underscore communist determination. Communist propagandists would attack US "war madness" and play on fears of a wider war. While making an all-out propaganda and diplomatic drive for an international conference, Hanoi's leaders would hint privately of willingness to reach some accommodation. Both North Vietnam and Communist China would deploy troops in a threatening manner, but the experts doubted that they would invade South Vietnam. Peking would probably meet Hanoi's requests for such defensive assistance as radar equipment, antiaircraft artillery, combat aircraft, patrol craft, and technicians. While probably not asking for Chinese ground forces, Hanoi would exploit any offers of Chinese Communist "volunteers" and would publicize the arrival of equipment and advisors. The Soviets

a JCS query a week later, CINCPAC said that from a purely military point of view there was no question that use of the B-57s and F-100s was desirable. There was a shortage of fixed-wing aircraft in South Vietnam, and requests by ground commanders for close air support often went unfilled. "Armed helos have partially filled gap by their use in suppressive fire." But utilization of the jet aircraft "must be considered in conjunction with the political decision to increase US participation," Admiral Sharp noted. He recommended a limited use of the B-57s, possibly as part of FARM GATE. These older aircraft would normally have been retired and had been retained in the Pacific Command only because of their suitability for the type of operations occurring in Southeast Asia. "Introduction of the still first line F-100 on the other hand could imply a marked increase in U.S. involvement." General LeMay's recommendations on 6 October followed on CINCPAC's views; after JCS discussion, they too were referred to the Joint Staff.[62]

During the first ten days of October the US intelligence community delivered two evaluations that had a marked impact on the deliberations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The first, SNIE 53-2-64, dated 1 October, surveyed the situation in South Vietnam and concluded that there had been further deterioration since early September. The intelligence experts considered conditions unfavorable for the development of a viable government in Saigon. They thought likely a "further decay of GVN will and effectiveness," leading toward defeatism and paralysis of leadership and attended by increasing friction between GVN and US officials. They doubted that the rearrangement of the political structure, scheduled for late October, would improve this picture; moreover, a coup involving "disgruntled South Vietnam military figures" could occur at any time. As governmental effectiveness declined, the war effort would dwindle on all fronts, and the GVN might seek a political accommodation with the enemy. With this prospect, the assessment read, the Viet Cong were unlikely to exert themselves in large military actions to win major victories. The enemy's current terrorist and guerrilla tactics were well designed to exploit the trend toward anarchy, leading ultimately to a neutralist coalition government that the communists could dominate.[63]

---

62. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250150Z Sep 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64). (U) 1st N/H of JCS 2343/476, 22 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (6 Oct 64).

63. (S-GP 1) SNIE 53-2-64, 1 Oct 64.

The Chief of Staff, Air Force, noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already submitted positive proposals on 2 June and 26 August, but the programs recommended had not yet been implemented. The judgment reached had been that more aggressive efforts should not be mounted until a more stable political base was achieved in South Vietnam. "SNIE 53-2-64 proves again that time is not on our side. It suggests strongly that additional delay can have disastrous results." General LeMay called on the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review urgently their previous recommendations and provide current advice to the President and Secretary of Defense, within 72 hours if possible.[65]

Four days later the Chief of Staff, Air Force, submitted his own version of the memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff should forward to the Secretary of Defense.[66] Some of its strongly worded phrases calling for accelerated and forceful action were ultimately to be included in the submission the Joint Chiefs of Staff made on 27 October, for a still graver view of the situation had been presented in the meantime by Ambassador Taylor.

In the first of three successive messages from Saigon, the Ambassador noted a "definite step-up" in infiltration from North Vietnam, particularly in the northern provinces. If continued at the current rate, infiltration during 1964 might reach a total of 10,000 men. "I feel sure," Taylor wrote on 14 October, "that we must soon adopt new and drastic methods to reduce and eventually end such infiltration if we are to succeed in South Vietnam."[67]

Two days later, in a message addressed to President Johnson and the Secretary of State, he again cited the rising rate of infiltration and said that increasing numbers of northern-born conscripts were being identified. Khanh's government claimed to have proof that they had come in organized NVN units. "By any objective standard their presence in SVN constitutes an invasion by hostile forces into the territory of an ally of the US," Ambassador Taylor declared. He said that with the advent of the dry season the infiltration problem would assume a magnitude and urgency that would require immediate countermeasures.[68]

---

65. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-24-64 to JCS, 12 Oct 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64).
66. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-34-64 to JCS, 16 Oct 64, same file.
67. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1129 to State, 14 Oct 64.
68. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/149, 22 Oct 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64).

would limit their involvement to political and propaganda efforts and, perhaps, agreement to meet Hanoi's calls for some military equipment.

Should these efforts fail to deter the US attacks, North Vietnam would have to decide whether to stop its support of the Viet Cong or suffer major destruction of its military and industrial facilities. The communist leaders might suspend such support, probably with the intention of renewing it later. The possibility of an all-out communist attack on South Vietnam in these circumstances could not be denied, however. The leaders in Hanoi might judge that the United States was unwilling to undertake a major ground war in Southeast Asia, or that if it proved willing, the United States could be defeated ultimately by the same methods that were successful against the French. "In a situation involving so many levels of possible escalation we cannot make a confident judgment as to which course the DRV leaders would choose," the intelligence experts said.

If North Vietnam responded aggressively, it would have some forms of assistance from Communist China, but the men in Peking would remain reluctant to become directly involved in the fighting unless destruction of the communist regime in Hanoi appeared likely. Nevertheless, there was always a chance that Communist China might intervene for reasons that seemed irrational to the United States or because it misjudged the US objectives. "Communist China's capability for conducting a ground war in adjacent areas of Southeast Asia is formidable," the analysts pointed out. They believed that Soviet reaction to escalation of the war would take the form of augmented pressures to bring the United States to the conference table.[64]

General LeMay brought the findings in the first of the two intelligence reports to the attention of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a forthright memorandum on 12 October. Reviewing the prediction of continuing deterioration in South Vietnam, he called it "as clear a forecast of impending disaster as we can expect to receive from the intelligence community. . . . Unless we can, without delay, define and initiate some positive course of action to counter the present trend, we must accept what looms before us as an inevitable consequence."

64. (TS-GP 1) SNIE 10-3-64, 9 Oct 64.

trained civil service in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) militate against early success and that the solutions, primarily political, to these problems are also critical to the eventual termination of the insurgency.

The struggle in South Vietnam is a combination of political and military actions and there is an interaction between the two that permits a political success to be exploited militarily and vice versa. Accordingly, a program of military and supporting political actions with respect to the RVN has been developed on the basis that US withdrawal from the RVN or Southeast Asia is not an acceptable course of action. This program envisages the requirement now for accelerated and forceful actions both inside and outside of the RVN to support a strategy of:

a. Depriving the Viet Cong (VC) of out of country assistance by applying continuously increasing military pressures on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) to the extent necessary to cause the DRV to cease support and direction of the insurgency.

b. Depriving the VC of assistance within the RVN by expanding the counter-insurgency effort - military, economic and political - within the RVN.

c. Continuing to seek a viable effective government in the RVN based on the broadest possible consensus.

d. Maintaining a military readiness posture in Southeast Asia that:

(1) Demonstrates the US will and capability to escalate the action if required.

(2) Deters a major communist aggression in the area.

The recommended courses of action to support this strategy were listed in an ascending order of severity in two appendices, one for actions within South Vietnam, the other for actions

The third message, on 17 October, reviewed the advances the Viet Cong had made. They had taken full advantage of the unsettled political conditions in South Vietnam to increase the area under their control. Over the past year the Viet Cong had moved gradually from their mountain bases, gained control of the piedmont, and were now encroaching into the coastal plain. In addition to gaining access to the plentiful supplies of food and manpower in this area they had assumed positions from which they could extend control to the coast in some regions. There the enemy might establish beachheads to support still more extensive infiltration.[69]

Although not directly related to the Ambassador's messages, certain comments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided to Secretary McNamara on 21 October were pertinent. In forwarding to him an Army study analyzing actions taken in Southeast Asia to date, they observed that "the very nature of guerrilla warfare, with its hit and run tactics, provides the insurgent with the initiative as long as he is not separated from his source of direction, personnel, and supplies." They noted that operations to cause North Vietnam to cease its support of the insurgency had been recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff but not yet implemented. They then referred to SNIE 53-2-64, saying that it "clearly indicates that we are fast running out of time in Southeast Asia." The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that they would shortly submit recommendations on additional courses of action in Southeast Asia.[70]

During intensive consultations on 23 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff reached final agreement on the text of their memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, which had been under development since 14 September. It was forwarded on 27 October. The Joint Chiefs of Staff cited Ambassador Taylor's message to the President on 16 October, as well as SNIE 53-2-64, as basis for their statement that "in view of the recent estimate of the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that strong military actions are required now in order to prevent the collapse of the US position in Southeast Asia."

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize that the lack of stability in the central government, the low state of morale of the leadership, and the poorly

69. (S) Msg, Saigon 1167 to State, 17 Oct 64.
70. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-893-64 to SecDef, 21 Oct 64, Encl ~~B~~ to JCS 2343/469, 29 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (24 Sep 64)(1).

beyond its borders. In introducing the appendices the Joint Chiefs of Staff repeated their established opinion that "the military course of action which would contribute most to defeating insurgencies in Southeast Asia remains the destruction of the DRV will and capabilities as necessary to compel the DRV to cease providing support to those insurgencies." Implementation of the entire program might be required to achieve this objective, but "the lists are arranged so that any of the actions may be selected, implemented, and controlled, as required, to produce the desired effect while analyzing and estimating the communist reaction."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff referred to SNIE 10-3-64, the estimate of probable communist reaction. From it they derived the conclusion that "there is not a high risk of introduction of Chinese communist ground force combat units unless major US/RVN ground units had moved to occupy areas of the DRV or communist held territory of Northern Laos, or possibly, the Chinese communists had committed their air and had subsequently suffered attacks on their bases."

> Further, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that because of the present favorable balance of power it is within the capability of US forces to deal with large-scale aggression.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested authority to implement immediately the first six courses of action of Appendix A (within RVN) and the first eight of Appendix B (outside RVN). The six to be pursued within South Vietnam were: 1) influence the GVN to apply increasing pressure on the Viet Cong and to continue the pacification program with emphasis on HOP TAC; 2) begin a vigorous civil affairs effort in South Vietnam; 3) apply much more stringent measures of population control, including curfews in selected areas, checkpoints, and identification, search, seizure, and detention procedures; 4) encourage recruitment from the Popular Force volunteers to serve as uniformed district and village policemen; 5) support operations to cut off VC supply through the Mekong-Bassac Rivers and associated waterways; and 6) employ US fixed-wing aircraft for day and night air strikes within South Vietnam (presumably the B-57s and F-100s).

The eight recommended actions outside South Vietnam were: 1) resume DESOTO patrols; 2) intensify OPLAN 34A operations with emphasis on MAROPS and addition of VNAF air operations against selected targets; 3) maintain the current forward deployments

of US combat units in Southeast Asia; 4) permit RVN forces to pursue and destroy VC units crossing into Cambodia; 5) launch appropriate retaliatory actions to NVN/VC incidents, as prescribed in NSAM 314; 6) conduct low-level US reconnaissance probes of North Vietnam; 7) resume and expand cross-border operations, both air and ground, against infiltration through the Laos Panhandle; and 8) with US, FARM GATE, and VNAF resources, attack lines of communication in North Vietnam in conjunction with air strike operations against nearby targets in RVN and Laos, destroying such border targets as Mu Gia Pass.

The next two courses of action of Appendix B were 9) deploy further US forces within the concept of OPLAN 37-64 (1 Army brigade and 2 F-100 squadrons to Thailand; 1 MEB to Da Nang), and 10) commence "air strikes against infiltration associated targets in the DRV." The Chief of Staff, Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations, supported by the Chairman, requested "authority to implement; as an extension of increasing pressures on the DRV, courses of action 9 and 10 of Appendix B, after appropriate implementation of the first eight courses of action."

The Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps urged more immediate action. They believed that "the judgment reflected in SNIE 53-2-64 forces the conclusion that, if indeed, time has not run out, it is fast doing so."

> Unless we move now to alter the present evolution of events, there is great likelihood of a VC victory. They see no useful alternative to initiating action against the DRV now through a planned and selective program of air strikes. Accordingly, they recommend that courses of action 9 and 10 (as revised) in Appendix B be implemented now, and that course of action 10 be revised to read:
>
> > Selective air strikes against DRV to include air strikes on infiltration routes.
>
> They believe that the initial effort should be focused on targets of military significance and should be mounted in response to the next significant VC action in South Vietnam. In this regard, they consider that a battalion size VC attack in SVN or an act of VC terrorism against US personnel should be construed as significant.

Also to be considered significant would be confirmation of the reported appearance of organized NVN units in South Vietnam.

Beyond courses of action 9 and 10 were six more in Appendix B of increasing severity, as follows: 11) aerial mining of North Vietnamese ports (Haiphong approaches, Cam Pha, and Hon Gay), with suitable notice to other countries through diplomatic channels; 12) "Naval quarantine/blockade of the DRV (also applies to Cambodia)"; 13) attacks of increasing severity on targets in North Vietnam; 14) "All-out air attack on the DRV" (the entire 94 Target List); 15) amphibious and airborne operations to seize one or more lodgements on the North Vietnamese coast; and 16) "Commit US and Allied ground forces into Southeast Asia as required." In Appendix A there was one more action within South Vietnam beyond the six recommended for immediate implementation: 7) "Deploy forces to implement appropriate CINCPAC OPLANS; to assist actively in fighting the insurgency in RVN or to defeat communist aggression as necessary." These further courses of action in the two appendices exceeded what had been recommended in the JCS memorandum of 26 August.

Besides calling for immediate implementation of certain actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended "that courses of action 7 in Appendix A and 11 through 16 in Appendix B be implemented as required to achieve US objectives in Southeast Asia." By so recommending, the Joint Chiefs of Staff showed themselves willing to contemplate a level of action beyond what they had suggested two months earlier, including the possibility of ultimate deployment of US ground combat forces to the mainland of Southeast Asia. The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 27 October by requesting that their views be provided to the President at the earliest feasible time.[71]

The Secretary of Defense replied as follows on 29 October:

> I have noted the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed in JCSM 902-64. They have been provided to the Department of State.
>
> Ambassador Taylor has expressed concern about initiating a program of pressure on North Vietnam before we have a responsible set of authorities to work with in South Vietnam. I am convinced that we should obtain his views with respect to the specific JCS

71. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-902-64 to SecDef, 27 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2339/149), JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64).

recommendations and their timing. I therefore propose to provide him a copy of the referenced memorandum and its appendices and to request his comments as soon as possible so that a proposal accompanied by your views can be presented to the President very soon.[72]

72. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Courses of Action, Southeast Asia," 29 Oct 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2339/149, 30 Oct 64, same file.

Chapter 13

JCS RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING THE BIEN HOA ATTACK

First Days of the Huong Government

In South Vietnam the High National Council (HNC), composed of 17 prominent figures representing various party and religious interests, had been formed by 26 September 1964. It set about drafting a provisional charter for the new government that was scheduled for installation by the end of October. In a message to Ambassador Taylor, Secretary of State Rusk said that "the US must exercise privately all the influence it can bring to bear to obtain as stable a form of government as possible and one whose personnel will be acceptable not only to the HNC but also to the military," and, of course, to the United States as well.[1]

For his part General Khanh seemed not only ready but anxious to shed his responsibilities as Prime Minister and become a soldier again. On 11 October he addressed the HNC on the temporary nature of his stewardship under the triumvirate arrangement and made clear that he did not aspire to the premiership in the new government. "I will return to my post as a general in order to fight day and night, together with my comrades-in-arms, to preserve this last piece of earth of the Free Vietnamese," he declared.[2]

Since Khanh wielded such power as was being exercised at the moment, however, it was evident that the form of the new government would have to meet his approval. Upon seeing the first draft of the proposed charter on 15 October, Khanh charged that the HNC had assigned unprecedented authority to the post of Chief of State, an authority greater than the Prime Minister's. He said that the document was "unacceptable to the armed forces" and demanded its revision. According to some reports, he threatened a coup if the HNC failed to comply.[3]

1. (TS) Msg, State 795 to Saigon, 9 Oct 64.
2. (U) Msg, Saigon 1092 to State, 11 Oct 64.
3. (S) Msg, Saigon 1150 to State, 16 Oct 64.

Embassy officials surmised that Khanh's objections stemmed in part from the fact that General Minh appeared to be the leading candidate at the moment for appointment as Chief of State. To avoid a confrontation between the two generals and their supporters, Ambassador Taylor persuaded the HNC to reduce the Chief of State to a figurehead position, reposing the main governmental power in the civilian Prime Minister, yet unnamed. The Ambassador informed Washington that General Minh "seems agreed" as Chief of State and that General Khanh would probably be named Commander-in-Chief. "We may be emerging from the woods, but I still have my fingers very much crossed," he wrote.[4]

On 21 October, assuming that Minh would be the Chief of State who would in turn appoint the Prime Minister, Ambassador Taylor discussed with him the selection to be made. He told Minh that the United States had no candidate for the post but that he wanted to be sure the United States was "not surprised" and would find the appointment suitable.[5]

A surprise was in store, nevertheless. On 24 October the HNC unanimously elected Dr. Phan Khac Suu as provisional Chief of State. Ambassador Taylor called on Suu the next day and told him "with some deliberate anger" that the United States could not countenance the HNC action of making important decisions without consulting the US Embassy in advance. Suu offered to resign at once if the United States wished him to. Taylor brushed this offer aside but told the new Chief of State that he could not expect US support unless he and the HNC informed US officials in advance of their nominations for Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and other key posts. These nominees must be satisfactory to the United States.[6]

In reporting these developments to the President, Ambassador Taylor characterized the new charter as "reasonably satisfactory" but said "we are not too happy" over the choice of Dr. Suu. Admittedly he was a respected man of high principles, an agricultural expert and opponent of the former Diem regime, but Suu was judged to be a weak leader and clearly lacking in physical stamina. After making the initial appointment of the Prime Minister, however, he would probably have only a nominal role in the government.[7]

---

4. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1148 to State, 16 Oct 64; 1199, 20 Oct 64.
5. (S) Msg, Saigon 1210 to State, 21 Oct 64.
6. (S) Msg, Saigon 1259 to State, 25 Oct 64.
7. (S) Msg, Saigon 1292 to State, 27 Oct 64.

General Khanh submitted his resignation as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense to the newly designated Chief of State on 26 October. Three days later Dr. Suu called on the Prefect of Saigon, Tran Van Huong, to serve as Prime Minister and assemble a cabinet.

Huong began his attempt to govern in difficult circumstances, without benefit of the initial surge of popular favor and tolerance that might have been expected. The new regime seemed to have only critics and opponents, with no important faction rallying to its support. The Vietnamese press was almost unanimous in dispraising it. The task of forming a cabinet was complicated by the reluctance of several candidates to join a government they considered temporary, and particularly by the eleventh-hour withdrawal of two key appointees, apparently owing to Buddhist pressure.[8]

Huong succeeded in completing his cabinet slate by 4 November, however, and Ambassadors Taylor and Johnson reviewed it with him. They also discussed the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief. Huong preferred General Minh but concluded it would be wiser to appoint Khanh. To ease the transition, Huong suggested that Minh leave the country for a time. Within a day, US officials were working on arrangements for Minh's quiet departure for Hawaii. The third member of the triumvirate, General Khiem, had already been dispatched to Washington as the GVN's Ambassador.[9]

With public announcement of the cabinet selections, the Buddhists declared their opposition, claiming that too many of the appointees had been associated with the former Diem regime. Student leaders organized a rally on 6 November and denounced the Huong government because it "has not answered the people's desire for freedom and democracy." The cabinet list gave the press new targets for criticism.[10] Prime Minister Huong declared that any antigovernment demonstrations would be suppressed and indicated that General Khanh had assured him of the Army's support. In public, Khanh confined himself to remarking that the Army would not try to resume power "unless the situation demands it."[11]

---

8. (S) Msg, Saigon 1385 to State, 4 Nov 64, JCS IN 12786.
9. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1382 to State, 4 Nov 64, JCS IN 12447; 1397, 5 Nov 64, JCS IN 13765.
10. (C) Msg, Saigon 1426 to State, 8 Nov 64, JCS IN 16990.
11. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol. XIV, 1963-1964, p. 20462B.

In an assessment dispatched to Washington at the end of the new government's first week, Ambassador Taylor said that the remarkable thing was that the decision of two months earlier to return political control to civilian hands had been carried out. Much was still uncertain, including the form the Buddhist opposition would take, the true political strength of Huong, the ability of the cabinet as a whole, and the durability of the resolve of Khanh and other officers to stay out of politics.[12]

The charter of government provided for an elected National Assembly, but until it came into existence the High National Council was to continue and to exercise the legislature's functions, including the power to remove the Prime Minister by passing a lack-of-confidence motion. Ambassador Taylor anticipated that the next critical turn in the political situation would come when the Huong government proposed the legal provisions under which the Assembly would be elected.[13]

On 10 November Huong expressed his disappointment to the Ambassador that the United States was limiting its action to South Vietnam, citing the lift to morale that the US retaliation to the Tonkin Gulf incidents had given. Taylor replied that "reciprocal responsibilities were involved"; the GVN must demonstrate strength to meet its current responsibilities and to withstand any VC counteraction that might be generated by increased pressures on North Vietnam. "Huong indicated his complete understanding of the situation," the Ambassador reported.[14]

OPLAN 34A Approval Procedures

In Washington at that time the Joint Chiefs of Staff were citing "stimulus to the new government leadership of Vietnam" as one of the benefits to be hoped for from the expansion of OPLAN 34A operations they were recommending to Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance.[15] The JCS recommendations on 14 November were made under the procedures of a new system for the approval

12. (S) Msg, Saigon 1414 to State, 7 Nov 64, JCS IN 15807.
13. (C) Msg, Saigon 1563 to State, 20 Nov 64, JCS IN 29904.
14. (S) Msg, Saigon 1452 to State, 10 Nov 64, JCS IN 19014.
15. (TS-GP 1) CM-258-64 to DepSecDef, 14 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 64).

of OPLAN 34A activities that had been established by higher authority some weeks earlier.

On 30 September Secretary Vance had advised General Wheeler and Assistant Secretary McNaughton that thenceforward, at the beginning of each month, a proposed schedule of 34A MAROPS would be reviewed in coordination by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Mr. McGeorge Bundy of the White House, and Mr. Llewellyn Thompson of the State Department. The document would become the approved schedule for planning purposes for the coming month, but the mounting of each listed operation would require approval in advance by the same three reviewing officials. A further step of approval was required. After SACSA had drafted the executing message, it would not be dispatched until initialed by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. Bundy, and Mr. Thompson. Under these procedures the schedule for October had received its first round of approval on the first day of that month.[16]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted the basic November OPLAN 34A schedule to Secretary Vance late in October but followed it on 14 November with detailed recommendations for adding VNAF air strikes to the program. Approval of the latter proposal was withheld pending the outcome of White House consultations at the end of November on larger aspects of the Southeast Asian problem, yet to be recounted.[17] The system for the approval of OPLAN 34A operations remained in effect in the following months, however.

The Progress of JCS and CINCPAC Planning

The plans for both retaliatory strikes and a more extended air campaign against North Vietnam had undergone further development during September and October, the most notable feature being the higher levels of desired damage written into the objectives. On 22 September the Chief of Staff, Air Force,

16. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to ASD(ISA), 30 Sep 64; (S) Memo for Record, DepSecDef, "October Schedule for OPLAN 34A Operations," 1 Oct 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep-Oct 64.

17. (TS-GP 1) CM-221-64 to DepSecDef, 29 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Oct 64). (TS-GP 1) CM-258-64 to DepSecDef, 14 Nov 64; (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Operation Plan 34A - Additional Actions (U)," 4 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/489-1, 7 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 64).

pointed out that in the wake of the Tonkin Gulf incident four days earlier the Joint Chiefs of Staff had agreed that punitive strikes against North Vietnam in response to attacks on DESOTO patrols should seek maximum feasible damage to the targets. While the strike missions would be selected from the 94 Target List, the JCS agreement divorced them from the List's damage criteria. General LeMay noted that the sortie requirements in CINCPAC's retaliation plan needed to be increased to achieve the new level.[18]

After exchanges with Admiral Sharp and further consideration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 7 October informed CINCPAC that when responding to North Vietnamese attack on US forces, the reprisal action "should be of such a magnitude as to inflict the maximum feasible levels of damage on the specific targets selected commensurate with the capability of available US forces, rather than the damage levels in the 94 target study." When a DESOTO patrol was in progress, PACOM forces should maintain a tactical readiness posture to conduct air strikes with the least practicable delay when ordered from Washington.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided two target options under each of two levels of response. The first, reprisal for attacks resulting in little or no damage to the DESOTO patrol, had an Option I A of five targets, including the enemy MIGs and their supporting facilities, wherever located. Option I B, though listing six targets, was a less severe response, which higher authority might prefer under the circumstances at the time of decision. For reprisal following attacks resulting in significant damage or loss of life in a DESOTO patrol unit, Options II A and II B both required a two-day attack, striking all Option I A targets plus five others. The additional targets of the two options differed in emphasizing port facilities as against railroad and highway bridges.

CINCPAC was authorized to employ available US resources except FARM GATE, to use optimum ordnance to include napalm and CBU2A weapons, and to provide CAP, suppressive fire, photo reconnaissance, and search and rescue. Whenever directed to execute any of the options, Admiral Sharp's command should be prepared to conduct air strikes on the remainder of the 94 targets.[19] Pursuant to this JCS directive, CINCPAC on 28

18. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/462, 22 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (22 Sep 64).
19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9584 to CINCPAC, 7 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2343/462-2), JMF 9155.3 (22 Sep 64).

October rescinded his Frag Order # 2 of 18 September and issued Frag Order # 3.[20]

The damage criteria of the 94 Target List itself came under consideration at virtually the same time. On 2 October PACOM officers had delivered a briefing before the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the air strike plan, which had been incorporated in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 as Annex R. General LeMay again took the initiative, advising his colleagues that while the plan was fully responsive to the JCS guidance provided in July, "I do not consider this, nor do I suppose that CINCPAC considers it, an optimum application of available force to the 94 target task -- to destroy the DRV will and capability to support the insurgency in SVN and Laos." He noted that conditions had changed in the meantime. The situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated, CINCPAC's air resources had been increased, and there was reason to expect that the political restrictions of midyear "may well be invalid by December 1964." The Chief of Staff, Air Force, considered that CINCPAC's planning should be redirected to achieve maximum feasible levels of damage. It was agreed that the Chairman would present this view to the Secretary of Defense during a second appearance of the PACOM briefing officers on 5 October.[21]

During the JCS session with the Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara said that on the occasion of the next DESOTO patrol, two aircraft carriers should be so stationed as to be able to conduct immediate retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam, if directed. Apparently the Secretary did not object to the higher damage criteria the Joint Chiefs of Staff were considering. In a message on 13 October they reviewed for CINCPAC the changes in the situation that led them now to instruct him to revise Annex R under the following additional guidance:

> a. Use available forces in PACOM as deemed necessary by you, to include at least two CVAs, and identify any essential or desired augmentation.

---

20. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF et al., 280210Z Oct 64.

21. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-4-64 to JCS, 2 Oct 64; (TS) Note to Control Div, "Briefing on the Air Strike Annex to CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64," 2 Oct 64; JMF 9155.3 (8 Oct 64).

22. (TS) Note to Control Div, "CINCPAC Air Strike Plan," 5 Oct 64, same file. This record contains no indication of SecDef views on damage levels.

b. Include in your plan provision for fighter CAP as required to meet current air threat.

c. Give first priority to airfields, aircraft, and POL storage facilities in all attack options which employ overt US air.

d. Strikes should be of such magnitude as to inflict the maximum feasible levels of damage on the specific targets commensurate with the capability of available forces.[23]

The problems confronting the United States in Southeast Asia had generated a continually expanding requirement for CINCPAC OPLANs treating various contingencies. As early as May 1964 the desirability of consolidating some of these plans had come under consideration, and CINCPAC had submitted a scheme for its accomplishment.[24] After Admiral Sharp assumed command in late June, further study led him to recommend a somewhat different consolidation of planning on 2 August. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the undertaking five days later.[25]

Admiral Sharp's intention was to make CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 the single master plan for all types of action designed to counter or cause cessation of North Vietnam's support of the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam. It should be so written as to allow implementation in stages, with flexibility to accommodate any future variants that might be developed. OPLAN 37-64 stemmed originally from the Presidential decisions in March, issued in NSAM 288, and the plan's original title was "Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN."[26]

On 19 November 1964, Admiral Sharp issued the revised version, CINCPAC OPLAN 37-65, now titled "Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN and/or Laos." It incorporated the previously effective OPLANs 33-62, 34-64, 37-64, and 99-64 --

---

23. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9769 to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2343/477), JMF 9155.3 (8 Oct 64).

24. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6338 to CINCPAC, 16 May 64; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230306Z May 64.

25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 022330Z Aug 64; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7801 to CINCPAC, 7 Aug 64.

26. NSAM 288 and the development of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, which the JCS approved on 21 Apr 64, have been treated in Ch. 9.

all directed against North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved OPLAN 37-65, subject to certain modifications, on 10 March 1965.[27]

The existence of two other CINCPAC plans should be recalled. OPLAN 38-64 provided for US military action, primarily with air and naval forces, against sudden large-scale Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese aggression in Southeast Asia. CINCPAC's basic plan for defense of the Southeast Asian mainland, in circumstances short of general war, was OPLAN 32-64.[28]

One further plan was promulgated in the autumn of 1964, in response to a JCS directive in late June. On 5 September Admiral Sharp submitted CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65, for operations to forestall or cause cessation of aggression by Communist China and its allies, in Southeast Asia, South Korea, or elsewhere. As directed, the plan placed primary reliance on US air and naval operations, holding US ground force involvement on the Asian continent to a minimum. "Its key is the cessation of aggression by striking the Asian Communist heartland."[29]

Implementation of CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65 was to come under frequent consideration in the circumstances that developed during the remainder of 1964. The plan's flexibility and range of actions offered US policymakers a number of options. Its Phase I consisted of deployments for deterrent effect. Its Phase II provided for pre-emptive action on the basis of strategic warning of impending Chinese Communist aggression, as well as for full-scale action against an aggression already launched.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65 on 21 September, noting that its further development was in progress. Among the modifications required was a slight alteration in the title, which became, simply, "Contingency Plan for CHICOM Aggression (U)." The Joint Chiefs of Staff also made the change indicated below in the plan's statement of mission:

---

27. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 37-65, 19 Nov 64, JMF 3146 (19 Nov 64) sec 1A. (TS-GP 3) SM-220-65 to CINCPAC, 10 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2054/649-7), same file, sec 1.

28. Development and JCS approval of OPLAN 38-64 are discussed in Ch. 10. CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 had received JCS approval on 6 Nov 63; (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1963, pp. 38-40.

29. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7128 to CINCPAC, 27 Jun 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65, 5 Sep 64, JMF 3146 (5 Sep 64) sec 1.

Deploy forces and/or conduct air and naval offensive operations to damage destroy to the degree necessary, the military, logistic, and economic structure of Communist China, and as required, that of North Vietnam and North Korea, in order to deter, prevent or cause cessation of large-scale aggression or attacks, by Communist China.[30]

The Bien Hoa Attack; JCS Recommendations of 1 and 4 November

Just after midnight, in the first minutes of 1 November, a Viet Cong force slipped by the RVNAF security troops at Bien Hoa Air Base, twelve miles northwest of Saigon. The enemy set up mortars and fired approximately 60 rounds in a 39-minute attack against the crowded flight line, runway, control tower, and bivouac area. Four US servicemen were killed and 72 were wounded or injured. Besides other US and VNAF aircraft damaged, five B-57s were destroyed and thirteen damaged, out of the total force of 36 US B-57 aircraft in South Vietnam. In an early message Admiral Sharp called the enemy action "a well executed attack and psychologically well timed." Staged on a South Vietnamese national holiday, it appeared to be a deliberate affront to the new Huong government and perhaps related to the US national election of 3 November as well.[31]

Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV all viewed the incident from the first as precisely the type of enemy action against US forces that had been marked for retaliation in recent US deliberations at the highest level. The Ambassador's first substantive message on 1 November called the Viet Cong attack "a deliberate act of escalation and a change of the ground rules under which they have operated up to now."

> It should be met promptly by an appropriate act of reprisal against a DRV target, preferably an airfield. Since both US and GVN have been victims of this attack and since ultimate objective should be to convince Hanoi to cease aid to VC (and not merely to lay off US), the retaliatory action should be made by a combined US/VNAF effort. Immediate objective would be to reduce probability

30. (TS-GP 3) SM-1534-64 to CINCPAC, 21 Sep 64, Encl to JCS 2054/644-6, 17 Sep 64, JMF 3146 (5 Sep 64) sec 2.

31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010501Z Nov 64, JCS IN 1006; (TS) "Resume of Bien Hoa Attack," 3 Nov 64; OCJCS File, "Bien Hoa Incident."

of similar attacks on other crowded US facilities such as Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut and to offset the depressive effect of this action on the new government.

Ambassador Taylor thought the retaliation should be launched within 48 hours at the latest, and preferably within 24. He was preparing recommendations regarding the targets, and he requested authority to begin consultations with Premier Huong and General Khanh toward agreement in principle on combined reprisal action.[32]

In an immediate reply the State Department told him to forgo approaching the GVN leaders pending the outcome of a high-level meeting scheduled in Washington at noon, 1 November.[33]

Within a few hours a message from Ambassador Taylor gave the US Mission's views. He repeated the point that the retaliation should be a combined US-GVN action on a tit-for-tat basis, following the provocation as closely as possible in time. The target in North Vietnam comparable to Bien Hoa was clearly the Phuc Yen airfield outside Hanoi, current location of the enemy MIG force. The presence of those aircraft and the field's strong AA defenses appeared to rule out VNAF participation in the attack, but Taylor believed Phuc Yen should be struck first, or else the MIGs would be dispersed to other bases, complicating the task of locating and destroying them. The next most suitable targets, he said, were the barracks at Vit Thu and Chap Le and the Xom Bang ammunition depot -- all close together in lower North Vietnam and within VNAF capabilities. Attack on all four targets would be "the combination of maximum effect."

Ambassador Taylor told Washington officials that if favorable decision on striking Phuc Yen was reached at their noon meeting, the attack could be launched at first light on 3 November by US 2d Air Division forces already in South Vietnam. "I strongly urge that any strikes approved be viewed as the inauguration of a new policy of tit-for-tat reprisals [illegible] taliation for major Viet Cong depredations," the Ambassador said. He recommended that, immediately following the strikes, the United States and the GVN announce jointly that retaliation would thenceforth be the rule against any major

32. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1357 to State, 010243Z Nov 64.
33. (TS) Msg, State 976 to Saigon, 010400Z Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Bien Hoa Incident."

acts of sabotage, terrorism, destruction of industrial facilities, or interruption of rail and highway communications.[34]

Even before these exchanges the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCPAC to sail the embarked Marine special landing force (SLF) toward Da Nang and there to hold it offshore and out of sight of land. Admiral Sharp should also prepare to move Army and Marine units by air from Okinawa to improve the security of the Saigon area and the two adjacent air bases, Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut. His recommendations for reprisal action were requested.[35]

In reply Admiral Sharp named three targets, all barracks or military camps, at Dong Hoi, Chanh Hoa, and Vit Thu (the last one also designated in Taylor's message, not yet seen by CINCPAC). Attacking them would be an appropriate reprisal for the American casualties suffered in the bivouac area at Bien Hoa. If a heavier retaliation was desired, attacks could be launched against Phuc Yen airfield and any of the options listed in CINCPAC's Frag Order # 3 of 28 October.

Admiral Sharp closed by observing that "failure to establish the fact now that attacks such as that on Bien Hoa will result in prompt and heavy retaliatory action can only result in a serious blow to our prestige and serve to invite further attacks at places and times of their choosing. As a minimum, I recommend attack on the three barracks areas."[36]

A message from General Westmoreland was received at about the same time, containing his strong endorsement of the Ambassador's initial recommendation that "retaliatory air strikes be undertaken, jointly with the GVN, against DRV targets." COMUSMACV also wrote that "Ambassador Taylor and I consider it highly undesirable that any action suggestive of dependent evacuation be taken at this time."[37]

---

34. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1360 to State, 010740Z Nov 64, JCS IN 1009, same file.

35. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1449 to CINCPAC, 312112Z Oct 64, same file.

36. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010501Z Nov 64, JCS IN 1006, same file.

37. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MACJOO 12862 to JCS, 010359Z Nov 64, same file.

From Washington later on 1 November General Wheeler advised Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland that a White House meeting to discuss courses of action was scheduled for early the following afternoon. At the noon meeting of senior officials on 1 November, now concluded, "concern was expressed that proposed US retaliatory/punitive actions could trigger North Vietnamese/CHICOM air and ground retaliatory acts."

> Highest authority desires to consider in conjunction with US military actions, increased security measures and precautionary moves of US air and ground units to protect US dependents, units and installations against North Vietnamese/CHICOM retaliation.

Requesting comments from the three addressees, General Wheeler said that the following actions were being considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff: 1) withdraw US dependents prior to or upon initiation of air strikes against the North; 2) move the Marine SLF to Da Nang air base and two Army or Marine battalions to the Saigon area to provide local security; 3) move a Marine HAWK battalion from California to South Vietnam; 4) augment land-based and carrier air resources for higher effectiveness in attacking the Option I A targets of CINCPAC Frag Order # 3; and 5) effect "forward movement from CONUS or within PACOM of ground, sea, and air units to WESTPAC and alert of additional units in CONUS as might be required to implement appropriate portions of CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 and/or CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65." Also, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were considering the desirability of using US aircraft against the Viet Cong within South Vietnam, in support of the VNAF and FARM GATE.[38]

The above actions under JCS consideration were only those responsive to the concern expressed by the officials at the noon meeting on 1 November. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had met earlier on that Sunday morning to formulate their recommendations for military action in consequence of the Bien Hoa attack. Their views had subsequently been presented orally to the Secretary of Defense by General Wheeler.[39] The course of action they urged was considerably stronger than any recommended by Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, or COMUSMACV during the 48 hours following the mortar attack at Bien Hoa.

---

38. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 1451 to CINCPAC, 012119Z Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Bien Hoa Incident."
39. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/153, 3 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

The Joint Chiefs of Staff viewed the enemy's strike on US forces as more than an incident requiring reprisal in kind. Giving a full measure of meaning to Ambassador Taylor's characterization of the enemy move as "a deliberate act of escalation," they considered that it marked the time when the United States must undertake a systematic program of military action to cause North Vietnam to desist from its support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao insurgencies. Besides launching immediate retaliation, the United States should institute a program of progressive attacks against the targets of the 94 Target List.

Specifically the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that within 24 to 36 hours, PACOM forces should conduct air strikes against five targets in Laos: Tchepone barracks, Tchepone military area, Ban Thay military area, Nape highway bridge, and the Ban Ken bridge on Route 7. At the same time, Admiral Sharp should conduct low-level reconnaissance of infiltration routes and of targets in North Vietnam south of Latitude 19° N. (roughly the lower third of North Vietnam). These operations would provide an immediate response, employ the capabilities of forces already in place, and divert the enemy's attention from the preparations and force deployments necessary for the stronger actions to follow. The preparations would include dispatching the Marine SLF to Da Nang and airlifting Army or Marine units from Okinawa to the Saigon area. The airlift aircraft could then be used to assist in evacuation of US dependents -- a move that the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed should begin concurrently with the air strikes against North Vietnam.

Other preparations, meanwhile, would develop readiness for the following operations:

a. Within 60 to 72 hours, 30 SAC B-52 aircraft from Guam conduct a night strike on Phuc Yen airfield.

b. At first light thereafter, PACOM carrier and land-based aircraft conduct a follow-up strike against Phuc Yen and strikes against POL storage at Hanoi and Haiphong and against the Gia Lam and Cat Bi airfields at those two cities.

c. Also at first light, VNAF aircraft strike the Vit Thu barracks.

While the above operations would have the appearance of reprisal, in the JCS view they should be merely the first steps

in a sustained program of attacks. The following steps should be: 1) armed reconnaissance of infiltration routes in Laos; 2) air strikes against infiltration routes and targets in North Vietnam; and 3) progressive strikes by SAC and PACOM forces against the targets of the 94 Target List. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that authority be obtained to use bases in Thailand as necessary in carrying out the program.[40]

In the early hours of 2 November, Washington time, the comments General Wheeler had requested from Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV were received. The Ambassador and General Westmoreland deferred to CINCPAC's judgment regarding the desirability of the forward deployment and alert of forces for possible implementation of OPLAN 32-64 or 39-65, as well as the augmentation of PACOM forces for more effective strikes under Frag Order # 3. Admiral Sharp favored these measures and made certain detailed suggestions. He, in turn, deferred to the opinion of the two Saigon respondents regarding withdrawal of US dependents. Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland did not consiser this move either necessary or desirable and said it would have "an adverse psychological impact on the newly formed government."

As for introducing Marines at Da Nang and two Army or Marine battalions to the Saigon area to provide security for US personnel and installations, COMUSMACV thought it undesirable "at this time. We hesitate at this juncture to admit by such action that the host government cannot defend bases used by us and to take the big step in committing organized U. S. ground units in combat with the V. C." The troops should remain in readiness for movement on short notice, however. Ambassador Taylor, holding the same opinion, commented more extensively. Placing US battalions at the airfields "is likely to convey message that US intends to continue to limit its actions to SVN and to defensive measures -- a note I hope we will not strike." He also observed that "our troops would regard static security mission as pretty inglorious business."

Admiral Sharp favored moving a Marine HAWK battalion to South Vietnam to increase air defense capabilities. General Westmoreland noted that he had already recommended deployment of two HAWK battalions to Da Nang, and the Ambassador joined

---

40. As will be recounted, the JCS repeated and confirmed their oral recommendations of 1 November in writing three days later; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-933-64 to SecDef, 4 Nov 64, App to JCS 2339/153, 3 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

him in urging that this occur as soon as possible. Both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV favored employing US aircraft within South Vietnam, to supplement the VNAF and FARM GATE whenever suitable targets were identified. Ambassador Taylor, however, thought that "we are missing few, if any, lucrative targets now with our present VNAF/FARM GATE force." He also noted that by December the number of operationally available VNAF aircraft would be substantially increased when the fourth A-1H squadron had completed its training.[41]

Ambassador Taylor's reply also responded to a joint State-Defense message sent him on 1 November, following the noon meeting. The message set forth the considerations being weighed in Washington more fully than General Wheeler's corresponding message. The Ambassador's initial dispatches following the Bien Hoa attack had been given careful thought, the writers said.

> There is no doubt here that this event adds considerably to cumulative factors pointing toward much harder policy in near future. At same time, we would find it hard to portray attack as major act of escalation in itself, since it differs only in degree and extent of damage from such previous incidents as CARD sinking and recurrent attacks on US personnel and equipment playing military roles. We have also been reluctant to give any appearance of reacting only when US personnel affected.

(The USN supply ship CARD had been sunk at the Saigon docks by a VC explosive charge on 1 May 1964; no personnel casualties resulted.)

> In addition above reasons arguing against one-shot retaliatory treatment, all of us here, including JCS, are negative on a tit-for-tat policy as basis for real action against the North. Not only is it hard to define such a policy, but all our studies and war games have indicated that in the end it conveys a weak signal to Hanoi and also has maximum disadvantages in wider international sphere.

---

41. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 020400Z Nov 64, JCS IN 10442; (TS) Msg, Saigon 1368 to State, 2 Nov 64, JCS IN 10572; (TS-GP 2) Msg, COMUSMACV MACJOO 12962 to CJCS, 2 Nov 64, JCS IN 10617; OCJCS File, "Bien Hoa Incident."

With specific reprisal action tentatively rejected, Washington officials saw the Bien Hoa attack as significant chiefly for bringing "measurably nearer point of decision on systematic wider actions against North." They recognized, nevertheless, that support of GVN morale was one of the factors arguing for some early action, such as release of US aircraft for overt employment against the Viet Cong. While this move would increase capabilities appreciably, it had the disadvantage of assuming an explicit US combat role for the first time. Also, sooner or later the US planes would probably attack innocent civilians through error, with unfortunate repercussions. The deployment of US security battalions to Bien Hoa, Da Nang, and Nha Trang was also under consideration. This move could have the desirable appearance of "securing decks for action," but State and Defense officials were uncertain how much it would really improve security, and it would "add to our casualties and general exposure." They asked the Ambassador and COMUSMACV to comment.[42]

Ambassador Taylor replied that "from Saigon end of line, the Bien Hoa attack looks quite different from the view set forth" in the joint State-Defense message. "It was unique as an attack directed specifically against US units and equipment," under circumstances unrelated to the day-to-day advisory effort, in which US forces expected to take losses. He cited its points of similarity with the Tonkin Gulf incidents.

> Finally, it demonstrated a new tactic, the employment of surprise attack by massed mortar fire, with such success that the US B-57 capability in this country was knocked out in about 15 minutes. Hence, we cannot view it as a VC aggression which is merely an improved version of similar past conduct. It is clear that Hanoi also views this as something special and expects something from us.

With regard to the views of GVN officials on the Bien Hoa attack, Ambassador Taylor felt that, if anything, they were less concerned than they ought to be. The event had occurred during a double holiday when few newspapers were published, and the general public had scarcely reacted. A press release by General Khanh had understated the damage suffered, and he had left town without attempting to consult the Ambassador. "For the moment," Taylor wrote, "I believe no action needs to be

42. (TS-GP 1) Jt State-Def msg 978 to Saigon, 020001Z Nov 64, JCS IN 10364, same file.

considered purely for impact on local morale. However, if there is no US reaction, our prestige is going to sag, both with friend and enemy."[43]

The general viewpoint of the joint State-Defense message prevailed at the White House meeting on 2 November, which General Wheeler attended. In a message to Admiral Sharp shortly afterward, the Joint Chiefs of Staff summed up the conclusion reached as being that "appropriate response to Bien Hoa attack is in order but such response need not be immediate. However, another similar VC attack would require immediate action by US forces possibly on the order of 1B of CINCPAC Frag Order 3." Concern had been expressed at the meeting over the adequacy of security measures around air bases and other sensitive US installations in South Vietnam. The Chairman had given assurance that General Westmoreland was pursuing this matter vigorously with GVN military officials.[44]

In reply to the last point, CINCPAC declared that General Westmoreland would continue to do all within his power to make the US installations secure, but "they are inherently vulnerable." Most of them were situated in the midst of populated areas and could be made safe only if rigid population controls were applied by the GVN -- a time-consuming process at best. Admiral Sharp said that the Viet Cong had had the capability to attack any of the US air bases for some time. He believed that the enemy had refrained in the past from fear of strong US retaliation, had recently made a deliberate decision to risk a new level of hostilities, and now would be encouraged by the lack of a determined US response to launch further attacks. "Since the air bases in Vietnam are congested, clearly insecure and without dispersal facilities of any kind," CINCPAC wrote, "we should not expose any more airplanes and American personnel on these bases than are necessary for the immediate mission. Aircraft can be moved readily in and out of RVN as requirements dictate."[45]

---

43. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1368 to State, 2 Nov 64, JCS IN 10572, same file.

44. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 1470 to CINCPAC, 2 Nov 64, same file. Concern about the security of US installations and personnel was a major secondary theme running throughout the discussions following the Bien Hoa attack; the measures considered are treated in more detail in Ch. 16.

45. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040353Z Nov 64, JCS IN 12399, same file.

At the White House meeting on 2 November General Wheeler had presented the JCS views that had first been given orally to the Secretary of Defense the previous day. At the same time, the task of reducing these views to writing for formal submission was under way.[46] On 4 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent their approved memorandum to Secretary McNamara. It confirmed their recommendation of the following specific operations: strikes against five targets in Laos and low-level air reconnaissance over part of NVN; after preparation, a strong B-52 night attack on the Phuc Yen airfield, followed the next morning by restrike and concurrent attacks on POL and airfields at Hanoi and Haiphong, plus a VNAF strike at Vit Thu barracks; continued action thereafter consisting of armed reconnaissance over infiltration routes in Laos, air strikes against infiltration routes and targets in NVN, and "progressive PACOM and SAC strikes against the targets listed in the 94 Target Study."

In justification the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited both general and specific considerations. Noting that they were already on record as concluding that the current level of actions was not sufficient to stabilize the situation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that "there now appears to be a South Vietnamese Government that can provide at least an initial basis for a more positive program of US actions," aimed at causing North Vietnam to cease its support of the insurgents. Specific justification lay in the VC attack on Bien Hoa, which they joined Ambassador Taylor in characterizing as "a deliberate act of escalation and a change of the ground rules under which the VC have operated up to now." This enemy action called for a prompt and strong response.

> Undue delay or restraint on our part could be misinterpreted by our allies in Southeast Asia, as well as by the DRV and Communist China. Such misinterpretation could encourage the enemy to conduct additional attacks, including acts of terrorism, against US personnel and their dependents.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any declaration committing the United States to a tit-for-tat reprisal formula. This concept they held to be unduly restrictive, in that it

46. (C) Note to Control Div, "Draft Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Recommended US Courses of Action in Relation to Viet Cong Attack on Bien Hoa Airfield, 1 November 1964," 2 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

would concede the initiative to the enemy and impose inflexibility on both the nature and level of US response. Rather than reprisal against comparable targets, they recommended undertaking the full program of operations they had listed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that evacuation of the estimated 1,600 US Government dependents from South Vietnam should begin concurrently with the first daylight strikes against the North. They noted that there were also some 3,100 nonmilitary US nationals and US-sponsored personnel in the country. The standing objection to evacuation was the expected adverse psychological impact on the government and people of South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thought that if the move occurred in conjunction with strikes against the North, this impact would be more than offset by favorable reaction to the increased US military activity.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 4 November with the following summary of their beliefs:

> a. We have reached a major decision point in Southeast Asia;
>
> b. The United States should continue to pursue its stated objective of keeping Laos, Thailand, and SVN free from communist domination. Military actions such as recommended herein are necessary contributions to this objective; and
>
> c. Early US military action against the DRV would lessen the possibility of misinterpretation by the DRV and Communist China of US determination and intent and thus serve to deter further VC attacks such as that at Bien Hoa.[47]

A Month of Critical Consultations Begins

While the President and his senior advisors had concluded on 2 November that no immediate retaliation should be mounted for the Bien Hoa attack, the event did set a course of critical and comprehensive deliberations in motion. The further consultations regarding US courses of action in Southeast Asia

47. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-933-64 to SecDef, 4 Nov 64, App to JCS 2339/153, 3 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

occupied the next four weeks and culminated in meetings held after Ambassador Taylor's return to Washington late in November.

At the White House session on 2 November an NSC Working Group was formed, with Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy as Chairman, to prepare a policy paper based on consideration of all possible courses of action. Indicative of one of the major areas of concern were the instructions given General Wheeler at the White House. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to provide a detailed examination of possible North Vietnamese or Chinese Communist military reactions to air strikes against the North. As the Chairman described the purpose for the Joint Staff later in the day, "this paper would be designed to anticipate enemy reactions, lay out our response to such reactions and define in detail the preparatory measures which we should undertake prior to mounting an attack so that we could respond in a timely, effective fashion to any enemy initiative."[48]

JCS Views on Countering Enemy Reaction, 14 November

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided their views to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum with detailed appendices on 14 November. In it they adhered to their recommendations of 4 November, repeating, as a quotation, the paragraphs outlining the program of military operations they favored. "Although these actions were recommended for the attack on Bien Hoa, they comprise an option equally applicable and available for immediate implementation in the event of other serious provocations in Southeast Asia."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said that "no significant logistic or transportation deficiencies are anticipated in carrying out the attacks against the targets listed in the 94 Target Study," but certain additional deployments would be necessary at the time of the decision. These included deployment from the CONUS to the Southeast Asia area of two USAF tactical fighter squadrons and additional tactical reconnaissance and tanker capability, as well as bringing the number of attack carriers in the area to three. (All of these were actions that CINCPAC had recommended during the exchanges following the Bien Hoa attack.)

48. (TS-GP 3) CM-228-64 to D/JS, 2 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/152, 2 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (2 Nov 64) sec 1.

The assessment of probable North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist (CHICOM) reaction did not differ notably from the one the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted less than three weeks earlier, on 27 October.

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the DRV and the CHICOMs will make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves to halt US attacks directed against North Vietnam. Although the DRV will take all actions to defend itself, the DRV and CHICOMs would be unlikely to expand the conflict. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that Communist China would be very reluctant to become directly involved in the fighting in Southeast Asia lest this be taken by the United States as a cause for major retaliation against the Chinese mainland. However, as the severity of US attacks against the DRV increases, the CHICOMs would feel an increased compulsion to take some dramatic action to counter the impact of the US pressures. This CHICOM response may take the form of the deployment of ground forces into northern Laos, ostensibly at the invitation of the Pathet Lao, or some similar action short of direct confrontation with US forces. It is the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the Chinese communists probably would not openly engage US forces unless they felt it was necessary to prevent collapse of the communist regime in North Vietnam. Therefore, there would not be high risk of the introduction of large-scale Chinese ground/air force combat units unless major US/GVN ground units had moved to occupy areas of the DRV or communist-held territory in northern Laos, or unless the Chinese had committed their air or naval power and had subsequently suffered attacks on CHICOM air force bases in China.

Admittedly, however, "there is always a chance that Peiping might intervene either for reasons that seem irrational to us or because they miscalculated the objectives of US moves and US resolve to remain in the area."

One of the appendices analyzed nine possible enemy courses of action and matched them against the available US and allied responses, with data on objectives, forces, deployments, and timing where feasible. "The salient conclusion which can be drawn from this analysis is that the United States and its allies can deal adequately with any course of action the DRV and/or CHICOMs decide to pursue," the Secretary was advised.

The capability to support the US military responses that might be required had been surveyed. The study revealed no significant logistic or personnel deficiencies until the uppermost levels of action were reached. Shortfalls were anticipated when approaching full implementation of CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64, which involved sending nearly six divisions with supporting air and naval forces to Southeast Asia, and to a lesser extent when implementing the strongest actions of OPLAN 39-65. Meeting these deficiencies would require some mobilization, mainly of Air Force reserve transportation units and Army reserve combat service support units, and the extension of terms of active duty. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought it improbable that the enemy would adopt a course of action that required full implementation of these plans in response. In any event, they said, "risks involved are considered to be more acceptable than the alternatives of continuing the present course or withdrawal from Southeast Asia."[49]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 14 November by recommending that it be forwarded to the President and that its findings be reflected in the report being prepared by the NSC Working Group. The Secretary of Defense replied that both this memorandum and the JCS recommendations of 4 November were being carefully considered during the current interdepartmental study of courses of action in Southeast Asia. He gave assurance that the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would accompany the report when ultimately submitted to the President.[50]

A JCS Program for Increasingly Severe Military Pressures, 18 November

A few days earlier, on 10 November, Secretary McNamara had asked General Wheeler to provide JCS recommendations on courses of action to bring "controlled and increasingly

49. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-955-64 to SecDef, 14 Nov 64, Encl A to JCS 2339/152-1, 9 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (2 Nov 64) sec 1.

50. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 17 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/152-2, 19 Nov 64, same file, sec 2. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Recommended US Courses of Action . . .," 13 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/153-1, 16 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

severe military pressure on North Vietnam."[51] The Joint Chiefs of Staff responded in a memorandum with extensive appendices on 18 November.

At the outset the Joint Chiefs of Staff made clear that in their view the preferred course of action was the one they had already recommended, most recently in their memorandum of 14 November. It would fulfill the "initial hard knock" concept, by destroying at the first blow the enemy's main air capability and POL storage. The current memorandum provided a recommended military program for use if higher authority chose instead to apply controlled, systematically increased pressures against North Vietnam. For such a program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff listed the following objectives as appropriate:

a. Signal the willingness and determination of the United States to employ increasing force in support of national objectives with respect to RVN and Laos; namely, an independent and stable noncommunist government in RVN and a free and neutral Laos under the terms of the Geneva Accords of 1962.

b. Reduce, progressively, DRV support of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos to the extent necessary to tip the balance clearly in favor of the Governments of RVN and Laos by:

(1) Reduction of the amount of support available through destruction of men, material, and supporting facilities;

(2) Reduction of the amount of support available through diversion of DRV resources to increased homeland defenses and alerts; and

(3) Reduction of the rate of delivery of the available support through destruction of bridges and other LOC choke points; staging facilities and transport; and through interruption of movements by attacks on selected fixed targets, armed route reconnaissance, raids, and waterborne interdictions.

51. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/157, 13 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64) sec 1.

c. Punish the DRV for DRV-supported military actions by the Viet Cong/Pathet Lao (VC/PL) against the Governments of RVN and Laos, including the US casualties which have resulted from those actions.

d. Terminate the conflicts in Laos and RVN only under conditions which would result in the achievement of US objectives.

Understandably, the detailed military program was very similar to the one recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 October, which had listed actions in an ascending order of severity. The program submitted on 18 November was more explicit regarding targets and numbers of sorties required; it departed from the October memorandum by omitting the final possible step of committing "US and Allied ground forces into Southeast Asia as required," although it contained a somewhat similar provision under collateral actions.[52]

The specific actions recommended, in sequence, were: 1) resume DESOTO patrols; 2) intensify 34A operations with emphasis on MAROPS and addition of air operations against selected targets; 3) expand air and initiate ground cross-border operations to interdict the flow of enemy personnel and materiel through the Laos Panhandle; 4) at the discretion of Saigon authorities, permit RVN forces to pursue and destroy Viet Cong elements crossing into Cambodia; 5) conduct US armed reconnaissance and interdiction on Routes 6, 7, 8, 12, and 23 in Laos and air strikes against Pathet Lao forces and facilities throughout Laos; 6) conduct low-level reconnaissance of infiltration-associated targets near the Laos border in North Vietnam and attack LOCs in that area and in the DMZ; 7) expand reconnaissance coverage of North Vietnam, with extension to Cambodia if necessary, and conduct air strikes against infiltration-associated targets in North Vietnam (446 sorties against 13 targets south of the 19th Parallel, followed by 594 sorties against 14 targets north of the 19th Parallel); 8) conduct aerial mining of North Vietnamese ports, initiate "a naval quarantine/blockade," and increase the severity of attacks on NVN targets; 9) be prepared to extend maritime operations as necessary to control shipping to Cambodia; 10) conduct air strikes against remaining military and industrial targets in

52. JCSM-902-64, 27 Oct 64, is treated fully in Ch. 12, including the SecDef action of referring it to Amb Taylor, whose comments will be described hereafter.

North Vietnam, completing the 94 Target List; and 11) by amphibious and airborne operations, establish one or more lodgements on the NVN coast, of sufficient magnitude to pose a plausible threat. In addition, US forces should stand ready to take appropriate reprisal action in the event of a NVN attack on the DESOTO patrol or of provocation by the Viet Cong similar to the Bien Hoa raid.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also listed collateral actions to be taken at the time of decision to undertake the program, including evacuation of dependents from Laos and South Vietnam and deployment of US forces for security and deterrent purposes as indicated in the appropriate CINCPAC OPLANs. The further collateral actions were to reintroduce a MAAG-type supply and training mission to Laos and to "deploy additional US (and Thai or other Allied) forces as necessary to: (1) conduct required operations; (2) deter further communist aggression; (3) defend key Mekong points; and (4) logistically support operations."[53]

Three days later the Secretary of Defense indicated that this JCS memorandum had been added to the materials receiving careful consideration during the current interdepartmental study.[54]

The Comments of Ambassador Taylor

A message had been received from Ambassador Taylor on 3 November, commenting at the request of Secretary McNamara on the program of action recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 October. Most of the Ambassador's points were equally applicable to the JCS submission of 18 November and moreover expressed a viewpoint that he was to maintain in the consultations of the following weeks.

Ambassador Taylor indicated his complete agreement with the thesis that the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam required the application of measured military pressures to induce the Hanoi government to stop supporting the Viet Cong

53. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-967-64 to SecDef, 18 Nov 64, Encl A to JCS 2339/157-1, 15 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64) sec 2.

54. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 21 Nov 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2339/157-1, 24 Nov 64, same file.

"and to use its authority to cause VC to cease or at least to moderate their depredations." But unless the United States was going to react very soon to the Bien Hoa attack along the lines he had recommended, the Ambassador favored delay in instituting more positive measures until the new Huong government found its footing. Action during this interim period might consist of intensified 34A operations, with the addition of air strikes against selected targets, conducted covertly by the VNAF. As he had in other recent messages, Ambassador Taylor opposed the JCS suggestion that US aircraft be used against the Viet Cong, supplementing the VNAF and FARM GATE efforts, but he stated the reason somewhat differently. "It amounts to departure for no clear gain from the principle that the Vietnamese fight their own war in SVN."

The Ambassador also opposed DESOTO patrols, except for essential intelligence purposes. "If we are seeking an excuse for action, it is to our interest to strike Hanoi for its malefactions in SVN and not for actions in the Bay of Tonkin against the US Navy." Besides, he noted, the most recent Tonkin Gulf incident, the firing at radar-detected targets on the night of 18 September, had "developed in such a way as to reduce our ability to use subsequent episodes as a credible basis for action." US action should be tied to Hanoi's support of the Viet Cong, not to the defense of purely US interests, and ample justification was available. He cited infiltration activities, the Bien Hoa raid, and increasing VC sabotage of the Saigon-Da Nang railway.

Ambassador Taylor saw "nothing but disadvantage in further stirring up the Cambodian border" by allowing hot pursuit. "We don't often catch the fleeing VC in the heart of SVN," he observed; "I see little likelihood of doing much better in Cambodia." He cautioned that Prince Sihanouk's reaction might generate difficulties outweighing the gain.

The Ambassador's comments on the JCS recommendations of 27 October closed with "a final word":

> It is well to remind ourselves that "too much" in this matter of coercing Hanoi may be as bad as "too little." At some point, we will need a relatively cooperative leadership in Hanoi willing to wind up the VC insurgency on terms satisfactory to us and our

SVN allies. What we don't want is an expanded war in SEA and an unresolved guerrilla problem in SVN.[55]

Two further messages from Ambassador Taylor a week later provided additional information and comment pertinent to the study going on in Washington. He was convinced that "the next few months will be critical to the success of the new government and to our efforts to bring about some degree of stabilization in the internal political situation of SVN." Even under favorable circumstances it would require three to four months to get the Huong government functioning effectively. The Ambassador planned to encourage the GVN to establish a series of short-term objectives that were reasonably attainable. Success in these endeavors would "provide a point of departure from which we can later undertake more ambitious projects, military and civilian, inside and outside SVN."[56]

The Ambassador reported on 10 November that the Mission Council was giving some thought to defining the minimum level of government required to provide a basis for mounting military pressures against the North. "I would describe that minimum government as one capable of maintaining law and order in the urban areas, of securing vital military bases from VC attacks, and gearing its efforts with those of the USG." But, Taylor asked, "do we withhold all action against the DRV (except those of the morale-sustaining type) until we get this minimum government? What if we never get it?"

> My own answer would be that it is highly desirable to have this kind of minimum government before accepting the risks inherent in any escalation program. However, if the government falters and gives good reason to believe that it will never attain the desired level of performance, I would favor going against the North anyway. The purpose of such an attack would be to give pulmotor treatment for a government in extremis and to make sure that the DRV does not get off unscathed in any final settlement.

The Ambassador's message revealed some of the difficulties of working with a people among whom willingness to sacrifice for a larger national purpose was not a common attribute.

---

55. (TS) Msg, Saigon 251 to OSD, 3 Nov 64, JCS IN 12008, OCJCS File, "Vietnam/November 64," Book 2.

56. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1440 to State, 9 Nov 64, JCS IN 17815, same file.

> At the moment the problem is not so much with the government, which means well, as with major outside groups such as some Buddhists, Catholics and politicians who refuse to give it support and are trying to tear it down before it even has a chance. . . . I point to articles in the American press showing clearly that the American people are becoming impatient with the politicking in Saigon with enemy at the gates of the city. My Vietnamese listeners never argue back but sadly acquiesce in the validity of such judgments. Unfortunately, they do not know how to remedy the situation, except at some damage to what they feel are their personal interests, and for all too many Vietnamese this is unthinkable.

Yet the South Vietnamese were "an individually capable and courageous people who do not want to be ruled by the North," and there was a surprising degree of vitality and resiliency in the country at large that was generally unaffected by the political turmoil in Saigon.

> Thus we must hang on, doing our best in the hope that out of this welter some real leadership will eventually emerge, and play for the breaks. Taking the initiative against the North is one-way to force the breaks.[57]

Comments of Mr. Rostow

As the NSC Working Group continued its study of courses of action, another view was heard, differing considerably from that of Ambassador Taylor or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mr. Walt W. Rostow, Chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, addressed a memorandum to Secretary McNamara on 16 November, following a conversation the previous day. "I am concerned that too much thought is being given to the actual damage we do in the North, not enough thought to the signal we wish to send," Rostow wrote. The signal, he believed, should consist of three parts:

> a) damage to the North is now to be inflicted because they are violating the 1954 and 1962 Accords;
>
> b) we are ready and able to go much further than our initial act of damage;

57. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1445 to State, 10 Nov 64, same file.

c) we are ready and able to meet any level of escalation they might mount in response, if they are so minded.

Rostow was convinced that "we should not go forward into the next stage without a US ground force commitment of some kind." Placing US combat troops in South Vietnam, and even in Laos, would make clear to Hanoi's leaders that they would encounter US strength on the ground if they chose invasion as the response to air attacks on their homeland. Also, withdrawal of these US ground forces could be an important bargaining counter in subsequent negotiations. "Ground forces can sit during a conference more easily than we can maintain a series of mounting air and naval pressures."

As for the air strikes against the North, Rostow thought the first ones should be designed merely to establish that the North Vietnamese would thenceforward be subject to attack for their continuing violations of the 1954 and 1962 agreements. Accordingly the initial operation should be "as limited and as unsanguinary as possible." It should establish the principle rather than wreak major damage.[58]

By 17 November the NSC Working Group had prepared a preliminary draft report for comment. By that date, also, it was established that Ambassador Taylor would arrive in Washington by 27 November to participate in the discussions. The further stages of consultation were expected to produce recommendations on a course of action in Southeast Asia for submission to the President by 1 December.[59]

58. (TS-GP 1) Memo, W.W. Rostow to SecDef, "Military Dispositions and Political Signals," 16 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2343/493, 18 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (16 Nov 64). In the above account the fact that Rostow intended that US troops be introduced specifically into RVN and possibly the Laos corridor is drawn from a later memo along the same lines; (TS-GP 3) Memo, W.W. Rostow to SecState, "Some Observations As We Come to the Crunch in Southeast Asia," 23 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/162, 25 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (23 Nov 64). Both Rostow memos were circulated to the JCS, but their author, soon to depart for a conference in South America, apparently took no part in the later discussions.

59. (S-GP 1) JCS 2339/161, 17 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1.

Further discussion and development awaited the arrival of Ambassador Taylor, who was expected in Washington on 26 November.

The Views of Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV

A courier had already carried the initial NSCWG working papers to Ambassador Taylor. On 24 November Admiral Mustin was dispatched to Hawaii with copies of the Bundy-McNaughton summary paper of 21 November and the JCS memorandum of 23 November, to give to Admiral Sharp and to the Ambassador during his stop at CINCPAC Headquarters en route to Washington.[9]

Just before Ambassador Taylor's departure from Saigon, General Westmoreland had provided him an assessment of the military situation. COMUSMACV was pleased with the way the RVN armed forces had "weathered the political storm over the past four months." His earlier concern over the disruption and disunity that might be caused by reprisals against officers for their political or religious affiliations had lessened, since there had been few instances of personnel changes for reasons of political expediency. Still more encouraging was the substantial increase in strength throughout the RVNAF. The results of a special call-up of men in the 20-25 age group had exceeded expectations. Beginning in late October about 10,000 men had reported for induction, and the conscription drive had also spurred volunteering. General Westmoreland believed that the 1964 year-end strength goals of the regular forces would be met by 1 February 1965.

Improved promotion policies, pay, and dependent housing continued to have favorable effect on armed forces morale, and capabilities were increasing. The VNAF would soon have four combat-ready A-1H squadrons and under current plans would activate two more during 1965. A fourth VNAF H-34 helicopter squadron would be operational by March. General Westmoreland reported improvement in VNAF pilot proficiency and favorable impact of the increased US advisory effort throughout South Vietnam. At the paramilitary level, however, the Popular Forces, although increasing in number, had "failed to achieve an effective identity with the local rural population." This problem required urgent attention.

9. (S) Msg, CJCS to Amb Taylor, Saigon, JCS 5119-64, 23 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

that senior officials would have to be carefully briefed in preparation for questions from Congress and the press on why the earlier, lower estimates had been discarded.[7]

By this stage of the consultations the Joint Chiefs of Staff at least had the satisfaction of knowing that the Option B being discussed was a true statement of their own concept of B, and not an imprecise version drafted by someone else. But the prospect of seeing it adopted as the US policy appeared slight. Certain revised pages for the Bundy-McNaughton draft summary paper of 21 November were issued after the 24 November meeting, but none of them affected its assessment of Option B. The paper indicated that at some stage during application of the strong military measures of Option B, "Hanoi might decide that the pain it was incurring was greater than the gains of continuing its present strategy," and the communist leaders might agree to negotiate toward some form of restoration of the 1954 agreements. But the paper also sketched an alternative prospect:

> South Vietnam might come apart while we were pursuing the course of action. In such a case, we would be in the position of having got into an almost irreversible sequence of military actions, but finding ourselves fighting on behalf of a country that no longer wished to continue the struggle itself.

Option B was judged to have "considerably higher risks of major military conflict with Hanoi and possibly Communist China."

> If we found ourselves thus committed to a major military effort, the results could be extremely adverse to our position in other areas, and perhaps to American resolve to maintain present world-wide policies, unless we achieved a clearly satisfactory outcome in a fairly short time.[8]

---

7. (TS-GP 3) AsstSecState (FE), "Memorandum of Executive Committee Meeting, November 24, 1964," 25 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia, Jul 64-Jun 65. The above discussion also draws on a memo circulated before the meeting, defining the issues to be discussed; (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState et al., "Issues Raised by Papers on Southeast Asia," 24 Nov 64, same file.

8. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState et al., "Attached Papers Concerning Southeast Asia," 26 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia, Jul 64-Jun 65. (TS) Revised Draft, "Summary: Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 26 Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov. 64."

or Option C would improve GVN performance and make possible an improvement in the security situation." It was also generally believed that if Hanoi did withdraw its support of the Viet Cong, the security problem in South Vietnam could be solved in time if the GVN held together. "However, the struggle would still be long."

Of particular concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the fact that most of the high-level advisors believed that Option B was significantly more likely to lead to major escalation of the hostilities than Option C. For this and other reasons most of the conferees dissented from the statement in the original NSCWG draft that Option B offered the best prospect of attaining the full US objectives. On the other hand, they agreed that the loss of South Vietnam would be "somewhat more serious than stated" in the original draft--a shift toward the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

One question discussed at the meeting on 24 November was: "Can Option C be carried out in practice under the klieg lights of a democracy, in view of its requirements that we maintain a credible threat of major action while at the same time seeking to negotiate, even if quietly?" It had been raised chiefly by advocates of Option A, who pointed to the difficulties experienced in pursuing a policy similar to C during the negotiating period of the Korean war, 1951-1953. Secretary Bundy recorded the following conclusion:

> There was a consensus that the requirement of Option C--maintaining military pressure and a credible threat of major action while at the same time being prepared to negotiate--<u>could</u> in practice be carried out. The difficulties and domestic pressures were noted, but it was felt that continuing military actions could handle such pressures and also pressures for premature negotiations or concessions.

One feature of the action contemplated to justify and explain a program of stronger US operations was the public release of information on enemy infiltration. At the meeting on 24 November concern was expressed that the latest reports from the field, estimating infiltration at a substantially higher level not only currently but for past years, might call forth charges of "framing evidence to suit out policy." It was agreed

Course C' is not recommended as the preferred course of action. However, should a controlled program of systematically increased pressures be directed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend the program of actions contained in JCSM-967-64.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 23 November to the Secretary of Defense by recommending that "Course B, as defined in this paper and which offers the best probability of attaining the stated objectives, be implemented at this time." The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Wheeler as their representative in high-level meetings, were to adhere to this recommendation throughout the subsequent consultations.

Appendices to the memorandum discussed each of the five courses of action in detail and made still clearer the advantage the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw in Course B as compared to the others. "A sharp blow, because of the boldness and resoluteness of its delivery, will discourage rather than encourage the enemy to escalate," they said. It would convey an unmistakable signal of US determination and would confront the communist leaders with the necessity of making a single, major decision, at once. The Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that if Course C or C' was followed, the enemy might be led to marshal his resources and draw aid from allies to match each progressive step in the US program with a new level of reaction. In this way a scale of hostilities might be reached that hardly differed from that of Course B, but it would lack the advantage of B's strong initial strikes against the communist air capability and POL storage. Under Course C, it might be said, Hanoi's leaders could keep in the game by advancing a few white chips on every round. Under Course B they could continue only by putting a stack of blue chips in the center of the table.[6]

A meeting of principal advisors was convened on 24 November to discuss the key issues, attended by Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Mr. McCone, Under Secretary of State George Ball and Assistant Secretary William Bundy, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, and General Wheeler. In a subsequent memorandum Secretary Bundy recorded it as the group's opinion that the situation in South Vietnam would deteriorate further under Option A, "but that there was a significant chance that the actions proposed under Option B

6. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-982-64 to SecDef, 23 Nov 64, Encl A to JCS 2339/161-2, 22 Nov 64; JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1.

c. Course C: Is inconclusive as to accomplishment of over-all objectives, because it is undertaken without a clear determination to see things through in full. Its uncertain pace could permit and encourage enemy build-ups to counter our own. Thus it would raise the risks and costs to us of each separate military undertaking, would invite further escalations on the part of the enemy, and would make miscalculations regarding the resolve and determination of the United States more likely. At any specific level of intensity, this course of action appears likely to entail the highest military risks of those considered, and to foster progressively increasing adverse political pressures in many quarters.

d. Course C': Offers a probability of achieving our objectives through progressively reducing the DRV support to the insurgencies. Its systematic force build-up would add further deterrence to possible CHICOM intervention, and should make miscalculation of US resolve less likely. Should escalation occur, it can be dealt with adequately and on terms more favorable than those applicable in Course C above. From a strictly military point of view this course of action involves probable higher military costs and casualties than Course B, for example, through failure to eliminate DRV air and DRV facilities available to CHICOM air at the outset. The determination signaled by this course should enlist substanial US public and world support, while giving pause to the opposition.

e. Course B: Offers the best probability of achieving our objectives at the least risk, casualties, and cost, and with the least probability of enemy miscalculation. In addition to its military advantages and its reduced probability of escalation, this course of action offers greater psychological impact and presents to all concerned a clear and unequivocal picture of US determination and US objectives. The possibility of intervention by the CHICOMs is judged to be less likely than in Course C'. There should be no problems beyond those in Courses C or C' in dealing with any world opinion which might oppose this course of action.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff rejected Course A' because it abandoned the US objectives, and Course A because it offered no reasonable prospect of achieving them. They did not recommend Course C, "because it is inconclusive as to attainment of our objectives, yet entails potentially high risks and costs."

Course C' was a more resolute version of C, bringing it into conformity with the program the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended a few days earlier for use if higher authority chose to apply controlled, systematically increased military pressures against North Vietnam. They defined it as follows:

> Undertake a controlled program of graduated military pressures, systematically applied against the DRV, in coordination with appropriate political pressures. This course is distinguished from Course C by the advance decision to continue military pressures, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward US national objectives. The military program for this course of action is the program set forth in JCSM-967-64, dated 18 November 1964.

Finally, the strongest was Course B, as redefined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

> Undertake a controlled program of intense military pressures against the DRV, swiftly yet deliberately applied, designed to have major military and psychological impact from the outset, and accompanied by appropriate political pressures. The program would be undertaken on the basis that it would be carried through, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward US national objectives; it would be designed, however, for suspension short of those limits if objectives were earlier achieved. The military program for this course of action is the program recommended in JCSM-955-64, dated 14 November 1964.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed the probable consequences of the five courses of action as follows:

> a. Course A': Abandons our objectives, sacrifices the military advantages attainable from a firm position on the mainland of Southeast Asia, and initiates progressive deterioration in our military position throughout the Western Pacific and in our political position world-wide.
>
> b. Course A: Puts some added demands on the DRV, but not commensurate with those imposed by the DRV on RVN. Thus it offers no identifiable probability of accomplishing our objectives, nor of alleviating the critical situation in RVN. The present possibility of internal collapse in RVN could lead to accelerated take-over by the communists, and entails substantial risks to US personnel and equipment in country during the attendant disorders.

deliberate approach, and should be designed to give the US the option at any time to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not. These decisions would be made from time to time in view of all relevant factors.

The negotiating part of this course of action would have to be played largely by ear. But in essense we would be indicating from the outset a willingness to negotiate in an affirmative sense. We would at the outset clearly be sticking to our full present objectives, but we would have to accept the possibility that, as the whole situation developed, we might not achieve these full objectives unless we were prepared to take the greater risks envisaged under Option B. In essence, Option C is a medium risk/medium hope of accomplishment option.[5]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed there were five alternatives open to the United States, rather than three. Two of the five corresponded to Options A and C in the NSCWG draft. The draft's Option B, however, they found to be "not a valid formulation of any authoritative views know to the Joint Chiefs of Staff." On the one hand it did not feature the strong initial blow at critical NVN targets that they recommended; on the other it appeared to commit the United States to a nonstop campaign against the targets of the 94 Target List, without pauses or negotiating probes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed a substitute version that did conform to their views.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed the five options for the Secretary of Defense in ascending order of severity and determination. Course A', they said, was implicit in the NSCWG draft but not separately identified. It was to "terminate commitments in RVN and Laos, and withdraw under conditions which impair as little as possible our standing in the eyes of the world." The second option, Course A, remained as originally defined: "continue actions within our present policies, including feasible improvements within the boundaries of those policies."

Course C (the original Option C) the Joint Chiefs of Staff characterized in a way that foreshadowed their subsequent rejection of it:

Undertake a program of graduated military and political initiatives to apply additional pressures against the DRV, without necessarily determining in advance to what degree we will commit ourselves to achieve our objectives, or at what point we might stop to negotiate, or what our negotiation objectives might be.

---

5. (TS-GP 1) NSCWG, Draft Working Paper, Section III, 17 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1A.

of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos. Early implementation of political and military actions designed to achieve these objectives, in addition to continued aggressive programs in SVN, offers the greatest assurance of success.[4]

As possible courses of action the NSCWG draft had identified three options open to the United States:

> Option A would be to continue present policies indefinitely. This would involve maximum assistance within South Viet-Nam, together with limited external actions in Laos and by the GVN covertly against North Viet-Nam. We would continue to seek every possible additional measure for expansion of the present effort that would fit within the present policy framework. We would also take specific individual reprisal actions not only against such incidents as the Gulf of Tonkin attack but also against any recurrence of VC "spectaculars" in South Viet-Nam (particularly but not solely if such spectaculars were aimed at US installations). Under this option, the aim of such reprisal actions would be to deter and punish such VC actions in the south, but not to a degree that would create strong international negotiating pressures. Basic to this option is the continued rejection of negotiation in the hope that the situation will improve . . . .
>
> Option B would call for continuing present policies as above, but its key ingredient would be a systematic program of military pressures against the north, meshing at some point with negotiation, but with pressure actions to be continued at a fairly rapid pace and without interruption until we achieve our present objective of getting Hanoi completely out of South Viet-Nam and an independent and secure South Viet-Nam reestablished. This option can be labelled a "fast/full squeeze." Basic to it is that we would approach any discussions for negotiation with absolutely inflexible insistence on our present objectives.
>
> Option C might be labelled "progressive squeeze-and-talk." It would consist of present policies, plus an orchestration of (1) communications with Hanoi and/or Peiping, and (2) additional graduated military moves against infiltration targets, first in Laos and then in the DRV, and then against other targets in North Viet-Nam. The military scenario should give the impression of a steady

4. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-982-64 to SecDef, 23 Nov 64, Encl A to JCS 239/161-2, 22 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1.

Terminate the personnel and materiel costs attendant to pursuing a long, drawn-out conflict.

Conversely, a US withdrawal would have serious consequences. It would:

a. Presage the collapse of the US position in SEAsia and the consequent weakening of the US defense posture in the Western Pacific.

b. Presage the early altering of the Free World orientation of the remaining countries of SEAsia, followed by uncertainties as to Nationalist China, Japan and Korea.

c. Increase the vulnerability of the Indian subcontinent to communist penetration.

d. Increase the strength and influence of Communist China and decrease its vulnerability to US actions.

e. Tend to isolate Australia and New Zealand.

f. Portray US unwillingness or inability to deal with "wars of national liberation" and consequently encourage the communists to extend such "wars" into other areas.

g. Weaken US prestige and influence throughout the world.

In their memorandum of 23 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff turned next to another basic matter: the US objectives. They cited NSAM 288 of 17 March 1964 and NSAM 249 of 25 June 1963 as the source of their understanding that the established national objectives included "a stable and independent noncommunist government in the Republic of South Vietnam, and a stabilized situation in Laos which conforms to the Geneva Accords of 1962." The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered these objectives "valid and essential to maintaining the US security position world-wide."

They further consider that the best probability of success in attaining these ends will be afforded by achieving the prerequisite objective of causing the cessation of North Vietnamese (DRV) support and direction

In the memorandum that they addreessed to the Secretary of Defense on 23 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that Southeast Asia was "an area of major strategic importance to the United States, the loss of which would lead to grave political and military consequences in the entire Western Pacific, and to serious political consequences world-wide." An appendix to the memorandum supported this view in detail, spelling out the strategic importance of Southeast Asia in the following terms:

a. The immediate strategic importance of SEAsia lies in the political value that can accrue to the United States through a successful stand against the communist insurgencies in RVN and Laos. Also of vital importance is the psychological impact that a firm position by the United States will have on the countries of the world--both free and communist.

b. RVN is a military keystone in SEAsia and is symbolic of US determination in Asia. The United States is committed in the eyes of the world to the defense of RVN as a matter of national prestige, credibility, and honor with respect to world-wide pledges and declaratory national policy.

c. SEAsia is strategically situated between Communist China and the Indian sub-continent and Australia. It is the southern anchor of the US and Free World defense posture in the Western Pacific.

d. SEAsia is of unique economic importance as a major source of rice for the food-deficit countries of Asia and is among the world's primary sources of natural rubber and tin. Control of the area, therefore, would not only be important to communist economic development, but would convey additional political leverage in dealing with countries which depend upon Southeast Asia's resources.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed the advantages that would follow from a US success in South Vietnam, including that it would:

Demonstrate to the world US will and determination to fulfill its commitments.

Discredit "wars of national liberation."

Open a new era of confidence in SEAsia with the consequent increased possibilities for improving other potentially unstable situations in the area.

government in South Vietnam could collapse at almost any time, though the chances seem better than even that it can hang on for the next few weeks or months and thus afford a political base for US-South Vietnamese prosecution of the war.

B. North Vietnam and the Viet Cong. North Vietnamese leaders appear confident that Viet Cong victory is near. They may direct the Viet Cong to undertake increased attacks on US and South Vietnamese units, but they are almost certainly not anxious to become involved in war with the US, and--given a continuation of present circumstances--will probably continue to be careful to avoid the costs and risks of major, overt involvement in the Viet Cong insurrection. Meanwhile, despite a large and growing North Vietnamese contribution to the Viet Cong insurrection, the primary sources of Communist strength in the South remain indigenous. Even if severely damaged, North Vietnam--should it choose--could still direct and support the Viet Cong insurrection at a reduced level. Increased US pressures on North Vietnam would be effective only if they persuaded Hanoi that the price of maintaining the insurrection in the South would be too great and that it would be preferable to reduce its aid to the Viet Cong and direct at least a temporary reduction of Viet Cong activity.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff gave intensive consideration to the development of their views on the NSCWG working papers. The Joint Staff had identified a number of issues requiring comment, the first being concern that the papers contained "an understatement of the gravity to the United States, both militarily and politically, of the possible loss of South Vietnam to the communists." In order to address this point, the Joint Chiefs of Staff set forth basic considerations in full in their response. They also drew together in a single integrated treatment the two major expressions of views they had recently submitted: JCSM-955-64, 14 November, containing the JCS preferred course of action to cause North Vietnam to cease supporting and directing the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam (now being called "the fast full squeeze"), and JCSM-967-64, 18 November, containing a program of graduated military pressures to reduce NVN support of the insurgencies ("the progressive squeeze").[3]

3. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/161-1, 19 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1. The JCS submissions of 14 and 18 November have been treated in detail in Ch. 13.

Chapter 14

THE PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS OF 1 DECEMBER 1964

JCS Comments on Initial Policy Draft, 23 November

Following the Viet Cong mortar attack on the Bien Hoa Air Base on 1 November 1964, an NSC Working Group (NSCWG) headed by Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy had been established to survey all possible US courses of action in Southeast Asia. Working-level inputs from the Joint Staff were supplied by the Director for Operations, Vice Admiral L. M. Mustin, USN. By mid-November the NSCWG had completed a set of draft working papers and had distributed it to the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Central Intelligence.[1]

The schedule called for submission of comments by 23 November. Secretary Bundy indicated that the comments should be directed at the issues raised in the NSCWG working papers, not at improving their language, since the final product would be a shorter summary paper. A first draft of the summary paper, written by Secretary Bundy and Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) John T. McNaughton, was circulated on 21 November, for revision in the light of the scheduled discussion of the issues.[2]

The intelligence assessment of the current situation in South Vietnam that underlay the material in the NSCWG working papers (given here as summarized in the Bundy-McNaughton paper) was as follows:

> A. South Vietnam. The political situation remains critical and extremely fragile. The security situation in the countryside continues to deteriorate. Although it is possible that the new government in Saigon can improve South Vietnamese esprit and effectiveness, this appears unlikely on the basis of present indications. Non-Communist

1. (TS-GP 1) NSCWG, Draft Working Paper, 13 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1A. (TS) J3M-2413-64 to D/JS, 7 Nov 64; (TS) DJSM-1804-64 to CJCS, 10 Nov 64; same file, sec 1.

2. (S) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecDef, Dir CIA, and CJCS, "Review of Working Drafts on Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 17 Nov 64; (S-GP 1) JCS 2339/161, 17 Nov 64; JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) Draft, "Summary: Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 21 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/161-3, 23 Nov 64, same file, se

Although encouraged by the current and prospective increases in the effectiveness of the RVNAF, General Westmoreland said that "the pacification program as a whole has not made comparable progress, and in many important areas has regressed." He hoped to induce all levels of RVN command and administration to set definite, attainable short-range goals whose achievement would restore momentum to the pacification effort. Further, he believed that US influence in planning, programming, and execution at the Saigon level must be increased. The establishment of US advisors in the central government offices was necessary "if the civil and military effort is to be coordinated and managed effectively." Finally, there was the matter of North Vietnam's support of the insurgency. "The external threat we must deal with as soon as some governmental stability is manifest and the counter insurgency campaign makes some progress."[10]

General Westmoreland's comments on this last point were set forth more fully in a message to General Wheeler on 27 November. He described the one respect in which his views differed from those being carried to Washington by Ambassador Taylor, as follows:

> I believe we must assure ourselves that GVN is established on reasonably firm political, military and psychological base before we risk the great strains that may be incurred by vigorous external operations. Ambassadors Taylor and Johnson tend to think that we can't wait for these conditions to develop and that present government requires morale boost by way of immediate dramatic action well beyond pattern of present policy. I feel that there is good prospect of things holding together until March or April. By that time RVNAF should be in far better shape to support expanded external operations and to capitalize on blows to VC morale which must inevitably result from expanded operations to North.

General Westmoreland recommended following Option A until "government has predictable stability for a few months," there was "some positive momentum in pacification," and several other conditions were satisfied. For action thereafter he favored Option C rather than Option B. With regard to the latter COMUSMACV said, "Once this option is exercised, US will be committed to follow through, regardless. His further objections were that "we don't want to appear to be taking on GVN's fight for them at this

10. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6191 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov 64."

stage," and that GVN officials might become "unhealthily preoccupied with external operations to detriment of pacification." He thought that friends and enemies alike might interpret Option B as "an act of desperation on part of US to salvage lost cause."[11]

Admiral Sharp had already been heard from, on 23 November. He favored immediate adoption of a program resembling the JCS Course C'. "We still have not made it clear to Hanoi and Peiping that the cost of pursuing their current objectives will become prohibitive," CINCPAC wrote.

> What is needed is a campaign of systematically and gradually increased measured military pressures against the DRV conducted in conjunction with a coordinated diplomatic and psychological program. This campaign would aim to convince the communists that destruction will continue to occur until they cease supporting the insurgency . . . .
>
> The required military actions in this campaign call for initial air strikes on infiltration routes, moving to infiltration-associated targets and then expanding to other important targets. Geographically, the air strikes would commence in the panhandle of Laos, move into the southern part of NVN and gradually move northward. The pattern would be systematic and progressive attacks of ever-increasing intensity and severity. However, sufficient time would be allowed between strikes to determine DRV and CHICOM reaction.

This option would not commit the United States irrevocably to escalation of the hostilities to any particular level, CINCPAC said, and it would not be necessary to strike Phuc Yen until such time as the enemy aircraft based there began to interfere with US operations.

Admiral Sharp held that the justification for such a controlled program of attacks had already been established by the Bien Hoa raid and other acts of the enemy. There was reason to believe that infiltration and military activity in the Laos Panhandle were increasing. "It is time to reverse this trend."[12]

With respect to the Huong government in South Vietnam, CINCPAC had merely expressed the hope that it would attain some stability and effectiveness. In fact, however, a new round of

---

11. (TS) Msg, COMUSMAC MAC 6164 to CJCS, 27 Nov 64, same file.
12. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230515Z Nov 64, JCS IN 32601, same file.

public turmoil had started. On Sunday, 22 November, some 5,000 demonstrators had marched on Huong's official residence in Saigon, demanding dismissal of the government. They were dispersed by the police, who used tear gas and acted with a firmness that appeared to promise fulfillment of Huong's earlier declaration that demonstrations would be suppressed.

Four days later, just as Ambassador Taylor was preparing to depart, a Buddhist leader demanded that the High National Council express lack of confidence in Prime Minister Huong, requiring his resignation. The HNC rejected the demand, however, and in the face of continuing demonstrations the government imposed a curfew on 25 November, followed by martial law two days later.

A DIA assessment supplied to General Wheeler on 27 November said that "at no time during the past 18 months have oppositionists displayed any sense of responsibility towards the national government." They fomented street demonstrations to achieve their personal aims, eliciting a response particularly from the students and intellectuals in the cities. The most recent disturbances arose from dissatisfaction with the composition of Huong's cabinet and could be traced to certain Buddhist leaders and to one militant Catholic priest, each of whom apparently believed Huong should have sought his approval of the officials selected. Also, "South Vietnamese politicians, disgruntled because of their exclusion from posts providing opportunity for personal gain, have expressed strong opposition." The DIA report noted that one of the foremost Buddhist leaders, Tri Quang, was not actively opposing the government. He believed its downfall was inevitable, making overt action unnecessary.[13]

Doubt regarding the survival of the Huong government, despite admirable qualities displayed by the Prime Minister himself, was one of the themes of the paper Ambassador Taylor submitted to the other conferees upon his arrival in Washington on 26 November. This paper and the Ambassador's subsequent counsel were of high importance in shaping the outcome of the deliberations.

---

13. (S-GP 3) Memo, Dir, DIA to CJCS, "Appraisal of Current Situation in South Viet-Nam," 27 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

After a year of changing and ineffective government, the counterinsurgency program country-wide is bogged down and will require heroic treatment to assure revival. . . . The northern provinces of South Viet-Nam which a year ago were considered almost free of Viet-Cong are now in deep trouble. In the Quang Ngai-Binh Dinh area, the gains of the Viet-Cong have been so serious that once more we are threatened with a partition of the country by a Viet-Cong salient driven to the sea. The pressure on this area has been accompanied by continuous sabotage of the railroad and of Highway 1 which in combination threaten an economic strangulation of the northern provinces.

This deterioration of the pacification program has taken place in spite of the very heavy losses inflicted almost daily on the Viet-Cong and the increase in strength and professional competence of the Armed Forces of South Viet-Nam. Not only have the Viet-Cong apparently made good their losses, but of late, have demonstrated three new or newly expanded tactics: The use of stand-off mortar fire against important targets, as in the attack on the Bien Hoa airfield; economic strangulation on limited areas; finally, the stepped-up infiltration of DRV military personnel moving from the north.

"Perhaps more serious than the downward trend in the pacification situation, because it is the prime cause, is the continued weakness of the central government." Ambassador Taylor saw small chance of a long life for the Huong government. "Indeed, in view of the factionalism existing in Saigon and elsewhere throughout the country, it is impossible to foresee a stable and effective government under any name in anything like the near future."

It is an inescapable fact that there is no national tendency toward team play or mutual loyalty to be found among many of the leaders and political groups within South Viet-Nam. Given time, many of these conditions will undoubtedly change for the better, but we are unfortunately pressed for time and unhappily perceive no short-term solution for the establishment of stable and sound government.

So long as there was no effective central government with which to mesh the US effort, "the latter is a spinning wheel unable to transmit impulsion to the machinery of the GVN."

The ability of the Viet-Cong continuously to rebuild their units and to make good their losses is one of the mysteries of this guerrilla war. We are aware of the recruiting methods by which local boys are induced or compelled to join the Viet-Cong ranks and have some general

appreciation of the amount of infiltration of personnel from the outside. Yet taking both of these sources into account, we still find no plausible explanation of the continued strength of the Viet-Cong if our data on Viet-Cong losses are even approximately correct. Not only do the Viet-Cong units have the recuperative powers of the phoenix, but they have an amazing ability to maintain morale. Only in rare cases have we found evidences of bad morale among Viet-Cong prisoners or recorded in captured Viet-Cong documents.

North Vietnamese direction and support took the form of "endless radioed orders and instructions" and the continuous infiltration of trained cadre and military equipment by land and water.

If, as the evidence shows, we are playing a losing game in South Viet-Nam, it is high time we change and find a better way. To change the situation, it is quite clear that we need to do three things: first, establish an adequate government in SVN; second, improve the conduct of the counterinsurgency campaign; and, finally, persuade or force the DRV to stop its aid to the Viet-Cong and to use its directive powers to make the Viet-Cong desist from their efforts to overthrow the government of South Viet-Nam.

Given the time limitation, Ambassador Taylor wrote, the United States would have to settle for something considerably less than an ideal government in South Vietnam.

However, it is hard to visualize our being willing to make added outlays of resources and to run increasing political risks without an allied government which, at least, can speak for and to its people, can maintain law and order in the principal cities, can provide local protection for the vital military bases and installations, can raise and support Armed Forces, and can gear its efforts to those of the United States. Anything less than this would hardly be a government at all, and under such circumstances, the United States Government might do better to carry forward the war on a purely unilateral basis.

The United States should continue to aid, advise, and encourage the South Vietnamese government, try to restrain the minority groups seeking its overthrow, and use all possible influence to maintain continuity of both organization and leadership. To raise the morale and confidence of the government and people of South Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor favored attacks against

the infiltration system in Laos and increased OPLAN 34A operations against North Vietnam by sea and air. While the latter would be covert in the sense of being disavowed, "their occurrence could be made known in such a way as to give the morale lift which is desired." The United States also should launch reprisal bombings for major Viet Cong depredations in South Vietnam.

> All these actions, however, may not be sufficient to hold the present government upright. If it fails, we are going to be in deep trouble, with limited resources for subsequent actions. It is true that we could try again with another civilian government but the odds against it would be even higher than those which have confronted the Huong government. We might try in a second civilian government to take over operational control by U.S. officials if indeed the GVN would agree to this change. However, there are more objections to this form of U. S. intervention than there are arguments in favor of it. Another alternative would be to invite back a military dictatorship on the model of that headed of late by General Khanh. However, Khanh did very poorly when he was on the spot and we have little reason to believe that a successor military government could be more effective. Finally, we always have the option of withdrawing, leaving the internal situation to the Vietnamese, and limiting our contribution to military action directed at North Viet-Nam. Such action, while assuring that North Viet-Nam would pay a price for its misdeeds in the South, would probably not save South Viet-Nam from eventual loss to the Viet Cong.

As for bringing military pressures to bear on North Vietnam, the Ambassador noted that the first rung of the ladder of escalation would have been occupied by "the initiation of intensified covert operations, anti-infiltration attacks in Laos, and reprisal bombings mentioned above as a means of stiffening South Vietnamese morale." Beyond that, attacks on North Vietnam could be mounted, beginning with infiltration-related targets such as staging areas, training facilities, communications centers, and the like. Progressively enlarged, these attacks could extend ultimately to "the destruction of all important fixed targets in North Viet-Nam and to the interdiction of movement on all lines of communication."

The undertaking of such a program would require prior consultation with Prime Minister Huong and General Khanh. "They will be taking on risks as great or greater than ours," and

their views would deserve a serious hearing. "If, as is likely, they urge us with enthusiasm, we should take advantage of the opportunity to nail down certain important points such as:

a. The GVN undertakes (1) to maintain the strength of its military and police forces; (2) to replace incompetent military commanders and province chiefs and to leave the competent ones in place for an indefinite period; (3) to suppress disorders and demonstrations; (4) to establish effective resources control; and (5) to obtain U.S. concurrence for all military operations outside of South Viet-Nam.

b. The U.S. undertakes responsibility for the air and maritime defense of South Viet-Nam.

c. The GVN undertakes responsibility for the land defense of South Viet-Nam to include the protection of all U.S. nationals and installations.

d. The GVN accepts the U.S. statement (to be prepared) of war aims and circumstances for negotiations.

Shortly after initiating an escalation program it will be important to communicate with the DRV and the CHICOMs to establish certain essential points in the minds of their leaders. The first is that under no circumstances will the United States let the DRV go unscathed and reap the benefits of its nefarious actions in South Viet-Nam without paying a heavy price. Furthermore, we will not accept any statement from the DRV to the effect that it is not responsible for the Viet-Cong insurgency and that it cannot control the Viet-Cong actions. We know better and will act accordingly. However, the enemy should know that the United States objectives are limited. We are not seeking to unify North and South Viet-Nam; we are seeking no permanent military presence in Southeast Asia. But on the other hand, we do insist that the DRV let its neighbors, South Viet-Nam and Laos, strictly alone.

Furthermore, we are not trying to change the nature of the government in Hanoi. If the North Vietnamese prefer a Communist government, that is their choice to make. If the DRV remains aloof from the CHICOMs in a Tito-like state, we would not be averse to aiding such a government provided it conducted itself decently with its neighbors.

But with all, we are tired of standing by and seeing the unabashed efforts of the DRV to absorb South Viet-Nam into the Communist orbit against its will. We know that Hanoi is responsible and that we are going to punish it until it desists from this behavior.

Ambassador Taylor did not doubt that the enemy would mount counteractions. The Viet Cong would intensify their activities, and the North Vietnamese might engage in limited air and ground attacks on South Vietnam, using regular military units "and perhaps volunteers from Red China. It is quite likely that they will invite some CHICOM military forces into the DRV if only to reinforce its air defense." If these counteractions failed and the enemy came under unbearable pressure, the communist leadership might feign submission or choose some other course. Ambassador Taylor would "leave negotiation initiatives to Hanoi."

Whatever the course of events, we should adhere to three principles:

a. Do not enter into negotiations until the DRV is hurting.

b. Never let the DRV gain a victory in South Viet-Nam without having paid a disproportionate price.

c. Keep the GVN in the forefront of the combat and the negotiations.

Attached to Ambassador Taylor's paper of 26 November was his "Suggested Scenario for Controlled Escalation." The actions in the scenario were not to begin until intensified 34A operations and air strikes and armed reconnaissance over Laos had been in progress for some time; it was also assumed that information on enemy infiltration would have been released in Saigon and Washington. The scenario began with the consultations with Huong and Khanh that the Ambassador had sketched; it continued through a rather deliberate sequence of actions until a moderate level of air strikes against infiltration targets in North Vietnam was reached. Ambassador Taylor cautioned that if the Hanoi government indicated willingness to discuss a settlement, the United States must avoid "becoming involved in a cease fire vis-a-vis the DRV and/or the VC accompanied by strung-out negotiations."[14]

14. (TS) "Amb. Taylor's paper," "The Current Situation in South Viet-Nam - November, 1964," n.d. [26 Nov 64], OCJCS File, Taylor Visit, Nov 64."

One of the early items in the Taylor scenario was "cease travel to Vietnam of additional dependents, but take no action to evacuate dependents already in Vietnam pending further developments." It happened that, in another connection, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had advised the Secretary of Defense of their views on this matter on the same day, 26 November. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thought it undesirable to announce a suspension of movement of US dependents to South Vietnam, for two reasons:

a. A policy announcement of this nature would inevitably raise in the minds of the South Vietnamese and others the thought that the United States was embarking upon a course of withdrawing from its commitments in South Vietnam.

b. Such an announcement might well focus the attention of the Viet Cong on US dependents now in the country, thereby placing them in jeopardy.

They repeated their view that dependents should be withdrawn shortly prior to or concurrently with the initiation of overt US military action against North Vietnam.[15]

Further Consultations Shape the Recommendations to the President

Ambassador Taylor met with the group of senior advisors in a wide-ranging discussion on 27 November. It was concluded that while the emergence of a neutral, nonaligned Republic of South Vietnam would be acceptable to the United States, a government genuinely devoted to nonalignment and insured against communist take-over could not appear until after the Viet Cong were defeated.

The materials General Westmoreland had contributed to the discussion were reviewed, with both Ambassador Taylor and Secretary McNamara dissenting from his belief that conditions in South Vietnam would improve and that a firmer base for stronger actions would be available six months hence. The Ambassador doubted that the situation would hold together for long if the United States merely continued its current programs under Option A, whereas he thought that stronger action along the lines of Option C would have a definitely favorable effect on GVN and South Vietnamese performance and morale. Others in the group suggested that "the strengthening effect of Option C could at least buy time, possibly measured in years."

---

15. (S-GP 4) CM-277-64 to SecDef, 26 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2343/496, 27 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Nov 64).

Secretary Bundy recorded the following tentative conclusion:

> It was urged that over the next two months we adopt a program of Option A plus the first stages of Option C. The likelihood of improvement in the government seemed so doubtful that to get what improvement we could it was thought that we should move into some parts of C soon.[16]

At this meeting Ambassador Taylor presented a list of thirteen questions on aspects of the initial NSCWG papers that had not seemed clear to him.[17] Several of them fell within the purview of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who responded promptly. They indicated that the JCS conception of Option B would require an estimated 20 strike days for implementation, while their preferred version (C') of Option C would require two to three months. "These courses of action are designed, however, for suspension short of these time spans if objectives are earlier achieved." To the question, "What do we do if the Huong government collapses some place along the B or C track?", the Joint Chiefs of Staff answered as follows:

> These courses of action are expected to decrease the likelihood of a collapse of the Huong government. Should a collapse occur, however, we must establish and sustain a government at least through attainment of our objectives. If necessary, reinstatement of military control should be considered as an acceptable course of action.[18]

At their meeting on 27 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff surveyed the status of the consultations. It was clear that the Joint Chiefs of Staff stood alone in advocating Option B. The three senior officials in the field did not agree with them. General Westmoreland favored continuing along the lines of Option A for upwards of six months; Admiral Sharp's recommendation was a firm endorsement of Option C. The most influential of the three, Ambassador Taylor, favored Option A plus the initial stages of Option C, and none of the other senior advisors in Washington appeared to support stronger action than this.

---

16. (TS) AsstSecState (FE), "Memorandum of Meeting on Southeast Asia, November 27, 1964," 27 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

17. (S-GP 1) Amb Taylor, "Questions Requiring Answers," 27 Nov 64, Encl to JCS 2343/498, 28 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (27 Nov 64) (1).

18. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-1005-64 to SecDef, 1 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/498-1), same file.

After an extended discussion the Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed that, barring a change of US objectives, the position they had taken in JCSM-982-64 on 23 November was the recommended course. That paper had restated and focused attention on the avowed US objectives, with the hope that the reception it received would reveal any change of thought at the highest policy level. No senior official had drawn back from a statement of objectives that bespoke a US determination to stand firm against communist expansion in Southeast Asia, and specifically in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that the military course of action they had recommended followed logically from this determination. It was designed to accomplish the objective in the most assured and effective way, in the least time and with the fewest casualties. General Wheeler had expressed the underlying thought in a reverse form in an annotation he made on one of the papers used at a high-level meeting:

> If we do not undertake B or C', we must establish new objective in SEA. JCS would need to study new objective and draw appropriate military plans.[19]

The high-level discussions to date had registered opposition to Option B on three main counts. The first was the judgment of most of the conferees that this course was the one most likely to lead to major hostilities with North Vietnam and possibly Communist China. It was also argued that choice of Option C would provide greater flexibility and control, since decision to proceed to Option B would still be possible; moving immediately to Option B would commit the United States to an irreversible sequence of actions.

The third objection turned on the incompatibility of Option B with one of the principles enunciated in Ambassador Taylor's paper: "keep the GVN in the forefront of the combat and the negotiations." The JCS plan for the implementation of Option B involved the use of SAC aircraft and a program of bombing in which there would be hardly more than token VNAF participation. Ambassador Taylor thought it highly important that the war retain the appearance of a conflict in which South Vietnam was defending itself against communist aggression and insurgency, with the United States supporting to the degree necessary. It should not

---

19. Annotation by CJCS on (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState *et al.*, "Issues Raised by Papers on Southeast Asia," 24 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia, Jul 64-Jun 65.

be converted to a US war against North Vietnam, mounted largely from South Vietnamese territory. He thought that the VNAF, particularly after its fourth A-1H squadron became operational in December, would be capable of taking the lead in bombing strikes against the North, at a level below Option B. In exploration of this point the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 November asked for CINCPAC's estimate of the maximum number of A-1H sorties the VNAF could generate against North Vietnam, currently and in the future, and for his views on the effect this commitment would have on air support of operations within South Vietnam.[20]

Further considerations that bore on the policy deliberations were indicated in a set of papers that Secretary Bundy circulated to the principal advisors on 28 November. In the papers he had attempted to work out a scenario for "the Immediate Action Program."

> The problem is a difficult one, a real jigsaw puzzle in which you have to weigh at every point the viewpoints of:
>
> a. The American Congress and the public.
>
> b. Saigon.
>
> c. Hanoi and Peiping.
>
> d. Key Interested Nations.[21]

Although not strongly indicated in the documents until this point, concern regarding the public and Congressional reception of the policy they might frame had almost certainly been a major factor in the thought of all the conferees, fed by such items as the editorial comment that had appeared in the New York Times on 25 November:

> The hawks seem to be emerging from the dovecotes of the Johnson Administration now that the election is over and another Vietnam reassessment is under way. All five members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are said to be pressing for broadening the conflict. And Ambassador Taylor . . . has talked publicly of bombing both Vietcong infiltration routes in Laos and "training and staging areas in North Vietnam itself."

---

20. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2368 to CINCPAC, 27 Nov 64.
21. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to Southeast Asia Principals, "Scenario for Immediate Action Program," 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov 64."

. . . .

> Only two months ago, in Manchester, N.H., President Johnson expressed these views about "going north" in Vietnam: "I want to be very cautious and careful and use it only as a last resort when I start dropping bombs around that are likely to involve American boys in a war in Asia with 700 million Chinese . . . . So we are not going north and we are not going south; we are going to continue to try to get them /the South Vietnamese/ to save their own freedom with their own men."
>
> If there is to be a new policy now, if an Asian war is to be converted into an American war, the country has a right to insist that it be told what has changed so profoundly in the past two months to justify it.[22]

With reference to public opinion, the Bundy papers included worksheets on the timing and nature of a White House statement at the conclusion of the conferences, consultation with Congressional leaders, and a major speech, preferably by the President. Concurrently a background briefing on infiltration might be staged in both Saigon and Washington, followed a week or so later by publication of a detailed report on the order of a white paper. Regarding the background briefing on infiltration the worksheet contained the following comment:

> This will be a major action, since it shows not only that it has been increasing this year, but that it has probably been greater all along than we realized. It will have a major public play in the US, and may well kick up a storm. We need to make this one stick as a prelude to all else.[23]

Further discussion among the senior advisors on 28 November gave more definite shape to their conclusions, and the following day Secretary Bundy circulated a draft action paper. Headed "Draft NSAM on Southeast Asia," it had already been reviewed by Ambassador Taylor, Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton, and Mr. Michael Forrestal of the State Department. The paper was virtually ready for submission to the President, subject to one more meeting of the advisors, to be held on 30 November in

---

22. NY Times, 25 Nov 64, 36.
23. (TS) Memo, AssSecState (FE) to Southeast Asia Principals, "Scenario for Immediate Action Program," 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov 64."

Secretary Rusk's conference room. General Wheeler went to that meeting prepared to raise several points that had been developed during a morning session of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[24]

The JCS comments were directed at clarification and improvement of the text, not at reshaping the concept along the lines of the Option B that the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to regard as the optimum course. The concept as stated in the Draft NSAM on Southeast Asia was as follows:

> A. US objectives in South Vietnam (SVN) are unchanged. They are to:
>
> 1. Get Hanoi and North Vietnam (DRV) support and direction removed from South Vietnam, and, to the extent possible, obtain DRV cooperation in ending Viet Cong (VC) operations in SVN.
>
> 2. Re-establish an independent and secure South Vietnam with appropriate international safeguards, including the freedom to accept US and other external assistance as required.
>
> 3. Maintain the security of other non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia including specifically the maintenance and observance of the Geneva Accords of 1962 in Laos.
>
> B. We will continue to press the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) in every possible way to make the government itself more effective and to push forward with the pacification program.
>
> C. We will join at once with the South Vietnamese and Lao Governments in a determined action program aimed at DRV activities in both countries and designed to help GVN morale and to increase the costs and strain on Hanoi, foreshadowing still greater pressures to come. Under this program the first phase actions within the next thirty days will be intensified forms of action already under way, plus (1) US armed reconnaissance strikes in Laos, and (2) GVN and possibly US air strikes against

24. (TS) AsstSecState (FE) to Southeast Asia Principals, 29 Nov 64, same file. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Chairman's Debrief of the 28 Nov NSC Policy Group Meeting on Southeast Asia," 30 Nov 64, Jt Sect Files.

the DRV, as reprisals against any major or spectacular Viet Cong action in the south, whether against US personnel and installations or not.

D. Beyond the thirty-day period, first phase actions may be continued without change, or additional military measures may be taken, including the withdrawal of dependents and the possible initiation of strikes a short distance across the border against infiltration routes from the DRV. In the latter case this would become a transitional phase.

E. Thereafter, if the GVN improves its effectiveness to an acceptable degree and Hanoi does not yield on acceptable terms, /or if the GVN can only be kept going by stronger action,/ the US is prepared--at a time to be determined--to enter a second phase program, in support of the GVN and RLG, of graduated military pressures directed systematically against the DRV. Such a program would consist principally of progressively more serious air strikes, of a weight and tempo adjusted to the situation as it develops (possibly running from two to six months). Targets in the DRV would start with infiltration targets south of the 19th parallel and work up to targets north of that point. This could eventually lead to such measures as air strikes on all major military-related targets, aerial mining of DRV ports, and a US naval blockade of the DRV. The whole sequence of military actions would be designed to give the impression of a steady, deliberate approach, and to give the US the option at any time (subject to enemy reaction) to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not. Concurrently, the US would be alert to any sign of yielding by Hanoi, and would be prepared to explore negotiated solutions that attain US objectives in an acceptable manner. The US would seek to control any negotiations and would oppose any independent South Vietnamese efforts to negotiate.

Next, the paper for submission to the President set forth a "Thirty-Day Action Program" for the first phase spoken of in the concept. It began by treating the White House statement to be issued and the materials Ambassador Taylor was to use in his consultations with the Huong government. Further, "at the earliest feasible time, we will publicize the evidence of increased DRV infiltration." This would be accomplished by on-the-record presentations to the press in Washington and Saigon, special briefings for Congressional leaders and the Ambassadors of key allied nations, and later publication of a detailed report.

Meanwhile the US Ambassadors in Laos and Thailand would inform government leaders there in general terms of the concept the United States intended to follow, seeking their support. Specifically, the approval of Souvanna Phouma would be obtained for an intensified program of US armed reconnaissance over the Panhandle area and along infiltration routes in central Laos. The concept would be explained more fully to the governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. In consultation with Prime Minister Harold Wilson during his forthcoming visit, the President would seek full British support but would not ask for any additional contribution to the effort in South Vietnam in view of the British commitment in Malaysia. Both political support and additional contributions would be sought from the other three SEATO nations, with the Philippine Government being pressed particularly to complete its plan for supplying an 1800-man task force. The attempt to enlist more "third country aid" would extend to other countries as well.[25]

The United States would make no special approach to Communist China during the 30-day period, but "we will convey to Hanoi our unchanged determination and objectives, and that we have a growing concern at the DRV role, to see if there is any sign of change in Hanoi's position." Similar representations would be made to the Soviets, "not in the expectation of any change in their position but in effect to warn them to stay out, and with some hope they will pass on the message to Hanoi and Peiping." No US activity at the United Nations was planned, except explanation and defense of any US reprisal action that might occur.

Military actions listed in the paper for the initial 30-day period included intensified 34A MAROPS by GVN forces and increased US high-level reconnaissance over North Vietnam. Also to be intensified were the strikes by the Royal Laotian Air Force against the infiltration system in Laos, supported by US CAP and flak suppression missions when needed. Beyond that, "US armed air reconnaissance and air strikes will be carried out in Laos, first against the corridor area and within a short time against Route 7 and other infiltration routes in a major operation to cut key bridges." (The term

25. For a summary of the contributions of other nations during 1964, see Ch. 16.

"air strikes" had been added following General Wheeler's explanation that armed reconnaissance did not include the type of pre-briefed operations necessary to cut specific bridges.)

Viet Cong provocation justifying reprisal was expected. "We should be alert for any appropriate occasion," the paper read, and it listed enemy attacks on Saigon, on provincial or district capitals, on important airfields or major POL facilities, or against US citizens as some of the possible incidents that might bring retaliation. Reprisal would be undertaken, preferably within 24 hours, against one or more targets in North Vietnam. "GVN forces will be used to the maximum extent, supplemented as necessary by US forces." The reprisal targets, generally associated with infiltration, would be selected from those located south of the 19th Parallel. Combined US-GVN planning would be initiated immediately both for reprisal action and for possible later air strikes across the border into North Vietnam.

Stopping the flow of US dependents to South Vietnam had been contemplated, possibly as one of the early actions during the initial 30 days. At the meeting on 30 November General Wheeler again presented the JCS opinion on this matter, and it was substantially accepted. The action was not definitely scheduled; the United States would be prepared to stop the flow at an appropriate time, chosen with due regard for the signal it would convey.

The paper closed with the following list of deferred actions, not to be taken within the 30-day period but open to consideration for adoption thereafter:

1. Major air deployments to the area.

2. Furnishing US air cover for GVN MAROPS.

3. Resuming destroyer patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. . . .

4. Evacuation of US dependents.

5. US low-level reconnaissance into the DRV.

6. GVN/US air strikes across the border, initially against the infiltration routes and installations and then against other targets south of the 19th Parallel.

On behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Wheeler had asked whether it was intended that air strikes and reprisal action be limited to targets south of the 19th Parallel. He was assured that this was intended.[26]

Thus the course of action being recommended to the President could be characterized as an intensified Option A, to be pursued for at least a 30-day period. Thereafter, if the government of South Vietnam gave evidence of greater stability and effectiveness, decision could be made to move to Option C. The conception held of Option C called for its implementation with less speed and determination than the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended.

The course being recommended fell far short of Option B, the strong line of action that was the prime recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This JCS view was to have a final hearing, however, for it had been agreed that General Wheeler would present it orally to the President during the meeting scheduled at the White House on 1 December.

The Presidential Decisions of 1 December

Gathered at the White House on 1 December to advise the President were Vice President Humphrey, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Ambassador Taylor, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, General Wheeler, Mr. McCone, and Assistant Secretaries McNaughton and William Bundy. In preparation for the meeting General Wheeler had written a paper that restated the recommendations the Joint Chiefs of Staff had consistently advanced since the Bien Hoa attack a month earlier. The President heard the Chairman's presentation with care and attention. Without reading the paper verbatim, General Wheeler covered all its points and had opportunity to amplify several of them in response to the President's questions. The text was as follows:

---

26. (TS) AsstSecState (FE) to Southeast Asia Principals, 29 Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov 64". No copy has been discovered in the available records of the recommendations as finally submitted to the President. The latest form in which the recommendations may be read is the draft paper of 29 Nov, as modified by changes known to have been made at the meeting on 30 November.

U. S. COURSE OF ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend initiation of sharp military pressures against the DRV, starting with an attack in force on the DRV, subsequent to brief operations in Laos and US low-level reconnaissance north of the boundary to divert DRV attention prior to the attack in force. This program would be designed to destroy in the first three days Phuc Yen airfield near Hanoi, other airfields, and major POL facilities, clearly to establish the fact that the US intends to use military force, if necessary, to the full limits of what military force can contribute to achieving US objectives in Southeast Asia, and to afford the GVN respite by curtailing DRV assistance to and direction of the Viet Cong. The follow-on military program--involving armed reconnaissance of infiltration routes in Laos, air strikes on infiltration targets in the DRV, and then progressive strikes throughout North Vietnam--could be suspended short of full destruction of the DRV if our objectives were earlier achieved. The military program would be conducted rather swiftly, but the tempo could be adjusted as needed to contribute to achieving our objectives.

2. The JCS have maintained constant and close surveillance over the situation in Southeast Asia for many months. Our recommendation as to the best US course of action derives from two major bases:

a. Southeast Asia is an area of major strategic importance to the US, the loss of which would lead to grave political and military consequences in the entire Western Pacific, and to serious political consequences world-wide.

b. National policies establish US objectives in Southeast Asia to include a stable and independent non-Communist government in the RVN (NSAM 288, 17 March '64) and a stabilized situation in Laos which conforms to the Geneva Accords of 1962 (NSAM 249, 25 June '63).

3. Other factors to which we attach much weight are:

a. The consensus of official opinion is that the GVN is unlikely to grow stronger; in all probability it will become weaker as the guerrilla war drags on and internal political dissension continues.

b. At some point, the continued political turmoil will affect adversely the military effort against the Viet Cong, thereby tipping both the political and military scales in favor of the Communists.

c. We know that the DRV is directing the VC insurgency in SVN and supporting it with sizable numbers of trained military leaders and technicians and substantial logistic means. We know that this support is being illegally moved through Laos and Cambodia into SVN.

d. To date, the DRV has underwritten the insurgency in SVN at minimum costs to themselves in people and material.

4. In sum, the JCS consider that, if military action against the DRV is not undertaken at an early date, a Communist victory in SVN must be foreseen. To suffer defeat in this first "War of Liberation" in a strategically important area will, we believe, incubate other such wars. Communist dogma calls for exploitation of success.

5. Furthermore, the JCS recommend a "hard knock" on DRV resources by US forces early in the military program. We believe that an early and heavy attack on DRV combat aircraft and POL has the following military, political, psychological and economic advantages:

a. In-country combat aircraft and air support facilities will be destroyed, thereby reducing the offensive and defensive air capabilities of the enemy, losses to ourselves, danger of retaliatory strikes against SVN, and logistic support to the VC and PL.

b. The DRV (and ChiComs) will be impelled to provide greater defense capabilities, thereby siphoning off resources which could be used offensively.

c. The DRV and Red China will know from the outset the threshold of military activity established by the United States. Since our action will not be ambiguous, or of minor effect, they must face up to the alternatives of war or accomodation to US objectives.

d. Destruction of POL in-country in the DRV will impose a stricture on land and air communications and, to some degree, on their limited industry. In any event, it will forecast to them what the future will hold if they continue on their present course.

6. The JCS recognize that any course of action we adopt, except early withdrawal from SVN, could develop eventually into the course they advocate. This fact reinforces our belief that we should profit by the several advantages of forthright military action initiated upon our decision. In other words, if we must fight a war in Southeast Asia, let us do so under conditions favorable to us from the outset and with maximum volition resting with the United States.[27]

At the White House meeting there was no dissent regarding the importance of Southeast Asia to the United States, the US objectives, and the other elements of the situation as the Chairman described them. The President's advisors agreed that the government of South Vietnam was unlikely to grow stronger. Its sudden collapse did not appear imminent, but the interplay of Viet Cong aggressiveness and GVN weakness would probably yield a continuing debilitation of the government unless effective measures were taken. With regard to the final paragraph, which General Wheeler did read at the meeting, all present acknowledged the truth of the first sentence: whatever choice of policy was made, the further development of the situation might

27. (TS) CM-283-64 to CSAF et al., 1 Dec 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov 64."

lead eventually to adoption of the strong military measures the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated now. For various reasons, including most prominently concern over the weakness and instability of the GVN, the strong course was rejected.

President Johnson accepted substantially the program recommended by his advisors. Some of its elements were deferred for later decision, such as the provision of US air cover for GVN MAROPS. Timing of the implementation of the 30-day first phase would be keyed to Ambassador Taylor's return to Saigon. Assuming a favorable outcome of his consultations with Huong and Khanh, the approved military actions would begin about 15 December.[28] General Wheeler described them in a message to Admiral Sharp, as follows:

> First phase actions (about 30 days) would consist of intensified MAROPS, intensified high level recce of DRV, intensified RLAF strikes in Laos, and approximately two missions per week of four sorties each conducted by US aircraft in Laos. Subsequent to the foregoing and deployment of 100/150 aircraft to Southeast Asia plus alert of US ground forces for movement, we would conduct low_level recce of targets near border in DRV and US/RLAF/GVN air attacks in DRV near Laotian border.

Thereafter, decision could be taken to conduct US-GVN air strikes against North Vietnam during the next two to six months, starting with targets south of the 19th Parallel and working northward. Mining of NVN ports and naval blockade might be decided upon at at later stage.[29]

The decisions made on 1 December included a general acceptance of the intention of launching reprisal strikes following any major VC or NVN attacks or incidents in South Vietnam or at sea. The President ordered a vigorous and expanded diplomatic effort to obtain commitments from other free world nations for the dispatch of men, materials, and supporting services to South Vietnam. The central document

---

28. (TS) Note to Control Div, "The Chairman's Debrief of the 1 December White House Meeting on Southeast Asia," 2 Dec 64; (TS) Note to Control Div, "The Chairman's Debrief of the 3 December NSC Policy Group Meeting on SEAsia," 4 Dec 64; same file.

29. (TS) Msg, JCS 5208-64 to CINCPAC, 3 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

embodying the agreed policy was the set of instructions the President would give to Ambassador Taylor. It was to be brought to finished form in further discussions following the 1 December meeting.[30]

It was notable that the White House statement issued on 1 December avoided heralding the consultations during Ambassador Taylor's visit as marking a new turn in US policy regarding South Vietnam. Among other things, no emphasis was given to the infiltration data, whose release Secretary Bundy had once thought of as "a prelude to all else." Whereas earlier drafts of the White House statement had included announcement that a report on infiltration would be released shortly, the statement as issued contained only the following reference:

> The meeting reviewed the accumulating evidence of continuing and increased North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong and of North Vietnamese forces in, and passing through, the territory of Laos in violation of the Geneva accords of 1962.[31]

The subsequent history of this matter may be sketched briefly. After extended discussions during December of the desirability of releasing the infiltration data, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara did provide a briefing for Congressional leaders on 21 January 1965. Since leakage to the press was now likely, arrangements were made for background briefings for correspondents in Saigon and Washington on 26 January.[32] The Department of State published a detailed and documented report on 27 February, titled Aggression from the North: the Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam. Besides describing the significant volume of the infiltration, it presented numerous case studies proving that the personnel being introduced into South Vietnam were drawn from regular NVN military units.[33]

---

30. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/499, 3 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Dec 64).

31. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (21 Dec 64), p. 870.

32. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64). (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/166, 19 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (19 Dec 64). (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg, State 1513 to Saigon, 22 Jan 65, JCS IN 89380; (S) Msg, State 1531 to Saigon, 25 Jan 65, JCS IN 92449. (S-GP 3) 2nd N/H of JCS 2343/490, 10 Feb 65, JMF 9155.3 (31 Oct 64).

33. Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Mar 65), pp. 404-427.

The final paragraphs of the White House statement of 1 December 1964 were as follows:

> The President instructed Ambassador Taylor to consult urgently with the South Vietnamese Government as to measures that should be taken to improve the situation in all its aspects.
>
> The President reaffirmed the basic U.S. policy of providing all possible and useful assistance to the South Vietnamese people and government in their struggle to defeat the externally supported insurgency and aggression being conducted against them. It was noted that this policy accords with the terms of the congressional joint resolution of August 10, 1964, which remains in full force and effect.[34]

34. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (21 Dec 64), p. 870.

Chapter 15

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS, DECEMBER 1964

Ambassador Taylor Confers with the GVN

Ambassador Taylor returned to Saigon after the consultations in Washington bearing written instructions from the President. Dated 3 December, they constituted the authoritative statement of the decisions reached at the White House meeting two days earlier.

> During the recent review in Washington of the situation in SVN, it was clearly established that the unsatisfactory progress being made in the pacification of the Viet Cong was the result of two primary causes from which many secondary causes stemmed; first, the governmental instability in Saigon and the second, the continued reinforcement and direction of the VC by the North Vietnamese Government. To change the downward trend of events, it will be necessary to deal adequately with both these factors.
>
> It is clear, however, that these factors are not of equal importance. There must be a stable, effective government to conduct a successful campaign against the Viet Cong even if the aid of North Vietnam for the VC should end.

Ending North Vietnamese support, while important, would not in itself end the war against the Viet Cong. It would only contribute to the creation of conditions favoring a successful pacification campaign within South Vietnam.

> Since action against North Vietnam is contributory, not central, we should not incur the risks which are inherent in such an expansion of hostilities until there is a government in Saigon capable of handling the serious problems involved in such an expansion and of exploiting the favorable effects which may be anticipated from an end of support and direction by North Vietnam.

Therefore, there were certain minimum criteria of performance that the Huong government must meet before new measures against North Vietnam would be either justified or practicable. The government should be able to speak to and for its people, to maintain law and order in the principal population centers, and to make effective plans and see them executed by military and police forces entirely responsive to its authority. Further, the government must have the military strength to cope with the probable enemy reactions to a program of increased pressures.

Ambassador Taylor was instructed to urge the GVN to make a particular effort to accomplish the following objectives, both for their inherent value and as a gauge against which governmental effectiveness could be measured:

1. Improve the use of manpower for military and pacification purposes.

2. Bring the armed forces and police to authorized strength and maximize their effectiveness.

3. Replace incompetent officials and commanders. Freeze the competent in place for extended periods of service.

4. Clarify and strengthen the police powers of arrest, detention and interrogation of VC suspects.

5. Clarify and strengthen the authority of provincial chiefs.

6. Make demonstrable progress in the Hop Tac operation around Saigon.

7. Broaden and intensify the civic action program using both military and civilian resources to produce tangible evidence of the desire of the government to help the hamlets and villages.

8. Carry out a sanitary clean-up of Saigon.

While the Huong government pursued these objectives, the United States would increase its use of air power against the infiltration routes in Laos, in conjunction with the efforts of the Royal Laotian Government, and it would encourage intensified MAROPS by GVN forces. "In

combination, these operations in Laos and at sea constitute the first phase of military pressures to reduce infiltration and to warn the DRV of the risks it is running." Meanwhile the armed forces of the GVN and the United States would stand ready to execute prompt reprisals for any unusual enemy action, and the US Mission was authorized to enter into planning with the GVN for this purpose.

"As a second phase, the United States is also prepared to consider a program of direct military pressure on the DRV, to be executed after the GVN has shown itself firmly in control."

> This second phase, in general terms, would constitute a series of air attacks on the DRV progressively mounting in scope and intensity for the purpose of convincing the leaders of DRV that it is to their interest to cease to aid the Viet Cong and to respect the independence and security of South Vietnam, properly assured by appropriate international safeguards.

In these attacks the United States would participate in support of the VNAF "and at the request of the Government of Vietnam." The US Mission was authorized to engage in combined planning with the GVN for these operations, with a clear understanding that the United States gave no advance commitment to implement the plans.[1]

Ambassador Taylor returned to a South Vietnamese capital in which calm had not been entirely restored following the demonstrations and brief imposition of martial law in late November. As the Embassy assessed the situation, oppositionist Buddhist leaders had the power virtually to immobilize the government, but they could not force Prime Minister Huong to resign. They charged the government with failure and repression, claiming that religious persecution was its intended next step, but the Buddhists offered no

---

1. (TS) "Instructions from the President to Ambassador Taylor," 3 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64. Amb Taylor was also instructed to advise the GVN of the US effort to gain commitments for increased participation from other Free World nations.

concrete program of their own. When pressed for specific measures, they talked of respecting "the people's wishes" and "completing the revolution."[2]

Ambassador Taylor met with Huong, Deputy Premier Vien, and General Khanh on 7 December for consultation and presentation of a written statement derived from his instructions. These three were the only GVN officials to whom the Ambassador revealed the US program. Their initial reaction was generally favorable, although perhaps not so enthusiastic as might have been hoped. Huong and his aides accepted as reasonable the US index for measuring GVN progress and agreed to work out details in future meetings. Despite the demonstrations and widespread opposition, the Prime Minister asserted that his government was already "able to speak for and to its people."[3]

The further consultations concluded with the issuance of a joint communique on 11 December. It said that the US Government had "offered additional military and economic assistance to improve the execution of the Government's programs and to restrain the mounting infiltration of men and equipment by the Hanoi regime in support of the Vietcong." It highlighted provisions for increasing the military, paramilitary, and police forces, and the fact that the GVN and the US Mission were "making joint plans to achieve greater effectiveness against the infiltration threat." Ambassador Taylor's instructions had said that the Huong government had "the complete support of the USG in its resistance to the minority pressure groups which are attempting to drag it down." This thought appeared in blander language in the communique, as a simple expression of full US support "for the duly constituted Government of Prime Minister Huong." It was enough, nevertheless, to set off Buddhist protests that the United States was responsible for maintaining Huong in power against "the just desires of the Vietnamese people and the Buddhist Church."[4]

---

2. (C) Msg, Saigon 1726 to State, 5 Dec 64, JCS IN 44569.
3. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1746 to State, 7 Dec 64, JCS IN 46777.
4. NY Times, 12 Dec 64, 1, 3.

Khanh's Purge of the HNC, 20 December

The next round of trouble, and a serious one, came not from the Buddhists but from General Khanh. Earlier in the month the Armed Forces Council, dominated by Khanh and the Young Turk faction among the military officers, had devised a regulation requiring the retirement of all general officers with over 25 years of service. It was aimed particularly at General Minh (still out of the country) and the three "Dalat Generals" who had been associated with him. On 18 December General Khanh petitioned the High National Council (HNC) to promulgate the regulation.

When the HNC did not promptly comply, Khanh and the Armed Forces Council met late on 19 December and determined to proclaim the dissolution of the High National Council and to arrest certain of its members. Most of the arrests occurred during the early hours of 20 December; eight HNC members were taken into custody as well as a number of other individuals tabbed as political agitators. In a telecon to Washington, General Westmoreland declared that "by arresting members of the High National Council, which is the interim legislative branch of the government, the military leaders have in fact abrogated the charter of the land."[5]

The Deputy COMUSMACV, Lieutenant General John L. Throckmorton, had gone to the RVNAF high command headquarters early on 20 December, seeking an explanation from the Young Turk officers he found there. The VNAF commander, General Ky, declared that he was not the leader but that he had been designated as spokesman because of his superior knowledge of English. He denied that any military coup was intended; action had been taken solely against the HNC, some of whose members were under communist influence and were undermining the government. Ky claimed that the prior assent of Prime Minister Huong and Chief of State Suu to the dissolution of the HNC had been obtained. The military officers saw their action as strengthening the government and leading to greater stability. The armed forces still supported Huong and Suu and had sought no change in the cabinet.

5. (C-GP 4) Telecon, COMUSMACV to NMCC, 200110Z Dec 64, JCS IN 59716, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

General Throckmorton replied that, whatever the merits of the action, the failure to consult or even notify the US Mission was an affront to the US Government. The purge of the HNC jeopardized the confidence the United States had reposed in South Vietnam's military leaders and "rendered unpredictable the continuation of US support." General Throckmorton persuaded Ky to postpone his scheduled press conference until he and other spokesmen for Khanh had had a meeting with Ambassador Taylor.[6]

Generals Ky and Thieu, Admiral Cang, and the I Corps Commander, General Thi, went to the Embassy shortly before noon on 20 December. As Ambassador Taylor reported the meeting, "I very forcefully expressed my disappointment in the action they had taken, made it clear they had jeopardized US support in everything they had been seeking, and asked for their explanation." The four Vietnamese officers averred that the decisions were made by General Khanh and that the Armed Forces Council was merely advisory to him. The Ambassador told them that their midnight meeting and the subsequent purge of the HNC would appear to Washington and the rest of the world as another military coup. He stressed the importance of maintaining the duly constituted government.[7]

On the following day Ambassador Taylor was able to bring General Khanh into conference. At first, Khanh claimed that the HNC dissolution was a decision of the Armed Forces Council; when pressed, he conceded that he was responsible, though still maintaining that he was carrying out the will of the majority of the officer corps. "I then asked him," Taylor reported, "if he felt he had acted . . . consistent with the conduct of a loyal ally. . . . I was obliged to tell him that he had lost my confidence."

> Khanh then asked whether, under the circumstances, he should retire from his present position. I was prepared for this question since we had discussed the matter earlier in the morning in the US Mission Council,

---

6. (C) Telecons, COMUSMACV to NMCC, 200607Z Dec 64, JCS IN 59810, and 200750Z Dec 64, JCS IN 59902, same file.
7. (C) Msg, Saigon 1870 to State, 20 Dec 64, JCS IN 60048.

where I found all members unanimous in feeling that Khanh must go. Hence, I replied in affirmative. . . . Perhaps he might enjoy traveling abroad.[8]

Once away from the Ambassador's formidable presence, however, Khanh denied that he had ever agreed to step down. News correspondents readily detected an anti-American tone in the order of the day that Khanh issued to the RVNAF on 22 December:

> Faced with the country's critical situation, the armed forces again have assumed their responsibility before history.
>
> On 20 December 1964 the Armed Forces Council withdrew its confidence from and proclaimed the dissolution of the High National Council. This institution, set up amidst the hopes of all the people and the armed forces, was exploited by counter-revolutionary elements who placed partisan considerations above the homeland's sacred interests.

Khanh cited the above decision as "proof of the armed forces' good faith." The Armed Forces Council still supported the civilian government of Chief of State Suu and Prime Minister Huong. Then came the lines that signaled the beginning of Khanh's campaign against Ambassador Taylor and the influence of the United States in the affairs of South Vietnam:

> We make sacrifices for the country's independence and the Vietnamese people's liberty, but not to carry out the policy of any foreign country. . . . Better to live poor but proud as free citizens of an independent country rather than in ease and shame as slaves of the foreigners and communists![9]

---

8. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1881 to State, 21 Dec 64, JCS IN 60342.

9. (U) FBIS 30, 22 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.

General Khanh circulated versions of the two interviews with the Ambassador in which Taylor was depicted as ill-tempered and domineering and some of his remarks were recast as insults to South Vietnam's national honor. He charged the Ambassador with meddling in the country's internal affairs and told an American correspondent that "if Taylor did not act more intelligently, Southeast Asia would be lost."[10] On 23 December Khanh assembled the members of the Armed Forces Council, played on their wounded pride, and induced them to endorse a letter to the Chief of State and the Prime Minister that amounted to a request that Ambassador Taylor be declared persona non grata.

The Department of State had just countered with a strong statement issued in Washington:

> Ambassador Taylor has been acting throughout with the full support of the United States Government. As we have repeatedly made clear, a duly constituted government exercising full power on the basis of national unity and without improper interference from any group is the essential condition for the successful prosecution of the effort to defeat the Viet Cong and is the basis of United States support for that effort. This is the position Ambassador Taylor has been expressing to Vietnamese leaders.[11]

Other US statements and orders made it clear that to follow the line General Khanh indicated would bring a break in US-GVN relations and an end to US assistance. Prime Minister Huong "conspicuously avoided mentioning the matter to Ambassador Taylor," and in following days the discord was smoothed away with satisfactory explanations all around. Dissolution of the High National Council had to be accepted as a fait accompli, however. The Embassy received intimations that some of the Young Turk officers, notably General Ky, had become convinced that Khanh had acted exclusively in his own interests throughout the affair, but there appeared no prospect of forcing him out of the Commander in Chief's post for some time.[12]

---

10. AP news ticker excerpts, 23 Dec 64, same file. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1939 to State, 25 Dec 64, JCS IN 64737. (S) Msg, Saigon 1950 to State, 26 Dec 64, JCS IN 64948.

11. Dept of State Bulletin, LII (11 Jan 65), p. 39

12. NY Times, 27 Dec 64, 1. (S) Msg, Saigon 1951 to State, 26 Dec 64, JCS IN 64974. (S) Msg, Saigon 1999 to State, 30 Dec 64, JCS IN 68412. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2010 to State, 31 Dec 64, JCS IN 69494.

None of the legalisms the State Department devised for preserving the appearance of continued constitutional government in South Vietnam could erase the fact that the Huong government existed at the sufferance of the military officer corps, headed by an increasingly less tractable General Khanh. The recent events were a definite rebuff to US hopes for governmental permanence and stability in Saigon, making less likely a decision to move to the stronger Phase II actions of the US program. Arising unexpectedly on 20 December, the political crisis had not affected the beginning of the Phase I military actions, however. They had gone forward in accordance with the 15 December target date.

Intensified OPLAN 34A Operations

Immediately following the Presidential decisions of 1 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had asked CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to submit plans for increasing the frequency of GVN MAROPS under OPLAN 34A, in two "Packages." Package One would consist of a series of shallow penetration raids on the NVN coast, to begin about 15 December and continue for 30 days or longer. The raids were to be directed at targets offering the greatest psychological impact, with their military utility and the actual degree of destruction achieved regarded as secondary. Package Two actions might be ordered at any time after the 30-day period. They would feature employment of US aircraft to protect the MAROPS vessels from attack by NVN air and surface craft, and restrictions on certain targets above the 19th Parallel might be lifted.[13]

On the basis of the replies of Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, with some modification, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 12 December recommended a program to the Secretary of Defense. Package One provided for specific target bombardments and harassment sweeps by PTFs (fast patrol boats) against targets of opportunity along the southern coast of North Vietnam, to be implemented about 15 December. Package Two added US air cover for a schedule of similar operations. Normally eight aircraft would accompany the PTFs, four armed for air-to-air and four for air-to-surface operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that

13. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2524 to CINCPAC, 2 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Dec 64).

necessary training and command and control arrangements could be completed in time to allow implementation of Package Two by 15 January 1965. Both packages included as corollary missions the capture of NVN naval craft and the destruction of junks, after removing the crews.[14]

Deputy Secretary Vance replied on 14 December with approval for implementation of the corollary missions and of Increments 1 and 2 of Package One, less their coastal harassment features. Increments 3 and 4 of the package were approved in principle, with the same exception and with implementation to be deferred until reactions to the first two increments were observed. Secretary Vance deferred decision on Package Two and the related rules of engagement the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted.[15]

Running concurrently with this round of recommendations and partial approval was a successful JCS effort to gain a greater degree of flexibility in the procedures for scheduling 34A MAROPS. The system in effect involved approval by State, Defense, and White House officials in Washington, first of a monthly program for planning purposes and then of each individual mission immediately prior to its execution. General Westmoreland was convinced that better results would be obtained if he was permitted greater latitude in scheduling the individual missions, in accordance with local weather and sea conditions and the readiness of crews and equipment. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, presented this view to the Secretary of Defense on 8 December, recommending that after Washington endorsement of the monthly program, COMUSMACV should submit packages of up to five missions for execution approval. With that approval obtained, General Westmoreland would be free to schedule the operations at his discretion, subject to coordination with Ambassador Taylor.[16]

---

14. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-1042-64 to SecDef, 12 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/502), same file.

15. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Intensification of OPLAN 34A Maritime Operations (S)," 14 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2343/502-1, 16 Dec 64, same file.

16. (TS-GP 1) CM-295-64 to SecDef, 8 Dec 64; (TS-GP 4) Memo, CSA to CJCS, "Trip Report, Vietnam, 8-12 December 1964," 21 Dec 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64. Initiation of the approval system several months earlier is described in Ch. 13.

Deputy Secretary Vance obtained approval of this proposal. At a meeting of the principal advisors on Southeast Asia on 19 December, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, the White House official concerned with OPLAN 34A scheduling, indicated that he was willing to "consider group approval of still larger packages if necessary, having due regard to our veto capabilities if a changed political situation should so require." At that meeting it was pointed out that the MAROPS approved so far did not represent any significant intensification of the program. Moreover, the prospects for greater activity in the near future were slight owing to seasonal sea conditions. No maritime operations had been completed for some three weeks past.[17]

BARREL ROLL

Another of the Phase I actions agreed to by the President on 1 December was a limited application of US air power against infiltration activities in Laos. To be sure, US aircraft were already engaged in operations over Laos, in the CAP and flak suppression flights provided when necessary to assist the Royal Laotian Air Force in its attacks on targets in the Laos panhandle. In addition to the long-standing high-level reconnaissance of South Vietnamese border areas, the United States had instituted the YANKEE TEAM reconnaissance flights over Laos in May 1964. Although authorized to return hostile fire and to attack known enemy antiaircraft positions, YANKEE TEAM flights did not have the mission of destroying infiltration targets. They were designed to provide intelligence and proof of infiltration, as well as to give evidence of the US military presence in Southeast Asia. From May until the end of 1964, 880 YANKEE TEAM missions were flown. The total of 1,257 sorties was shared by carrier aircraft of the Navy and USAF planes of the 2d Air Division, stationed in South Vietnam.[18]

The increased activities directed on 1 December were to consist of US armed reconnaissance and prebriefed air strikes

17. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, Dir J-3, "Meeting of NSC Principals, 19 December 1964," 19 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/166, 19 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (19 Dec 64).

18. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, pp. 269-272.

against infiltration routes and facilities in the Laos corridor. Initially only the program for the first week of the 30-day period was being considered, consisting of two missions of four aircraft each, separated by at least three days. At General Wheeler's direction, Joint Staff representatives sought guidance from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), including discussion of routes to be subjected to armed reconnaissance and of secondary targets to be struck with unexpended ordnance. Assistant Secretary McNaughton indicated that the risks to US aircraft should be held to a minimum, with no overflight of North Vietnam permitted. Further, "the purpose of the missions was to send a signal of deeper US involvement, the signal to be more psychological in nature than of pure military effectiveness."

Meanwhile the US Ambassador in Vientiane (William Sullivan, who had recently succeeded Leonard Unger in this post) had obtained the approval of Souvanna Phouma for US armed reconnaissance against infiltration routes in Laos. Souvanna had specifically requested flights over Routes 7, 8, and 12. The first of these lay north of the panhandle area.[19]

On 11 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a message to CINCPAC alerting him to be prepared to conduct the two missions following receipt of execution orders on or about 14 December. At the same time the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense describing the two missions and recommending approval of their execution. They advised him that the message to CINCPAC had set forth the following:

a. Armed reconnaissance of Route 8 between its junction with Route 12 and a point not closer than two miles from the DRV border; secondary target if ordnance not expended during armed reconnaissance: military strong point on Route 12 (RLAF Target No. 21).

b. Armed reconnaissance of Route 121 and Route 12, the latter between Ban Na Kok and a point not closer than two miles from the DRV border; secondary target if ordnance not expended during reconnaissance: Tchepone Barracks (RLAF Target No. 3).

19. (TS-GP 1) J-3 TP 180-64 (Rev.), 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Dec 64).

> . . . The message also prescribed that he may use optimum conventional ordnance, select aircraft at his option with the restriction that strike aircraft may not be launched from Thai bases, provide anti-MIG combat air patrol, conduct poststrike reconnaissance and search and rescue (SAR) operations, and that he should coordinate with the American Embassy in Vientiane.[20]

At a meeting of senior advisors the following day, 12 December, after adding a prohibition of the use of napalm, "Mr. McGeorge Bundy said the program fulfilled precisely the President's wishes, that he would so inform the President, and that it should be executed unless advised separately to the contrary by him." The conferees agreed that there should be no public statement concerning the air operations over Laos, though the question would be reopened if a US aircraft were lost.[21]

Later on 12 December the Secretary of Defense orally confirmed the White House approval, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff dispatched the action message to CINCPAC. The operations had been given the nickname BARREL ROLL.[22]

The first BARREL ROLL mission was conducted on 14 December by F-105 aircraft of the 2d Air Division. The USAF planes scored rocket hits in the target area at the military strong point on Route 12 and attacked a secondary bridge in the Nape Highway Bridge area. Carrier aircraft of the USS RANGER performed the second mission on 17 December. The third, four days later, was the first BARREL ROLL armed reconnaissance over Route 7. Two further missions were accomplished before the end of the month. All flights were

---

20. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2848 to CINCPAC, 11 Dec 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-1041-64 to SecDef, 11 Dec 64, Encl A to JCS 2344/103, 11 Dec 64; JMF 9155.2 (11 Dec 64).

21. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, Dir J-3, "Meeting of NSC Principals, 12 December 1964," 12 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64).

22. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2883 to CINCPAC, 12 Dec 64. (C-GP 4) Memo, Dir, Corres and Directives Div, OASD(Admin), to Secy JCS, "Operations in Laos," 17 Dec 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Dec 64).

conducted during daylight hours, but no enemy personnel or traffic were observed. The US flights received occasional AA and ground fire, spotted several unmanned AA positions, and inflicted damage on a number of buildings at enemy installations. The BARREL ROLL operations continued thereafter, the sixth mission being flown on 2 January 1965.[23]

Plans to Strengthen the RVNAF

A commitment to renewed effort to increase the size and effectiveness of RVN military forces was another feature of the US program launched by the President's decisions of 1 December. Measures to accomplish this were for the most part already under review. For instance, on 24 November COMUSMACV had recommended an increase in the RVNAF force structure, in which Ambassador Taylor and Admiral Sharp had concurred. The current authorized strength of the regular forces was 243,599, while that of the paramilitary forces was 212,246. General Westmoreland recommended that approximately 140,000 men be added during the coming year, 1965.[24]

In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 17 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed the recommended increase as "necessary to provide additional forces for implementation of the national pacification programs and for preventing further deterioration in the military situation." The decisive stage of the consideration did not occur until well into 1965, however. Although the Secretary of Defense approved in principle on 13 January, implementation awaited final approval by the Department of State, negotiations with the GVN, and arrangement of the MAP funding. In any event, the increases were not to be applied until after the RVNAF reached its currently authorized strength, about 1 February 1965.[25]

Another matter was the brief reconsideration given during December to the plans for expanding South Vietnam's air forces. On 15 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff had

23. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 217-64, 21 Dec 64, and subsequent OPSUMs.

24. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

25. (S-GP 3) JCSM-1047-64 to SecDef, 17 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/500-1); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Increase in RVNAF Force Structure (U)," 13 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-2, 14 Jan 65; same file. The force structure proposal is treated in greater detail and the outcome described in Ch. 22.

recommended to the Secretary of Defense that two further A-1H fighter squadrons--the fifth and sixth--be added to the VNAF during 1965. They cited the fact that existing VNAF and FARM GATE resources were insufficient; as many as a third of all requests by ground commanders for close air support missions were not being honored because of non-availability of aircraft. In the face of an upward trend in Viet Cong activity and with the functioning of the air request net itself steadily improving, this shortfall appeared certain to reach still more serious proportions in the coming months. The proposed increase in the VNAF would require retention of FARM GATE for training purposes, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. They recommended that two FARM GATE squadrons be maintained until the sixth VNAF squadron had become fully operational, following which a determination could be made regarding the requirements for a residual training capability.[26]

Secretary McNamara approved the VNAF expansion program on 6 November, with the following schedule:

a. 1 May 1965 - Activate the 5th VNAF Squadron with 10 aircraft.

b. 1 June 1965 - Increase 5th VNAF fighter squadron to full strength of 25 aircraft.

c. 15 Sep 1965 - Activate the 6th VNAF Squadron with 10 aircraft.

d. 15 Oct 1965 - Increase 6th VNAF fighter squadron to full strength of 25 aircraft.

He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to submit recommendations regarding the disposition of FARM GATE at such time as the fifth VNAF squadron became operational.[27]

Ambassador Taylor called this decision into question in a message on 9 December. He thought "we should not embark

26. (S-GP 4) JCSM-875-64 to SecDef, 15 Oct 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/417-2, 12 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 64).
27. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnamese Air Force Fighter Squadrons," 6 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2343/417-3, 9 Nov 64; Msg, JCS 1830 to CINCPAC, 13 Nov 64; same file.

on an expansion of VNAF by two more A-1H squadrons since the training requirements will reduce operational VNAF aircraft during the coming critical months." The Ambassador believed it would be better to reinforce FARM GATE and the VNAF with B-57 jet bombers.

> It is my understanding that VNAF presently has pilots capable of flying 8 B-57s at once if maintenance is provided by USAF. Although we are committed to support the fifth and sixth A-1H squadrons under current understandings, the substitution of a modest jet program would, I believe, overcome any GVN objection to cancelling these last two squadrons.[28]

It was evident to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Ambassador Taylor was not properly informed. Only six VNAF pilots, chiefly senior command personnel, had received limited transition training in the B-57. They were qualified for daytime, visual, noncombat flying only. Also, the schedule for activating the additional squadrons had been devised with full consideration for the ability of the VNAF to absorb them; implementation should not produce the problem the Ambassador had cited.[29]

In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 12 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff registered their disagreement with Taylor's proposal and reaffirmed their support of the VNAF expansion program. They noted that addition of B-57s to the VNAF force structure could have major political implications, since the Geneva Accords prohibited the introduction of jet aircraft. They believed it should be considered as an issue separate from the projected increase in fighter squadrons.[30]

No change was made in the scheduled VNAF expansion. It should be noted, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not opposed to the introduction of jet aircraft into South Vietnam. On 4 September they had recommended that 15 VNAF pilots and the required maintenance personnel receive jet

---

28. (S) Msg, Saigon 1758 to State, 9 Dec 64, JCS IN 48728, JMF 9155.3 (9 Dec 64).
29. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/503, 10 Dec 64, same file.
30. (S-GP 3) JCSM-1040-64 to SecDef, 12 Dec 64, App A to JCS 2343/503, 10 Dec 64, same file.

training in the continental United States during 1965 and that ten jet aircraft be provided to South Vietnam early in 1966. The Secretary of Defense had disapproved this recommendation, believing that the undertaking would not contribute significantly to the current counterinsurgency battle and that "it would tend to duplicate, at considerable cost, the task of air defense that the U.S. must be ready to perform for the foreseeable future."[31]

One further US action should be mentioned. It had long been recognized that if military pressures were mounted against the North that might bring enemy air attacks in retaliation, air defense resources in South Vietnam would have to be increased. When action against the North appeared more likely following the first Tonkin Gulf incident in August, a Marine LAAM (HAWK) battalion was alerted on 1 September for deployment from the CONUS to Da Nang. During the greater heightening of tensions following the Bien Hoa attack on 1 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with Secretary McNamara's approval, directed movement of the Marine HAWK battalion to the Western Pacific. The unit sailed on 18 November. During the more than two weeks it was in transit, an additional Marine HAWK battery remained on alert for airlift to Da Nang in the event of an emergency.[32]

Meanwhile CINCPAC had carried out his orders to perform an on-the-ground survey of the optimum siting of the unit in South Vietnam and to analyze the security and support problems its deployment would present. On 25 November Admiral Sharp recommended early approval of deployment of the HAWK battalion, less one battery, to Da Nang. The remainder of the battalion should be located on Okinawa as an interim measure pending further siting and security developments. Both Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland concurred in his recommendation.[33]

---

31. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-768-64 to SecDef, 4 Sep 64 (derived from JCS 2343/436-1); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Jet Training for South Vietnamese Pilots," 25 Sep 64, Att to JCS 2343/436-2, 29 Sep 64; JMF 9155.3 (11 Aug 64).

32. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/497, 27 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (27 Nov 64).

33. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 252150Z Nov 64, JCS IN 36221, same file.

As the embarked unit neared its destination, decision was made at a high level in Washington that it should not proceed for the present to South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff accordingly ordered the two ships carrying the HAWK battalion to Okinawa, where they were unloaded on 7 December. Two days later General Westmoreland renewed the recommendation that the battalion be deployed to Da Nang, because "the missiles are needed now."[34]

On 11 December Ambassador Taylor was authorized to inform the GVN that two batteries of HAWK air defense missiles were in a position of readiness for prompt deployment to South Vietnam whenever needed.[35]

The Mode of Phase I Implementation

The Presidential decisions of 1 December had not provided the go-ahead for any major action. Within the Phase I program of the first 30 days, only the BARREL ROLL missions over Laos were a new activity, and the guidance was that these operations should "send a signal of deeper US involvement" rather than strive for a high level of military effectiveness. Restraint had been apparent as well in the scheduling of 34A MAROPS and the disposition of the HAWK battalion.

At a meeting of senior officials on 19 December, which General Johnson attended as Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the program of BARREL ROLL missions beyond the first two of 14 and 17 December was one of the matters discussed. According to the meeting record, "General Johnson pointed out that this program is not as strong as that recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that it provides no significant intensification as compared with the previous week's operations."

> This was acknowledged. Mr. Vance stated that that was a criterion governing preparation of the program. Mr. McCone confirmed that there is not yet any indication that the DRV has recognized any change

34. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6373 to CJCS, 9 Dec 64, File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.
. (S) Jt State-Def msg, State 1247 to Saigon, 11

in the nature of our military operations as the result of last week's program. Consensus was that this was the way things should remain for the next two weeks.[36]

Later in December, after the dissolution of the High National Council and the falling out between Ambassador Taylor and General Khanh had given US officials further reason to proceed cautiously, a still greater disposition toward restraint was displayed in the response to the Brink Hotel bombing.

The Brink Hotel Explosion

On Christmas Eve a powerful blast shattered the Brink Hotel, an American BOQ in downtown Saigon. One US Army officer and one US civilian were killed and 63 US servicemen and civilians were injured, besides one Australian officer and 43 Vietnamese. Unknown persons had delivered this blow, apparently by parking an explosive-laden automobile in the hotel's first-floor garage.[37]

Ambassador Taylor characterized the bombing as a "major terrorist attack directed squarely at US personnel," and he termed it providential that only two fatalities had resulted. The incident was clearly one of the type that had been marked for reprisal in recent US consultations. But the Ambassador saw a counterindication in the "present absence of clear proof that bombing is work of VC."

> Another question arises as to timeliness of initiating reprisals in view of our sorry relations with RVNAF. I would get around this point by excluding Vietnamese from participation and by using sea-based US aircraft for strike. We can tell our military opposite numbers that it is kind of operation we would have liked to conduct jointly but could not in present state of our relations.

36. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, Dir J-3, "Meeting of NSC Principals, 19 Dec 1964," 19 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/166, 19 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (19 Dec 64).
37. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 221-64, 26 Dec 64.

The Ambassador advised Washington that he was withholding recommendation to execute a reprisal attack pending the outcome of the investigation of the source of the Brink bombing.[38]

A joint State-Defense message in reply later on Christmas Day cited further reasons for caution, stemming mainly from the current political difficulties in South Vietnam. If a reprisal was mounted, "Hanoi would hardly read into it any strong or continuing signal in view of overall confusion in Saigon."

> Hanoi might well share what would certainly be strong reaction in US opinion and internationally that we were trying to shoot our way out of an internal political crisis. Under present circumstances of Saigon disunity, it would be hard for American people to understand action to extend war. Moreover, unless evidence crystal clear, there might be some suspicion at least internationally that BOQ bombing was not in fact done by VC. For these reasons, we are not convinced reprisal action desirable as of now, but we are prepared to make quick decision if you make recommendation with different assessment. . . .

Should reprisal be decided on, the prospective target was already chosen: the Vit Thu Lu military barracks in lower North Vietnam.[39]

Admiral Sharp was next heard from, with a strong recommendation that the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese masters not be allowed to escape unscathed as they had following the Bien Hoa attack. He favored an immediate strike against the military barracks, saying "this is the language the VC understand."[40]

By 28 December Ambassador Taylor had concluded there was no reason to hold back. "Although we will probably never have evidence which will stand up in court of VC

---

38. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1941 to State, 25 Dec 64, JCS IN 64762.
39. (TS) Jt State-Def msg, State 1355 to Saigon, 25 Dec 64, JCS IN 64849.
40. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 262150Z Dec 64, JCS IN 65166.

complicity in the Brink bombing, no one in this part of the world has slightest doubt of VC guilt." He reported that the radio voice of the National Liberation Front was claiming credit for the explosion. "They say that they did it and we should treat them accordingly." The US Mission Council was unanimous in recommending that a reprisal bombing attack be executed as soon as possible against the Vit Thu Lu barracks. General Westmoreland would like to include some VNAF participation in the primarily US operation. "As US relations with RVNAF seem to be improving at the moment and since there were 43 Vietnamese casualties in the Brink bombing," Ambassador Taylor did not oppose this suggestion.[41]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly endorsed the Ambassador's views regarding Viet Cong responsibility for the Brink bombing, which they called "a deliberate act aimed directly at US forces in South Vietnam." In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 28 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought approval for the dispatch of an action order to carry out the reprisal recommended by Ambassador Taylor and Admiral Sharp.

> The attack should be primarily a US operation, in such strength as to assure a high probability of target destruction. If VNAF readiness and time permit, the VNAF should participate. Two CVAs are presently on station, which, with in-place land-based air, provide adequate strength for this attack within an estimated six-hour reaction time.

The message the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed for dispatch to CINCPAC would instruct him to launch the operation on 30 December, Saigon time, employing 40 strike sorties from US resources, plus any further sorties the VNAF might be able to provide. He was to use optimum conventional ordnance, excluding napalm.[42]

A meeting of senior officials presided over by Secretary Rusk occurred at mid-day on 28 December. Some of those present were opposed to mounting an attack in view

---

41. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1975 to State, 28 Dec 64, JCS IN 65666, JMF 9155.3 (28 Dec 64).
42. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-1076-64 to SecDef, 28 Dec 64, Encl to JCS 2343/510, 31 Dec 64, same file.

of the political instability in Saigon and the time elapsed since the Brink incident. It was agreed that Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy would consult with the President at his Texas ranch the following day.[43] By early evening on 29 December the Secretary had signaled Ambassador Taylor that "highest levels today reached negative decision on proposal . . . for reprisal action for BOQ bombing." General Wheeler had similarly informed Admiral Sharp.[44]

An Afterword by General Wheeler

On the last day of the year General Wheeler sent a personal message to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland. The Chairman said he still had not been apprised of "the factors which influenced highest authority to disapprove recommendations of Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and JCS to undertake reprisal for Brink bombing." He then provided his own assessment of the probable reasons, such as the following:

> The presence of U.S. dependents in South Vietnam. This has been a matter of continuing concern to highest authority and was specifically referred to by Secretary Rusk at our meeting on 28 December. There is concern in Washington, amounting almost to conviction, that our dependents are liable to attack as a VC/DRV reprisal to a U.S. attack against the DRV. While our dependents remain in South Vietnam, I consider that forceful action by the U.S. outside the borders of South Vietnam is practically precluded.

General Wheeler was convinced that the continued presence of US dependents was "a hurdle which trips decisions."

The second factor he cited was "doubt in some Washington sectors that security measures of critical installations in Saigon and elsewhere are adequate." He had encountered an attitude among some officials "to the effect

43. (S) Msg, JCS 5458-64 to CINCPAC, 28 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.

44. (S) Msg, JCS 5464-64 to CINCPAC, 29 Dec 64, same file. (TS) Msg, State 1365 to Saigon, 29 Dec 64, JCS IN 67453, JMF 9155.3 (28 Dec 64).

that lax security not only invites but in some curious way justifies a VC attack and thereby inhibits us from retaliatory action."

Next, there was "a widespread and strong belief, shared by some DOD senior officials, that reprisals must be executed within 24-36 hours." To wait longer was to remove the US action "from the reprisal to the offensive area," making it an escalatory act. Finally, there was the underlying fact that "U.S. policy determination currently is limited to the decision to exert a limited squeeze on the DRV; no decision had yet been taken to move militarily against the North."

General Wheeler anticipated that with the reconvening of Congress in the new year there would be "sharp inquiries into U.S. policy in South Vietnam, the conduct of the war and the reasons for our lack of success. The Congress and the American people are increasingly concerned about the situation in Southeast Asia." He believed, however, that their concern was not that the United States was engaged in a war; it stemmed from frustration "that we are not winning the war."

General Wheeler counseled the two commanders to look to the maintenance of the US capability for prompt retaliation. Despite the recent decision against reprisal, some officials continued to talk of the need for a 6-hour reaction time in response to VC or NVN provocation. The Chairman had advised them more than once that if VNAF participation was desired, an additional 24 hours would be required to arrange it. Beyond that, General Wheeler said,

> We must continue to press the military and the civilians in Saigon to submerge their differences and fabricate a reasonably sound governmental structure; . . . we must somehow convince the Washington policymakers that our security arrangements are as good as the type of war we are fighting will permit.[45]

45. (S) Msg, JCS 5485-64 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.

Referring specifically to "the GVN disarray on Christmas Eve" and its effect on the reprisal decision, General Wheeler said that "the political confusion in Saigon does not encourage nor, indeed, permit the U.S. to increase the stakes in Southeast Asia." He could as well have used these words to explain the course US policy had taken throughout 1964.

On 8 April 1964 a message from the Office of the Secretary of Defense advised CINCPAC that all action relating to the Model Plan was suspended. The message quoted a White House statement of 17 March as the current guidance:

> The policy should continue of withdrawing U.S. personnel where their roles can be assumed by South Vietnamese and of sending additional men if they are needed. It will remain the policy of the U. S. to furnish assistance and support of South Vietnam for as long as is required to bring Communist aggression and terrorism under control.

The OSD message contained parallel instructions regarding the Military Assistance Program. CINCPAC was to suspend the planning of MAP on a five-year basis and give intensive attention to the immediate and forthcoming fiscal years, 1965 and 1966. Ceilings had already been established at $143.1 million for Vietnam FY 65 MAP and $143.0 million for FY 66. An expectation that more than this would be needed was evident in the instruction given CINCPAC: "requirements above these program levels should be identified as separate packages." Immediate needs, rather than long-term program projections, were to govern the provision of US men and materials to South Vietnam.[3]

As has already been recounted, in July the United States determined to increase the number of military advisors in South Vietnam substantially. For all purposes, more than 8,000 men were added during the year. This brought the total US personnel commitment to 23,292 by the end of 1964, drawn from the Services as follows:[4]

USA	14,679
USN	1,109
USMC	900
USAF	6,604
Total	23,292

3. (S-GP 4) Msg, DEF 963028 to CINCPAC, 8 Apr 64, same file.

4. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, Figure I-6, following p. 4.

Chapter 16

THE US ESTABLISHMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1964

The US Personnel Commitment

President Johnson, shortly after assuming office in November 1963, reaffirmed the White House statement of 2 October that had set the goal of substantial achievement of the purposes of the US advisory effort in South Vietnam during the next two years. The expectation was that a major withdrawal of US military personnel would be possible after 1965.[1]

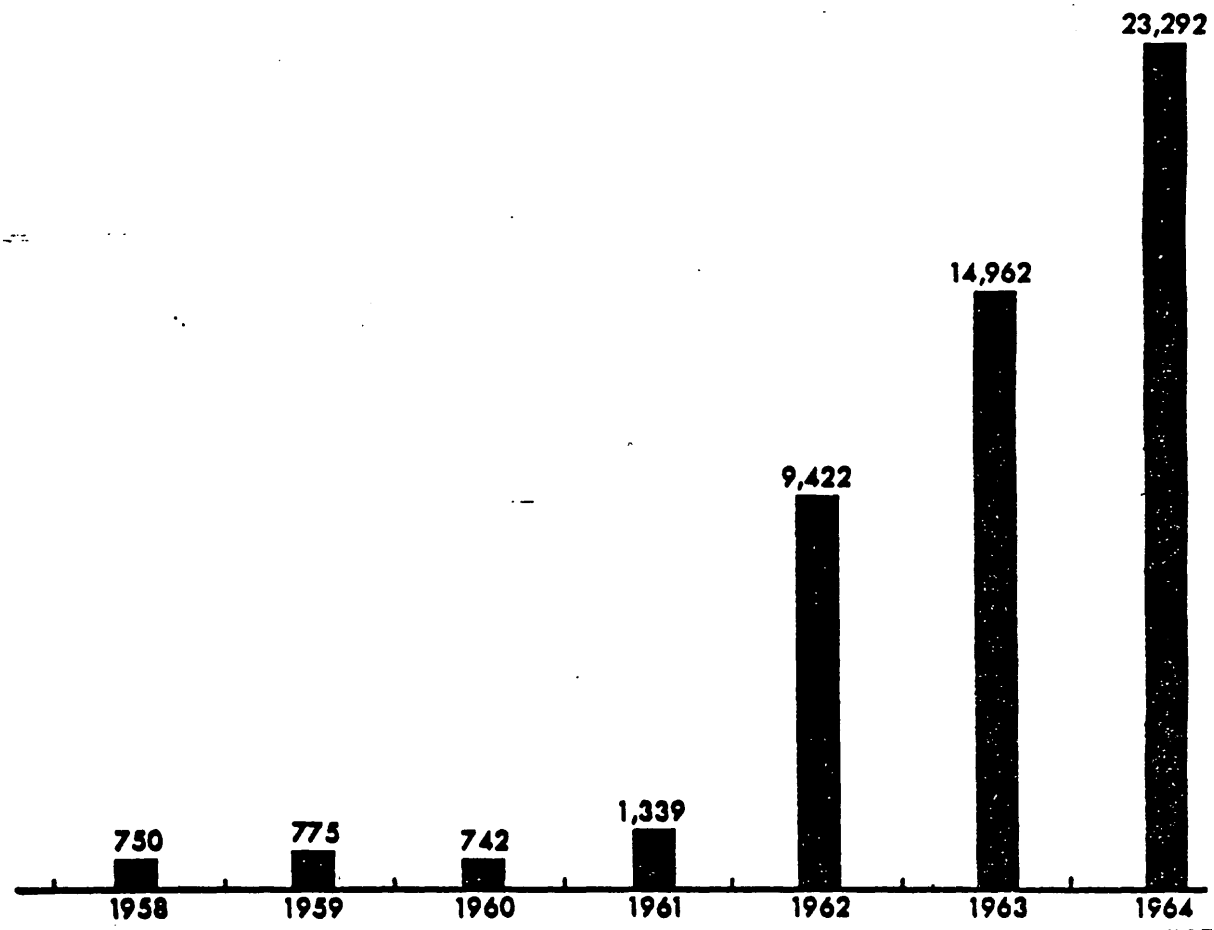
At that moment CINCPAC had nearly completed work under his instructions to revise the plan for the transition, on a faster time schedule. On 5 December 1963, Admiral Felt submitted the "FY 65-69 Accelerated Model Plan (CPVSN) for Republic of Vietnam." As directed, the revised plan assumed that the Viet Cong insurgency would be brought under control in the northern provinces during 1964 and in the rest of the country during 1965. In the northern provinces (I and II Corps Tactical Zones and part of the III Corps Zone) the RVNAF would begin its phase-down to a postinsurgency force structure during 1965, and elsewhere during 1966. As the RVNAF assumed the air, transportation, and communications functions currently being performed by US units, the latter would be withdrawn, along with the US advisors. By FY 1968 the entire RVNAF would have reached its postinsurgency force level of 119,700, and only a residual US MAAG establishment would remain in South Vietnam.[2]

Even at the time of submission it was becoming clear that the assumption on which the Model Plan was based was unlikely to be fulfilled. By the end of December, and in his statements during the following months, President Johnson was saying that the United States would maintain personnel and equipment in South Vietnam for as long as necessary to assist the GVN in putting down the insurgency.

---

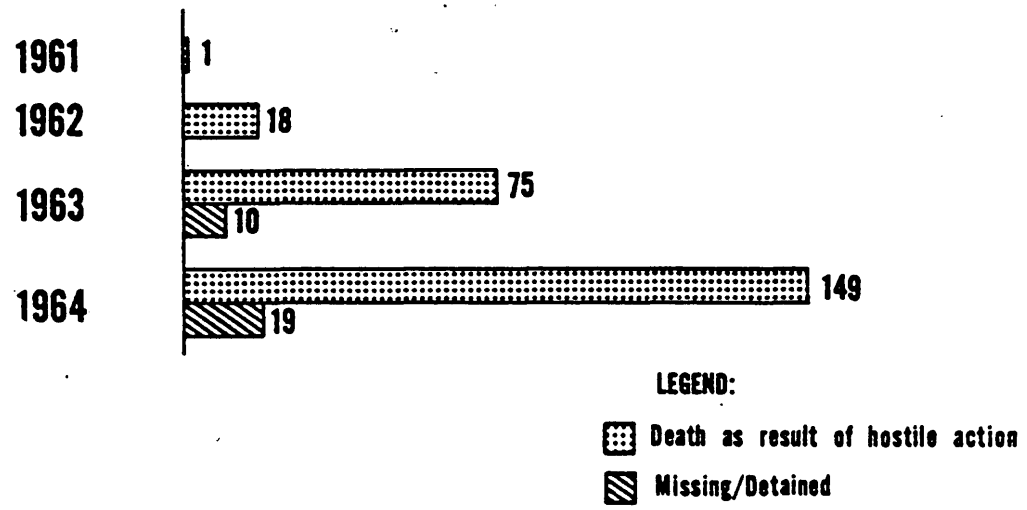
1. (TS-GP 1) NSAM 273, 26 Nov 63, Att to JCS 2343/297, 29 Nov 63, JMF 9155.3/5410 (22 Nov 63) sec 2.
2. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 001260, 5 Dec 63, Att to JCS 2343/262-5, 12 Dec 63, JMF 9155.3/3360 (25 Jan 63) sec 5.

BUILDUP OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL RVN

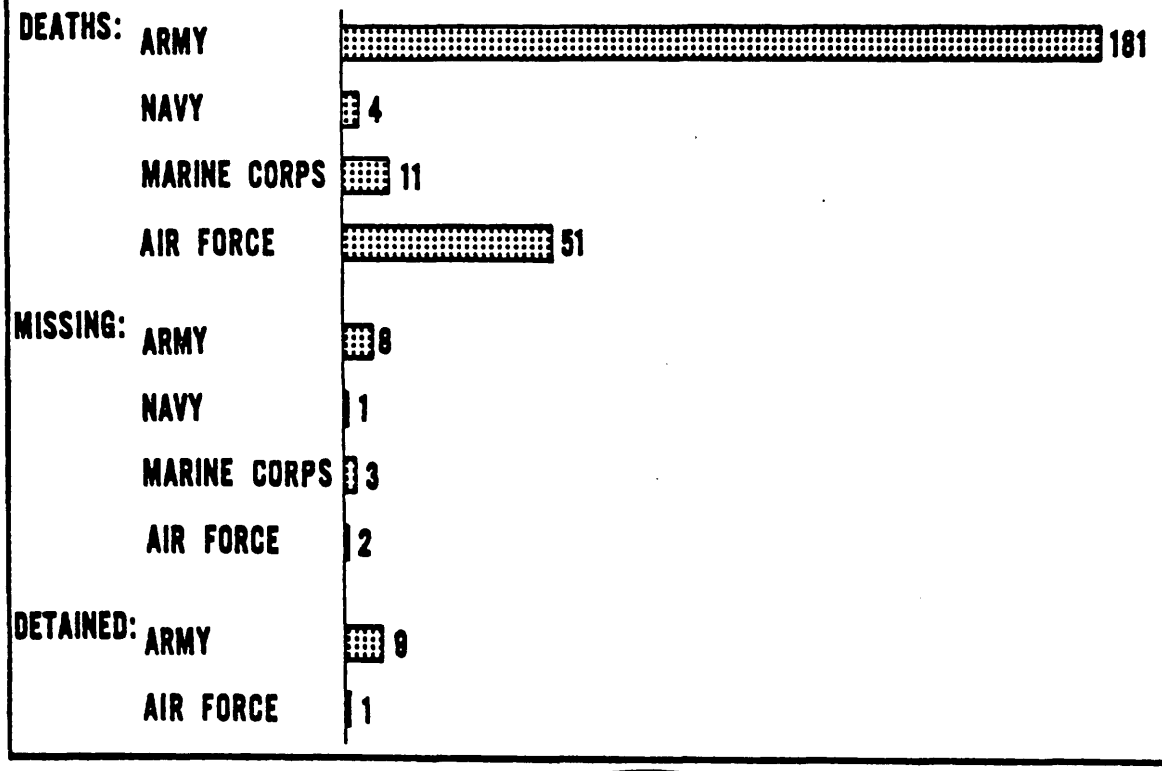


(TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964.

CASUALTIES AMONG U.S. PERSONNEL IN RVN 1959 - 1964



U.S. PERSONNEL CASUALTIES AS RESULT OF HOSTILE ACTION IN RVN 1961 - 196



Other lines of relationship included: 1) the direct line of operational command from CINCPAC to COMUSMACV and thence to the US forces and military agencies in South Vietnam; 2) administrative logistic support channels from the PACOM component commands to the Service component elements of the MAAG establishment; 3) the US Ambassador's overall responsibility for MAP administration, expressed through a direct relationship with CHMAAG; 4) coordination and liaison among the Ambassador, COMUSMACV, other US agencies in the country, and the GVN.[6]

On 18 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that as part of their continuing attention to improving the US effort in South Vietnam, they were studying possible organizational changes. Among other things, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had been asked for their views on the desirability of disestablishing MAAG, Vietnam, and merging its functions with MACV.[7]

Both officers, Admiral Felt and General Harkins, opposed the change. The latter said that the current organization was "understood by all" and was working well. COMUSMACV believed that "suggested US reorganization with attendant problems involving new relationships would be counter-productive." CINCPAC's reasons were similar:

> We will be unduly rocking the boat to no practical purpose since COMUSMACV already clearly exercises operational command over MAAG and advisors. This arrangement enables COMUSMACV and staff to concentrate on counterinsurgency effort and frees them from laboring on MAP administrative and logistical details as well as other nuts and bolts which law requires MAAG's to perform.[8]

After study, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to defer making any recommendation on this organizational matter until after the return of the Secretary of Defense and General Taylor from their March trip to South Vietnam. During that visit, however, Secretary McNamara directed General Harkins to perform a feasibility study of possible

---

6. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/335, 28 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 1.
7. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-136-64 to SecDef, 18 Feb 64, Encl to JCS 2343/317-2, 14 Feb 65, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64).
8. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/335, 28 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 1.

Owing to the rank and quality of the personnel assigned, this commitment had an impact on the US Services that was out of proportion to the numbers involved. At the end of 1964 the Vice Chief of Staff, Army, General Creighton H. Abrams, remarked that the US Army had "the equivalent of about 4.8 divisions worth of majors and captains, about 3.5 divisions worth of lieutenants and about three divisions worth of master sergeants" in South Vietnam.[5]

As the number of US personnel increased and the advisory effort was extended to the district level and to all ARVN battalions, casualties rose during 1964. The number of US servicemen killed, 149, was just short of twice the figure for 1963.

US Military Organization in South Vietnam

As 1964 opened, the US military organization in South Vietnam displayed two major elements, both subordinate to CINCPAC. One was headed by the Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV); the other by the Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (CHMAAG). The former exercised operational command over all US military activities in the country; the latter was responsible for the administration of day-to-day MAAG functions. Nearly 3,000 US personnel were under CHMAAG's direction, while COMUSMACV's headquarters was a relatively modest establishment of less than 400 people.

On military assistance matters, two channels of communication existed. One ran from CINCPAC through COMUSMACV to CHMAAG for all matters dealing with MAAG current operations and training; through the other, CINCPAC addressed CHMAAG directly concerning military assistance and force deployment objectives and MAP plans and programs under development. COMUSMACV had opportunity to comment to CINCPAC regarding MAP plans and programs, and CHMAAG kept COMUSMACV informed of his direct contacts with CINCPAC.

5. Ibid., p. 310

b. Any substantial reorganization now is undesirable in light of predictable adverse impact on the operational effort and on the stability of the RVN Government. CINCPAC agrees.

The Chairman and the Chief of Staff, Army, held the opposite view. They believed that "COMUSMACV, the commander in the field with basic responsibility for the success or failure of operations in the Republic of Vietnam, should be allowed to organize his headquarters as he sees fit provided he does so within his resources and without detriment to his mission."

In this case, COMUSMACV has stated that his reorganization plan could be accomplished with a saving of personnel and with minimum disruption (approximately one month); furthermore that this plan would constitute an important step toward elimination of duplication and improvement of responsiveness to command. His recommended solution is a clean-cut one which eliminates the dual US military channels of authority existing in Vietnam . . . .[11]

Secretary McNamara rendered his decision on the same day, 8 April, in favor of the reorganization as proposed by COMUSMACV. In informing CINCPAC the Joint Chiefs of Staff made the following stipulations:

The present organization of MACV as a subordinate unified command in RVN should be retained. However, in the Service manning of his headquarters, COMUSMACV may adjust the manning proportion so as to reflect the particular interests and degree of involvement of the Services.[12]

Later in the month General Harkins submitted a proposed JTD for the new organization resulting from absorption of MAAG by MACV. It listed a total of 3,580 officers and men--more than authorized for the previous organization. The distribution and differences were as follows:

---

11. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-288-64 to SecDef, 8 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2343/335-5), JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 2.

12. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "MACV/MAAG Reorganization," 8 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/335-7, 8 Apr 64; (C-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5802 to CINCPAC, 10 Apr 64; same file.

consolidation of MAAG and MACV. As COMUSMACV understood the Secretary's intention, the "fundamental objective is to streamline U. S. command organization in Vietnam for improved efficiency."[9]

COMUSMACV's reorganization plan reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 14 March. Its main feature was disestablishment of the MAAG headquarters as a separate echelon and absorption of its functions by MACV's J-staff elements. The field and training advisors would be directly under COMUSMACV's command, without CHMAAG as an intermediary. In explaining the concept General Harkins wrote that "MACV is more in the nature of a Specified Army Command rather than a Subordinate Joint Command."

> The nature of the warfare being conducted; the fact that about 65% of the American military are Army; and the fact that about 95% of RVNAF forces are Army, validates the appropriateness of this conclusion. Nevertheless, recognizing the joint aspects of the operation, the "J" staff would be retained. However, the staff would be heavily weighted with Army representatives and would contain Directorates purely Army in makeup and devoted to peculiar Army tasks.[10]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff delivered a split recommendation to the Secretary of Defense on 8 April. The Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps members opposed the disestablishment of MAAG:

> a. The concept of a subordinate unified command in South Vietnam, as developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and implemented by CINCPAC, remains fundamentally sound. MAAG, Vietnam, should be retained as an entity under MACV, although some individual functional adjustments should be made between the MAAG and MACV, including the transfer of functions which bear directly on combat advisory assistance and support for RVN Armed Forces.

---

9. (S) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/355--Vietnam and Southeast Asia (U)," 2 Mar 64, same file. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 220912Z Mar 64, same file, sec 2.

10. (C-GP 3) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, "Study on Reorganization of Hq MACV and MAAG," [12] Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/335-3, 14 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 1.

COMUSMACV should be manned by the Air Force rather than the Army, was made the subject of a separate paper.[15]

On 6 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the proposed MACV JTD be approved "on an interim basis." They recognized that further adjustments would probably be necessary in the future and noted that both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV were instituting manpower survey actions. Secretary McNamara approved on 29 June.[16]

The question of Service balance in the three senior military positions in South Vietnam--COMUSMACV, Deputy COMUSMACV, and Chief of Staff, USMACV--had a somewhat longer history. The position of deputy commander had been added to the organizational structure at the beginning of 1964. Lieutenant General William C. Westmoreland, USA, had arrived in Vietnam on 27 January to assume the duties of Deputy COMUSMACV.

Earlier, in November 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had agreed that when the Marine Corps Major General then serving as Chief of Staff completed his tour in mid-1964, he would be succeeded by an Air Force officer. During the March visit, however, Secretary McNamara directed that COMUSMACV be permitted to recommend the manner of filling the post. Later in the month General Harkins requested that Major General R. G. Stilwell, USA, then serving as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, USMACV, became his next Chief of Staff. CINCPAC concurred. Since both Generals Harkins and Westmoreland were Army officers, this would assign all three senior positions to one Service.[17]

On 9 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted their divergent views to the Secretary of Defense:

> a. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Chief of Staff, US Army, concur in the recommendation as submitted.

---

15. (S-GP 4) "Air Force Statement of Nonconcurrence," Encl E (removed from paper by Decision) to JCS 2428/360-1, 22 May 64, same file. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/408, 3 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64).

16. (S-GP 4) JCSM-484-64 to SecDef, 6 Jun 64 (derived from JCS 2428/360-1); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "MACV 15 May 1964 Joint Table of Distribution (U)," 29 Jun 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2428/360-1, 2 Jul 64; JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2.

17. (S-GP 4) JCS 2428/348, 3 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/5000 (12 Mar 64).

	Army	Navy	AF	MC	Civ	Total
Proposed MACV JTD	3000	199	341	40	0	3580
MACV/MAAG currently authorized	2705	191	336	39	2	3273
Difference	+295	+8	+5	+1	-2	+307

General Harkins explained that the additional personnel were needed to provide more men and officers for the field advisory effort, to support new staff functions, and to support "previously performed but unsupported functions."[13]

CINCPAC, although not recommending disapproval, was critical of the JTD. Besides noting that the original objective of saving personnel had not been attained, he thought the proposed staff structure complex and unwieldy and saw some possibilities of conflict of responsibilities. Admiral Felt objected, also, that the reorganization would make MACV "basically an Army headquarters, with the Air Force and Naval commands serving as appendages." It moved away from the objective he cited: "maintain and improve the unified effort in Vietnam."[14]

General LeMay initially objected that "approval of the proposed MACV JTD would in effect result in a de facto Specified Army Command." It would provide a staff whose joint Service representation was inadequate for "successful prosecution of current joint operations in Vietnam." Moreover, should there be occasion to implement certain of CINCPAC's contingency plans for wider hostilities, COMUSMACV would become the Commander, US Forces Southeast Asia, directing sizable forces of all Services. "The wisdom of fighting such a force without a true joint staff is questionable," General LeMay said. During the JCS consideration, however, one of his main contentions, that the position of Deputy

13. (C-GP 4) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, Ser 0415, 23 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2428/360, 6 May 64; (S-GP 4) JCS 2428/360-1, 22 May 64; JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2. The figures given are those of the J-1 report in JCS 2428/360-1, which corrected certain discrepancies in COMUSMACV's submission.

14. (C-GP 4) CINCPAC, First Endorsement, Ser 0339-64, on COMUSMACV Ltr, Ser 0339-64, 1 May 64, Att to JCS 2428/360, 6 May 64, JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2.

b. The Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps concur in the recommendation, but as a matter of principle do not agree that the three senior positions should be filled by the same Service.

c. The Chief of Staff, US Air Force, feels that, considering the importance of air strategy in Vietnam, the Air Force is not properly represented among the three senior positions in USMACV. Therefore, he does not concur in the recommendation, but considers that the next Chief of Staff, COMUSMACV, should be an Air Force officer.

Secretary McNamara the following day approved the appointment of General Stilwell as Chief of Staff, USMACV.[18]

The parallel question of filling the Deputy COMUSMACV position arose soon afterward. General Harkins was scheduled to return to the United States late in June and to retire on 1 August. The President had approved the succession of General Westmoreland to the command position, which would leave the Deputy COMUSMACV post vacant.

In a preliminary discussion the Joint Chiefs of Staff, less the Chairman, reached general agreement that the next Deputy COMUSMACV should be an Air Force officer. They asked General Taylor to communicate this view to Admiral Felt, General Harkins, and General Westmoreland, whose comments the Chairman had indicated he wished to have before reaching a decision.[19]

General Westmoreland's comments, in which General Harkins concurred, were received on 6 May.

I feel strongly that if there is to be a deputy commander, MACV, he should be Army not Air Force. I fully concur with the feeling expressed by the Secretary of Defense that this is predominantly a land campaign and therefore senior commanders should be prepared by experience and orientation primarily to deal with problems involving ground operations.

---

18. (C-GP 4) JCSM-295-64 to SecDef, 9 Apr 64, Encl to JCS 2428/348-1, 9 Apr 64; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Chief of Staff, U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Command, Vietnam," 10 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2428/348-2, 13 Apr 64; same file.

19. (S) Msg, JCS 1999-64 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64.

He believed an Air Force Lieutenant General would be "of marginal effectiveness as an assistant" and that introduction of this officer would displace the highly satisfactory arrangement under which the Commander of the 2d Air Division, Major General J. H. Moore, currently provided advice on air matters to COMUSMACV. Effective integration of air considerations in the command's planning was assured also by the fact that the MACV J-5 was headed by an Air Force Major General. General Westmoreland did not feel that a deputy commander was necessary. If it was considered prudent for contingency backup purposes to have a senior officer in such a position, he would recommend that it be combined with the Chief of Staff's post.[20]

Commenting on the exchange of messages between Generals Taylor and Westmoreland, in which both had referred to Secretary McNamara's views, Admiral Felt wrote with what appeared to be resignation:

> "My effort to imbue the principle of unified team effort seems to have come to naught. Insistence on exclusive recognition of parochial interests creates an unhappy and unhealthy situation. The facts belie a contention that the campaign in RVN is exclusively Army. We have made a serious effort to lead the Vietnamese into a unified effort in their organization, planning and execution. It is disappointing to see a proposition put forward on our side that only a foot soldier understands the kind of warfare being conducted in RVN. A unified command concept is required by the terms of reference given to COMUSMACV.[21]

The matter became more pressing as the date of General Harkins' departure from South Vietnam approached. On 12 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted divergent views to the Secretary of Defense. The Chief of Naval Operations, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps believed that the post of Deputy COMUSMACV should be filled and that, "in order to preserve the unified nature of the command," the deputy should be from a Service other than that of the commander. "Further, in view of the

20. (S) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV MAC 2217 to CJCS, 6 May 64, same file.
21. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 071926Z May 64, same file.

increased air activity in Vietnam and the possibility of contingency plan implementation involving expanded air operations, there is a need to broaden the frame of reference in the MACV command element to meet these circumstances." Therefore, they recommended that the Deputy COMUSMACV be supplied by the Air Force.

The Chief of Staff, Army, dissented. He believed that "there is ample and able Air Force representation in Vietnam," made effective by the excellent relationship between General Westmoreland and General Moore. He discounted the need for a separate contingency backup commander, holding that the Chief of Staff, General Stilwell, was fully qualified to assume command in an emergency. General Wheeler recommended acceding to the desire General Westmoreland had expressed on 6 May that no Deputy COMUSMACV be assigned.[22]

The Secretary was informed that the Chairman would submit his opinion separately. General Taylor wished to consult with General Westmoreland once more, to learn whether a further five weeks of experience had altered his views. General Westmoreland replied that he saw no need for appointment of a Deputy COMUSMACV in the immediate future. "However, in consideration of all factors including possible expansion of conflict and the presence of a contingency command backup," he had concluded that assignment of a deputy about 1 August would be prudent.[23]

> For the time being, I would not combine the Deputy and Chief of Staff functions. In view of the role I would assign the Deputy involving matters of insurgency, basic ground combat, frequent negotiations with ARVN generals, and supervision of our field advisors, I recommend that he be an Army officer.

General Taylor carried a memorandum containing his views to the Secretary of Defense on 18 June. He believed there was a definite need to fill the position of Deputy COMUSMACV. "An energetic prosecution of the Pacification Program will increase the workload of COMUSMACV both in the field and in Saigon," at a time when his concern with MAP activities would

---

22. (S-GP 3) JCSM-514-64 to SecDef, 12 Jun 64, Encl to JCS 2343/408-1, 12 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64).

23. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6864 to COMUSMACV, 15 Jun 64, same file. (S) Msg, Dep COMUSMACV MAC 3077 to CJCS, 18 Jun 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 64.

also rise owing to the disestablishment of the MAAG. "It seems clear that General Westmoreland will need a deputy even to a greater degree than did General Harkins."

> As is suggested by the above enumeration of tasks, the deputy should be an across-the-board generalist capable of acting as an alter ego to General Westmoreland either in the field or in Saigon. This concept of the task argues against the proposal to create a three-star air deputy in order to give greater weight to the air campaign. Such an arrangement would not give General Westmoreland the across-the-board reinforcement needed and would tend to erode the position of the Commanding General, 2d Air Division, Major General Moore, to whom General Westmoreland now looks for the conduct of the air campaign.

"A final consideration," General Taylor wrote, "is the importance of having as Deputy Commander, MACV, a potential successor to COMUSMACV" in the existing combat situation in South Vietnam. "The deputy should be an Army officer as it is hardly conceivable in view of the nature of the counter-insurgency operations that we would want a COMUSMACV from another Service." General Taylor recommended that an Army deputy be assigned who would be provisionally regarded as the successor to COMUSMACV. Secretary McNamara recorded his approval of the Chairman's memorandum on 18 June.[24]

Major General John L. Throckmorton, USA, was subsequently selected. Promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General, he assumed the position of Deputy COMUSMACV on 2 August 1964.[25]

Problems of US Military-Civilian Coordination

In South Vietnam the overall responsibility for US activities and authority over political and basic policy matters rested with the Ambassador. COMUSMACV had a specific and direct responsibility for US military policy and operations, under the political guidance of the Ambassador. Their Washington superiors expected the Ambassador and COMUSMACV to coordinate

---

24. (S-GP 3) CM-1427-64 to SecDef, 15 Jun 64, Att to JCS 2343/408-2, 19 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64). Although dated 15 Jun 64, CM-1427-64 contained a reference to Westmoreland's message of 18 June; that it was hand-carried by CJCS to SecDef on the latter date is indicated by annotation on copy in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 64.

25. (C) JCSM-569-64 to SecDef, 13 Jul 64, JMF 1141 (29 Jun 64).

their efforts closely and keep one another fully informed regarding their contacts with GVN military and political officials. The relationship that existed between Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and General Paul D. Harkins, in 1963 and until mid-1964, did not entirely fulfill this ideal.

The findings of Secretary McNamara during his visit to South Vietnam in December 1963 tended to support complaints General Harkins had made about the aloofness of the Ambassador and lack of effective Embassy coordination of the US effort. On returning to Washington the Secretary told the President that Ambassador Lodge maintained no regular official contact with COMUSMACV. "Lodge sends in reports with major military implications without showing them to Harkins," he said, "and does not show Harkins important incoming traffic." Secretary McNamara did not suppose that Ambassador Lodge was following any conscious policy of excluding the chief US military official in South Vietnam from his counsel. The difficulty appeared to be one of personality; "he has just operated as a loner all his life and cannot readily change now." During the visit Secretary McNamara had done what he could to counter this deficiency by alerting other officers of the Embassy to the need for closer coordination.[26]

When Ambassador Lodge made a move several months later toward centralized control of one aspect of US activities, however, he encountered resistance. At an Embassy meeting on 21 April he passed out a memorandum to those present, including COMUSMACV, which stated that US agency heads should seek no appointments with General Khanh without prior clearance and approval by the Embassy. Such appointments would be taken up with the Deputy Chief of Mission. If an agency head was summoned by the GVN leader, he would respond but would notify the Embassy that he intended to do so. "One purpose of these measures," the Ambassador stated, "is to reduce to a minimum the amount of time which General Khanh must give to American visitors. His time is very precious and should only be allotted to matters that are absolutely vital." A further purpose was "to make sure that all US agencies follow the same broad line."[27]

---

26. (S) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Vietnam Situation," 21 Dec 63, OCJCS File, Reports on SVN (Trip File Folder), Envelope #4.

27. (C) Memo, Amb H. C. Lodge to COMUSMACV et al., 21 Apr 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64.

General Harkins did not read the memorandum until later in the day. He then responded with a memorandum of his own to the Ambassador, quoting from the COMUSMACV terms of reference, which had been agreed to by the Secretaries of State and Defense and signed by the President. The document charged him with "direct responsibility for all United States military policy, operations and assistance" and granted "authority to discuss both the United States and Vietnamese military operation directly with the President of Vietnam and the leaders of the Government of Vietnam." While indicating that he would continue to keep the Ambassador informed of any such discussions, General Harkins said he could not feel bound by the recent memorandum.[28]

Ambassador Lodge submitted the conflicting interpretations of authority to Washington for resolution. The initial draft for a reply prepared in the Department of State gave virtually full support to the Ambassador's position. When General Taylor saw the proposed text he objected strongly and was backed by Secretary McNamara. After further consultation, Secretary Rusk sent a letter to Ambassador Lodge whose terms were acceptable to the Department of Defense. The Secretary indicated a means of accommodation that he thought compromised neither COMUSMACV's authority to discuss military matters with high GVN officials nor the Ambassador's overall supervisory authority. Lodge was entitled to receive advance notice of any such discussions, including the purpose, and he could provide policy guidance to General Harkins if required. It was suggested, however, that COMUSMACV's visits to General Khanh not be subject to clearance with the Deputy Chief of Mission. Secretary Rusk expressed the hope that Lodge and Harkins would consult together with such frequency that the question of calls on General Khanh would be disposed of as a routine matter. At the same time, General Taylor advised General Harkins that since this letter had the concurrence of the Secretary of Defense, it should be regarded by COMUSMACV as a directive.[29]

---

28. (U) Memo, COMUSMACV to Amb Lodge, 22 Apr 64, same file.
29. (C) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState, 7 May 64, with two draft letters and note by SecDef; (C) Msg, JCS 2190-64 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 15 May 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64.

As the end of his tour in South Vietnam approached in June, General Harkins expressed himself as still dissatisfied with the Ambassador's methods and procedures. It was his observation that Lodge rarely consulted anyone, including the Deputy Chief of Mission. "I am hardly ever privy to messages bearing on the military prior to dispatch from the Embassy," he told General Taylor on 7 June.[30]

General Westmoreland, already designated as Harkins' successor, had taken the opportunity of the plane ride back from the Honolulu Conference a few days earlier to speak frankly to Ambassador Lodge about deficiencies in the US official establishment. He reported to General Taylor on 6 June that he had pointed to a lack of clear definition of responsibilities as the source of faulty coordination of the pacification task. Ambassador Lodge appeared to favor one of Westmoreland's suggestions, that COMUSMACV be named as the Ambassador's executive agent for coordination of all US efforts toward pacification. Ambassador Lodge was unwilling to advocate such a designation, however, unless asked by Washington to recommend improvements.[31]

Later in June Ambassador Lodge resigned, and the President appointed General Taylor to succeed him. The new Ambassador was invested with full responsibility for all US programs in South Vietnam, including whatever degree of command and control over the military effort he considered appropriate.[32]

Within a week after his early July arrival in Saigon, Ambassador Taylor instituted several measures to improve the coordination among US agencies. First, he placed all US activities under the direction of a newly created US Mission Council. The membership included the Ambassador, the Deputy Ambassador, COMUSMACV, the senior AID, USIA, and CIA officials, and Mr. William Sullivan, who also served as full-time executive coordinator. The Ambassador announced that all existing committees would be surveyed with a view to consolidation, expansion, or perhaps elimination.[33]

30. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 2833 to CJCS, 7 Jun 64.
31. (C) Msg, Deputy COMUSMACV MAC 2815 to CJCS, 6 Jun 64.
32. (S) Msg, State 20 to Saigon, 2 Jul 64.
33. (S) Msg, Saigon 41 to State, 7 Jul 64.

Ambassador Taylor declared it his intention "to have this mission operate as a team and to present a coordinated front not only to the Vietnamese but also to Washington." Uncoordinated communications from US agencies in South Vietnam to their parent organizations in Washington had produced confusion at both ends of the line in the past. He now required that all outgoing communications be routed through Saigon, except on very routine or technical matters. Also, all field reports would be sent first to appropriate elements of the US Mission in Saigon, which would determine the manner and means of repeating the information to superiors in Washington. Finally, the Ambassador established a 44-hour work week for all US civilian agencies in Saigon.[34]

The working relationship established between Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland was particularly close. COMUSMACV's messages to CINCPAC and Washington on major subjects commonly included notice of the Ambassador's concurrence or a fuller expression of his views. Ambassador Taylor's practice was typified by the following remark in a message to General Wheeler, referring to certain closely held preliminary papers for a conference in Washington: "In this connection you should know that I have cut Westy completely into these matters and that I have his views on the . . . papers."[35]

Later in the year Ambassador Taylor turned his attention to improving US coordination in Southeast Asia as a whole, to meet a need that had often been cited during his service in Washington. Noting that national policy decisions were being implemented by separate actions of the US Embassies in Saigon, Bangkok, and Vientiane, and by COMUSMACV and the Seventh Fleet as well as by the military forces of the countries of the area, on 16 September he proposed a formal politico-military coordinating committee for Southeast Asia, reporting to the State and Defense Departments. Both Ambassador Martin in Bangkok and Ambassador Unger in Vientiane soon indicated their general agreement with the proposal.[36]

On 25 September a joint State-Defense message, to whose composition the Joint Chiefs of Staff had contributed, endorsed the goal of close coordination on politico-military matters

34. (C) Msg, Saigon 117 to State, 16 Jul 64. (U) Msg, Saigon 254 to State, 30 Jul 64.
35. (S) Msg, Saigon JPS 538 to CJCS, 23 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.
36. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/142-2, 23 Oct 64, JMF 9150 (22 Sep 64) sec 1.

among the three US Embassies. Washington officials suggested that Ambassador Taylor continue to convene ad hoc meetings when required, with military representation provided also on an ad hoc and informal basis. Should he conclude that a more formal arrangement was needed, the Ambassador was invited to submit proposed terms of reference.[37]

The three Ambassadors met in Saigon on 8 October, and two days later Ambassador Taylor forwarded draft terms of reference for a group to be known as the Coordinating Committee for US Missions Southeast Asia (SEACOORD). It would "coordinate policy recommendations and military operational matters affecting more than one mission."

> With respect to military and related operational matters, the committee will coordinate the operations and actions of their respective missions and component elements within the sphere of their competence and authority from Washington. The committee will also act as a clearing house for the exchange of information on all military or other operations affecting more than one post . . . . The committee will not exercise executive authority over any mission or military command.

In support of SEACOORD there would be a standing military committee, known as SEAMIL, with COMUSMACV or his representative as Chairman.[38]

Ambassador Taylor's idea was burgeoning into reality in Saigon more rapidly than some officials in Washington had expected. As the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought to mature their views on the proposed terms of reference, the Joint Staff advised them that "the problem for the military appears to have become one of providing adequate military advice while at the same time avoiding the growth of an irregular command line which could circumvent the established US military chain of command, or which would erode established channels for continuous exchange of military information."[39]

---

37. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-826-64 to SecDef, 24 Sep 64, Encl to JCS 2339/142-1, 25 Sep 64; (U) 1st N/H of JCS 2339/142-1, 5 Oct 64; same file.
38. (S) Msg, Saigon 1080 to State, 10 Oct 64, JMF 9150 (22 Sep 64) sec 1.
39. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/142-2, 23 Oct 64, same file.

General LeMay had expressed his concern more bluntly. He told his JCS colleagues that study of the recent messages indicated that "this committee is concerning itself not only with political and military coordination but with a wide range of military operations and specific details of air operations."

> In effect, this committee can shift primary influence over military operations in SE Asia, not simply RVN, to the US Ambassador in Saigon. Recommendations on military matters will inevitably be handled increasingly in State Department channels with the responsible unified commander, and perhaps the JCS as well, expressing what must be after-the-fact views.[40]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided their comments on the terms of reference to the Secretary of Defense on 6 November. They noted that they viewed Southeast Asia "as a militarily strategic entity." The established unified command system and the provisions of CINCPAC's contingency plans reflected this view and provided "effective military command arrangements responsive to present and anticipated situations in the area." The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized the necessity for political coordination in Southeast Asia "and for the established military structure to provide advice and information."

They advised the Secretary that Admiral Sharp considered that military representation during meetings of SEACOORD was essential. He had proposed procedures that the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed and that they had written into the revised terms of reference they recommended for adoption. Under the JCS revised terms, CINCPAC would be represented at SEACOORD meetings as he deemed appropriate, and he could designate additional representatives to sit on SEAMIL. COMUSMACV remained the SEAMIL Chairman.

In their revision the Joint Chiefs of Staff had given particular attention to the statement of SEACOORD's objectives. They deleted the more direct references to "military" and

---

40. (TS-GP 3) CSAF J-23-64 to JCS, 12 Oct 64, same file.

"military operations" from the Taylor draft, making "political or politico-military" matters the central concern of the committee:

> The objectives of SEACOORD are to coordinate policy recommendations and political actions including those which would have a major effect on military operational matters in more than one country. SEACOORD will also act as a clearing house for the exchange of information on all political or politico-military operations affecting more than one post. . . . recommendations will be forwarded through existing political and military channels.

The point of greatest concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff was stated in their basic memorandum:

> The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the establishing of SEACOORD and the intent of the TOR in no way change the existing military relationships or the established chain of command for the conduct of military operations.[41]

Even as the Joint Chiefs of Staff were submitting their recommendations, SEACOORD was holding its first formal meetings in Saigon, with COMUSMACV, CINCPACAF, and CINCPAC's J-5 chief in attendance. At the close of the second meeting General Westmoreland proposed that SEAMIL be abandoned as a formal organization. Ambassador Taylor agreed. COMUSMACV reported to General Wheeler on 11 November that the experience of the meetings had brought conviction that no separate military committee was needed.

> SEACOORD is a political/military organization designed to exchange viewpoints and to insure coordination of approved programs. Ad hoc groups can meet as appropriate to explore any problem and I visualize an ad hoc get-together by military respresentatives of the missions involved prior to most SEACOORD meetings.[42]

---

41. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-935-64 to SecDef, 6 Nov 64 (derived from JCS 2339/142-2), JMF 9150 (22 Sep 64) sec 2.

42. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5908 to CJCS, 11 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.

On 9 December Secretary McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that in view of the satisfactory functioning of SEACOORD for approximately two months, he thought it unnecessary to suggest revision of the group's terms of reference. But he delivered the following observation:

> I agree with the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the establishment of SEACOORD in no way changes the existing military relationships in the established chain of command for the coordination of military operations.[43]

The Use of Advisors

The US advisors, military and civilian, performed the central function that the United States had undertaken in South Vietnam. The concept was that the advisors would train and assist the Vietnamese, helping them to help themselves. As General Westmoreland later wrote:

> Our national policy was and remained based on meticulous recognition that the Republic of Vietnam was a free and independent sovereign state, with full freedom of choice. Therefore, in all of our endeavors, both within the military and at embassy level, our role was to provide advice and assistance; and our relationship was that of an ally. We could advise and persuade our Vietnamese counterparts, but we could not direct or dictate to them. The ultimate decisions remained Vietnamese.[44]

Some resistance from GVN officials to increasing the numbers and involvement of US advisors had been encountered during the period of the Diem regime. It came as an unwelcome surprise to US officials that this attitude did not change when a group of officers headed by General Minh overthrew Diem in November 1963. In a consultation with Ambassador Lodge on 10 January 1964, leaders of the Minh government said plainly that they did not want US personnel going into districts and villages. General Minh observed that the

43. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Politico/Military Coordination in Southeast Asia," 9 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/142-5, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (22 Sep 64) sec 2.

44. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68, p. 116.

French, even at their most heavy-handed, had never gone into villages or districts. To do so made the United States seem more imperialistic than France and played into the hands of the Viet Cong.

General Minh and his colleagues were also unhappy because of alleged visits by MAAG and MACV personnel to observe military training among the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. The Generals wanted these sects to produce Vietnamese, not "American-type," soldiers. General Don pointed out that the GVN had had a somewhat similar difficulty a year earlier when the US advisors fed the Montagnards a better ration than the Vietnamese Army received. Further, General Minh claimed that the CIA was making contacts with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. If this continued, the CIA would "get the Cao Dais and the Hoa Haos away from us. We simply cannot govern this country if this kind of conduct continues."[45]

The tenor of these remarks caused some concern in Washington, where expansion of the advisory effort was under consideration. Ambassador Lodge was informed that his superiors had come to believe in "the essentiality of the formal, recognized advisory framework down to battalion and province level, and now to include the subsector [district], where it can be established." Since the presence of US personnel gave the best assurance that US materiel was being used to full advantage, the Ambassador was requested to continue his efforts to introduce more advisors, perhaps at first on an experimental basis in a few districts.[46]

Washington officials were eager to make more effective use of civilian advisors as well. Early in January General Minh had remarked to Ambassador Lodge that perhaps a joint US-GVN "brain trust" might be a good idea. The remark, when reported to Washington, was seized upon by the State Department as an opportunity to introduce US advisors into the highest echelons of the GVN. President Johnson endorsed the concept, and on 11 January the State Department informed Ambassador Lodge that "high-level advisors may be essential

45. (S) Msg, Saigon 1288 to State, 10 Jan 64.
46. (S) Jt State-Def Msg (State 1072) to Saigon, 17 Jan 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 63-Feb 64.

key to instilling ingredient most sorely lacking in GVN: efficiency and urgency of action." The United States was prepared to send civilian experts to work side by side with the most senior GVN officials in the various areas of government.[47]

Ambassador Lodge had no enthusiasm for the project. He advised the Secretary of State that General Minh had said nothing further about the "brain trust" idea and that apparently it had been merely a phrase used in conversation rather than a serious proposal. "Very much doubt whether GVN would like the idea of high-powered Americans on an 'opposite number' basis in adjacent offices to them all through the government," the Ambassador wrote. "Believe this would have a 'colonial' touch which they would have a hard time explaining away."[48]

After the Minh government was overthrown by General Khanh on 30 January, there was a gradual change in the GVN attitude toward accepting more US advisors. At first, Ambassador Lodge reported that the Khanh government, like its predecessor, would probably resist US attempts to introduce high-level advisors into the GVN structure. The outlook began to change with the development of the National Pacification Plan in April. General Khanh, recognizing the lack of qualified Vietnamese administrators and executives, asked for and received several experienced US civilians. They were assigned as counterparts to cabinet ministers dealing with finance and economics, foreign affairs, civil administration, and press relations.[49]

Meanwhile, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 18 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had urged further expansion of the advisory effort. They recommended encouraging General Khanh to accept US advisors at all levels considered necessary by COMUSMACV, noting that "this is particularly applicable in the critical provinces where the advisory effort should be expanded and should reach down to the subsector level." Also, US civilian advisors should be offered for service at all echelons of the GVN, to provide civil administration expertise until a corps of Vietnamese administrators could be trained.[50]

---

47. (S) Msg, State 1055 to Saigon, 11 Jan 64.
48. (S) Msg, Saigon 1304 to State, 14 Jan 64.
49. (S) Msg, Saigon 2126 to State, 6 May 64.
50. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-136-64 to SecDef, 18 Feb 64, Encl to JCS 2342/317-2, 14 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64).

After further study and JCS recommendations, it was decided at the Honolulu Conference in early June to seek General Khanh's agreement to an increased US advisory effort. The United States wished to place advisors at the battalion level throughout the RVNAF and to extend the advisory effort to paramilitary forces at the district level in eight critical provinces. On 25 June General Khanh accepted these proposals.[51]

The advisory effort at the province and district level was largely concerned with implementation of the pacification program. At the time the expansion was approved, there was a USOM advisor to each province chief. With extension of the effort to the district level, a shortage of US civilians for assignment meant that military officers would have to assume some civil advisory duties. In addition, the number of military advisors at the province level was to be increased to give greater aid to the province chiefs in the administration of both military and civil programs that contributed directly to the pacification effort.[52]

By November, advisory teams were operating in 75 districts and half of the 239 districts in the critical provinces were scheduled to be manned by the end of the year. COMUSMACV reported that there had been an excellent response to the effort so far. Casualties were light, the advice was well received, and USOM-USIS-MACV coordination was excellent at the district level.[53]

US Participation in Combat Operations

The task of the US military advisor was to counsel, assist, and instruct South Vietnamese fighting men, without himself engaging the enemy except in self-defense. In practice, as in the case of FARM GATE, some US personnel had become directly involved in combat operations. For the Americans with other units that made contact with the enemy, the temptation to take action without going through the formality of advising was understandably strong.

51. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC JOO 5432 to JCS, 25 Jun 64.
52. (S-GP 1) JCSM-465-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/388, 28 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64) (1).
53. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6191 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File, "Taylor Visit, Nov 64."

On 21 April Senator Everett M. Dirksen and Representative Charles A. Halleck accused the Johnson Administration of hiding the facts about US involvement in South Vietnam from the American people. They said evidence was mounting that the United States was actually fighting the war. The two Republican leaders cited the letters of Captain Edwin G. Shank, USAF, written to his wife and released by her after his death in Vietnam on 24 March. Captain Shank had been shot down while on a FARM GATE mission.[54]

Early in May the Shank letters were published in Life. They contained statements that US pilots were actually doing the fighting in South Vietnam and that the VNAF personnel accompanying them on FARM GATE missions were "airmen basics," not student pilots receiving training.[55]

At a conference with COMUSMACV in Saigon on 13 May, Secretary McNamara stressed the potentially unfavorable impact on public support of the US effort in Vietnam of allegations such as those contained in the Shank letters. He reaffirmed the US policy that fighting in RVN would be done by the Vietnamese themselves and said that any exception to this policy must be approved by the highest authority. The FARM GATE concept had been adopted as a specific exception, reluctantly approved with the understanding that it was an essential supplement to GVN capabilities and temporary in nature. The Secretary of Defense ordered an immediate program to train enough VNAF pilots to assure that they would ultimately be able to carry on the air war in RVN entirely on their own.[56]

After the Secretary's return to Washington, General Taylor sent the following message to CINCPAC:

> Since the initiation of US participation in counterinsurgency action in South Vietnam, it has been the policy of the US Government that US military personnel will not take part in combat. This policy is reaffirmed subject to the following exceptions.

---

54. NY Times, 22 Apr 64, 1.
55. Life, 8 May 64, pp. 34B-39.
56. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC JO1 3849 to CINCPAC, 14 May 64, OCJCS File 091, Vietnam Trip, 9-14 May 64.

The continued use of so-called FARM GATE aircraft is authorized subject to the condition that they fly bona fide operational training missions against hostile targets to prepare the participating VNAF personnel for eventual replacement of US pilots. The ultimate objective is elimination of the requirement for FARM GATE aircraft.

It is recognized that helicopter operations will continue to introduce US personnel into combat situations. It is emphasized that helicopters are for use as transport and their weapons are for the protection of vehicles and passengers. Armed helicopters will not be used as a substitute for close support air strikes.

US military personnel assigned as advisors to RVNAF units will be exposed to combat conditions only as required in the execution of their advisory duties.[57]

The publicity given to the Shank letters caused an inquiry to be launched by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Armed Services. Hearings in executive session were held on 24-26 June, under the chairmanship of Senator John C. Stennis. The declared purpose was "to obtain firsthand information upon the situation in South Vietnam, the purpose and mission of the Air Force units assigned there, the contribution being made by the United States . . . and related matters." After hearing the testimony of eight returned USAF pilots, the Secretary of the Air Force, and other Air Force officials, the Stennis Subcommittee produced a classified "Summary Analysis" that caused considerable concern within the Department of Defense.[58]

With the concurrence of the Secretary of Defense, General Wheeler sent a copy to Ambassador Taylor on 17 July, making the following comment in his covering letter:

Other than taking the appropriate corrective action, the Chiefs are not sure just how they may be drawn into any exchange over the summary. However, in order to prepare ourselves, we have had the Joint Staff analyze the summary and isolate those areas and

57. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6399 to CINCPAC, 20 May 64.
58. (TS) "Summary Analysis of Hearings Held by Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee on the Situation in South Vietnam," Encl to Ltr, Senator John C. Stennis to SecDef, 9 Jul 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, "Hearings by Stennis Committee . . . ."

issues about which we should be particularly concerned . . . . It is possible that some of the operational procedures described in the summary may be, or may have been, at variance in some respects with established policy; however, we hope that sufficient corrective action has been taken to bring the procedures back into line with policy and that such positive action can be reported.[59]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to send a team to Saigon to investigate and report on the allegations made by the Senate Subcommittee. Individually, the allegations raised no issues not already addressed by the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, or the Secretary of the Army in testimony on the same broad subject before Congressional committees during May and June 1964. Collectively, however, the allegations implied high-level mismanagement of operations in Vietnam and deliberate repression or misrepresentation of facts.[60]

The JCS team submitted its report on 5 August. The basic purpose was "to provide the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the facts and background in order that they would be able to address intelligently the allegations of the Stennis Committee, in the event they were called upon to do so." The key issues and the facts as determined by the JCS team were as follows:

> Allegation #1. The official policy of the Pentagon is that U.S. Forces, including the Air Force, are in South Vietnam as trainers, instructors, and advisors, only, and that they have not been and are not in a combat status, whereas USAF pilots have been engaged in combat operations. Further it was the policy to keep such information from the American people.
> Answer. In the opinion of U.S. military personnel stationed in South Vietnam (SVN) they are and have been in "combat operations." . . . COMUSMACV stated ". . . US service personnel are frequently introduced into combat situations. For this reason individuals are given combat pay and awarded combat decorations." . . . With regard to allegations that it was the policy to keep information from the American people, the team had no basis for determining facts on this subject.

59. (TS) Ltr, CJCS to US Amb Saigon, 17 Jul 64, same file.
60. (TS) DJSM-1203-64 to CJCS, 16 Jul 64, same file.

Allegation #2. USAF Air Commando pilots flew actual combat missions without assistance from the Vietnamese aboard and without giving training or instruction to him except in the most general sense of the word. As a rule the Vietnamese aboard were basic airmen without any prior aviation experience or training.
Answer. Essentially true until May 1964. Since then all Air Commando Squadron combat flights have been training missions with a bona fide VNAF pilot trainee on board receiving instruction. The USAF pilots in the MAAG still fly combat missions while accompanying VNAF on combat missions. This is done as part of their assigned tasks as instructors and advisors.

Allegation #3. Visiting high level officials receive distorted or incorrect briefings on activities of the USAF Air Commando Squadron.
Answer. May have been true. However, Ambassador Taylor was asked about the incident referred to in the testimony. He stated that . . . he was fully briefed on and was aware of all aspects of the 34th Tactical Group's missions including FARM GATE operations.

Allegation #4. Rules of Engagement placed substantial restrictions upon USAF pilots. They felt the Army operated under more flexible rules.
Answer. The allegation is correct. . . . The missions of USAF and U.S. Army armed aircraft are different. The USAF mission is one of training VNAF pilots and observers while the Army mission is one of supporting ARVN in tactical operations.

Allegation #5. There was a considerable lack of cooperation and coordination between the Air Force and the Army in the conduct of military operations in South Vietnam.
Answer. This has been true in the past. Cooperation and coordination are now better than they have been in the past and are still improving.

Allegation #10. Comparative . . . USAF-VNAF pilot losses indicate that USAF pilots are not as effective as VNAF pilots or that USAF pilots are flying the more dangerous missions or that the VNAF has a much more superior aircraft in the AlH.
Answer. There is no single or positive answer as to why USAF combat pilot losses exceed those of the VNAF. However, three possible reasons are:

1. USAF pilots flew many missions in T-28 and B-26 aircraft which were more vulnerable than the armored AlH aircraft.
2. USAF pilots flew the majority of their missions in the Delta region where aircraft damage has been 11 times greater than for other areas of SVN.
3. VNAF pilots do not press the attacks as aggressively as USAF pilots. This is the opinion of the U.S. advisors at the regimental and battalion levels.

Allegations 6-9, omitted above, had to do with the types of US equipment used in RVN and with the mission of one VNAF squadron.[61]

CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and the Joint Staff had also submitted comments on the allegations, all in substantial accord with the findings of the JCS investigating team. The available records contain no indication that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had occasion to reply to the issues raised in the Stennis Subcommittee's "Summary Analysis," which did not become public.[62]

At the end of October Ambassador Taylor reported that he had just discovered another instance of US pilots engaging in combat operations. In this case the personnel were members of the USAF advisory group assigned to VNAF squadrons, not FARM GATE pilots.

> I find that since late 1961 USAF advisors have been flying single-seater VNAF aircraft on tactical missions and delivering ordnance in combat under the same conditions as the VNAF pilots of their units they advise. The only restriction is that the US pilot never attacks a target before it has been attacked by a VNAF pilot. . . .
>
> While I have known that these advisors fly with their squadrons to monitor operational tactics and performance, I did not know until now (nor did General Westmoreland) that as a routine matter they carry and expend ordnance in the same manner as their VNAF comrades. If this situation has been understood by others, it has

61. (TS) Memo, Deputy D/JS to CJCS, "Trip Report of the Fact-Finding Group Visiting South Vietnam in Connection with 'Summary Analysis' of Hearings . . . ," 5 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (5 Aug 64).

62. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC Comments on Stennis Report, n.d.; (TS) Memo, C/S USMACV to Deputy D/JS, 2 Aug 64; (TS) DJSM-1203-64 to CJCS, 16 Jul 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, "Hearings by Stennis Committee . . . ."

never come out in the many discussions of related subjects which I have attended in the JCS and elsewhere. As a result, I have inadvertently made some incorrect statements in Congressional hearings on the subject of use of US personnel in combat.

Warning that under current conditions, some US personnel were likely to be involved in any VNAF strike mission, Ambassador Taylor recommended a quiet JCS review of the matter "to decide what, if anything, should be done at this juncture."[63]

A message from CINCPAC followed, in which Admiral Sharp said that some members of his staff had been aware that the USAF advisors were flying combat missions but that the matter had not come to his attention since assuming command. To General Wheeler he recommended that no directive stopping the practice be issued.

> These advisors cannot be very effective unless they fly with their squadrons and participate with them in the combat missions. They will be particularly ineffective if after three years they suddenly are grounded . . . . To do so at this point would surely cause some publicity and also would not be understood by the Vietnamese.

CINCPAC pointed out that US helicopter crews and ground force advisors were participating in combat actions every day. COMUSMACV fully concurred in his views.[64]

The available records contain no evidence that any restrictions were placed on the role of USAF advisors in South Vietnam at this time. Later, with the changes in US policy regarding the employment of US pilots and aircraft that occurred in 1965, the cited practices were no longer nonconforming.

Development of Facilties

The US construction policy in effect at the beginning of 1964 had been devised in the light of the expectation that US involvement in South Vietnam was temporary and would be reduced within the foreseeable future. The policy looked mainly

63. (S) Msg, US Amb Saigon JPS 389 to SecState, SecDef, and CJCS, 30 Oct 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.
64. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 310344Z Oct 64; (U) Msg, COMUSMACV MACV 5791 to CINCPAC, 3 Nov 64; same file.

to the maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of existing facilities. Any new construction was tailored to minimum requirements for the safety, health, and welfare of US personnel.

At midyear, however, broad new construction requirements developed when the decision was made to expand the US military advisory effort. Requirements also increased for construction in support of US contingency plans and operations. By September new programs had been developed and approved. So far the funds for base construction in South Vietnam had for the most part been charged to MAP, following a concept of "joint use" bases, sponsored by the host nation and having possible US contingency application. In the Autumn of 1964 the Department of Defense decided that future construction to support US forces would be Service funded.[65]

On returning from a trip to Southeast Asia in April, the Secretary of State had proposed maintaining a permanent US naval presence in South Vietnam.

> There would be substantial psychological benefits to South Vietnam and a useful signal to Hanoi in maintaining a US naval presence at Tourane or Camranh Bay until pacification of South Vietnam is assured. This need not involve elaborate shore installations. A carrier task force, with visible training flights over Vietnam would underline our seriousness of purpose and make it clear that we do not intend to be pushed out of Southeast Asia. Such a presence could also have a stabilizing influence on Laos.[66]

After consulting CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff commented on Secretary Rusk's proposal on 25 April. They agreed that more US Navy ships and planes should be seen in the western part of the South China Sea. This naval presence need not be limited to specific areas of Vietnam and need not be continuous, they advised the Secretary of Defense. They recommended that units of the Seventh Fleet "show the flag" along the entire

---

65. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, pp. 338-344; 1965, pp. 528-529.

66. (S-GP 1) SecState, "Summary of Additional Steps in South Vietnam," 20 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/360, 21 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64).

coast periodically and that increased numbers of small ships visit RVN ports. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed stationing a carrier task group (CTG) in a particular location, however, since this would restrict its mobility and place it in danger from mines. They proposed instead that a CTG be moved into waters near Vietnam and conduct air operations, including training flights over land areas. They also suggested that US amphibious training exercises conducted in RVN shore areas and estuaries might strengthen the signal of US determination to Hanoi.[67]

Ambassador Lodge, in commenting on the JCS proposal, suggested that a better alternative might be to establish a skeletonized naval installation at Cam Ranh Bay, which could also serve as a US beachhead in case of emergency. The base would establish a US presence "in a way which is defensible without depending on Viet-Nam and without political complications or involvement of dependents." Other advantages cited by the Ambassador were that very little construction would be needed and the base could be used as a counter in any diplomatic negotiations.[68]

CINCPAC agreed. He now told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he believed the CTG movement should be deferred indefinitely, until a situation arose in which the deployment would have immediate psychological or combat significance. "I believe that there is merit in Ambassador Lodge's idea of establishing a USN base at Cam Ranh Bay and recommend that steps be taken looking to the future to ensure unrestricted operational use of Cam Ranh Bay and to obtain base rights involving the adjacent land area." Admiral Felt proposed that CINCPACFLT be directed to conduct a survey of the bay and its environs to determine its possibilities.[69]

On 8 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a survey be made immediately with a view to establishing a naval facility at Cam Ranh Bay on an austere basis. Concurrently, they said, the extent of the base rights required should be determined and US naval forces should begin using the bay as an operational anchorage as soon as

---

67. (S) Msg, JCS 5966 to CINCPAC, 22 Apr 64; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 222333Z Apr 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-356-64 to SecDef, 25 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2343/363); JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64) (A).

68. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2101 to State, 2 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (1 May 64) sec 1.

69. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 052336Z May 64, same file.

feasible. Establishment of the base would demonstrate to leaders in both North and South Vietnam the US commitment to continuing involvement in the struggle. The base would provide support for naval operations along the Vietnamese coast and would offer a site for amphibious training and seaplane operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that establishment of the base would involve a further direct US military confrontation with the Viet Cong, that adequate security would have to be provided, and that some shore installations would have to be constructed. On 9 May the Secretary of Defense approved a survey of the Cam Ranh Bay site, and CINCPAC was directed to undertake it.[70]

The survey forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 November indicated that the Cam Ranh Bay area was suitable for use as a fleet anchorage and amphibious training area with relatively good security. It was also suitable for establishing an austere facility ashore with good growth potential. As there was no current operational need for a naval shore facility, CINCPAC recommended in December that further action be held in abeyance until requirements for a US presence in the area were established. In the meantime, the United States had obtained clearance from the GVN in November to use Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang harbor for USN seadrome operations.[71]

As more US personnel and equipment arrived in Vietnam the need for expanded facilities became more acute. In November CINCPAC sought approval to build two airfield installations, one a new jet-capable field at Chu Lai, the other a second runway at Da Nang. The main justification was that planned deployments under CINCPAC OPLANs could not be accommodated by existing facilities, given their increased utilization by forces already in South Vietnam. The Secretary of Defense approved the construction in December. These were the first major US installations programmed for support of US units not directly associated with an advisory or military assistance mission.[72]

In July COMUSMACV had called attention to the lack of adequate hospital facilities in Saigon. After approval in

---

70. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-399-64 to SecDef, 8 May 64 (derived from JCS 2343/368-1); Msg, JCS 6242 to CINCPAC, 9 May 64; same file, sec 1.

71. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/368-2, 13 Jan 65; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 080257Z Dec 64; same file, sec 2.

72. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1861-64 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia Jul 64-Jun 65. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 123.

Washington, he requested from the GVN an area near Tan Son Nhut Air Base for construction of a new hospital. Both authority to begin construction and GVN consent had been received by November, but the hospital would not be ready for approximately ten months. At year's end interim measures were being considered, including the Ambassador's suggestion of using a hospital ship.[73]

Base Protection

The adequacy of the protection for US personnel, equipment, and installations received continuous attention from US officials. Concern for the security of the Saigon area, where there were many US dependents, had prompted CINCPAC on 1 April to request the deployment of a second Army MP company to South Vietnam. The Secretary of Defense approved the request on 27 April.[74]

As the year progressed, with mounting evidence of Viet Cong strength and aggressiveness, the safety of US personnel and installations outside the capital became a matter of equal concern. After the deployment of more US aircraft to RVN in August in consequence of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, General Westmoreland voiced his apprehension regarding the security of the air bases where the planes were stationed, principally Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa near Saigon, and Da Nang. He described the bases as "loaded with U.S. aircraft and none . . . defended to our satisfaction." They were tempting targets for the Viet Cong, particularly vulnerable to night attack with mortar or rifle fire. COMUSMACV asked that certain US troop units be placed "on call" to defend the airfields if they were attacked by a force the RVNAF could not handle.[75]

On 29 August CINCPAC added his recommendation that the United States prepare to furnish troops to protect installations in South Vietnam, mainly because of the GVN's instability and possible future inability to do the job. After reviewing the situation and receiving the approval of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC on 1 September that they expected the additional aircraft that were crowding the air bases would be withdrawn. With reference to COMUSMACV's request for "on call" units, they believed the existing system

73. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1861-64 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia Jul 64 - Jun 65.
74. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012250Z Apr 64; (S) Note to Control Div, 27 Apr 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (1 Apr 64).
75. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 8149 to CINCPAC, 15 Aug 64.

of DEFCONs and alerts made possible adequate readiness conditions without committing forces beforehand. Admiral Sharp was informed that "now is not the time to take the actions requested." Before any of his OPLANs were put into effect, however, CINCPAC's views and recommendations regarding "prudent deployment" of more forces would be carefully considered.[76]

Assuming that the RVNAF carried out its commitment to guarantee the security of US forces stationed on the air bases, the measures then in effect appeared adequate to meet the potential threat. In August COMUSMACV had arranged for special provisions at the three main bases. Combined defense plans were prepared, and both US and RVNAF units on the bases were given tasks in support of the plans. Three RVNAF airborne battalions were assigned, one to each of the big air bases. Two USA infantry officers were assigned to the staff of the USAF commanders at Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut to act as advisors and assist in planning ground defense.[77]

These measures were insufficient, however, to prevent the highly successful Viet Cong mortar attack on the Bien Hoa air base in the early minutes of 1 November. General Westmoreland explained that while the provisions made had increased the effectiveness of the defenses against direct ground attack, they had "done little to protect against mortar attack such as that experienced." There were hundreds of sites in wooded areas and hamlets within mortar range of the bases that the Viet Cong could reach without being detected, so long as the local inhabitants were afraid to report them. COMUSMACV was continuing the effort to improve the base defenses, but he said there was no assurance that similar VC attacks would not take place at other critical facilities, which were equally vulnerable and glutted with aircraft.[78]

In the Washington consultations immediately following the Bien Hoa attack, consideration was given to deploying a Marine special landing force to Da Nang and two Army or Marine battalions to the Saigon area to provide local security. Both Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland opposed these measures,

---

76. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 8230 to CINCPAC, 1 Sep 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 374.

77. (TS-GP 4) DJSM-1491-64 to CJCS et al., 1 Sep 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep-Oct 64.

78. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 212890 to JCS, 2 Nov 64.

however, with the latter commenting, "We hesitate at this juncture to admit by such action that the host government cannot defend bases used by us and to take the big step in committing organized U. S. ground units in combat with the V. C."[79]

With regard to air base security, General Westmoreland soon reported that aircraft were being dispersed and, where practicable, would be revetted. The alert posture of US air units had been raised and US guards on airfields reinforced. He was urging further measures on the GVN, including the stationing of more security troops at major installations, intensified partolling, and control of population movements around airfield perimeters.[80]

On 25 November CINCPAC endorsed a COMUSMACV request for 502 US military personnel (57 Army, 292 Air Force, 153 Marines) to enhance the internal security of US airfields in South Vietnam. The personnel included Air Police, Army MPs, and Marines to augment a reinforced rifle company at Da Nang. The Army and Marine forces were ordered to RVN on 2 December from CINCPAC's own resources. Shipment of the Air Police from the CONUS still awaited Secretary McNamara's approval.[81]

Somewhat earlier both Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland had indicated that after careful consideration of using US combat troops for outer perimeter and area security around the bases, they had rejected the idea. They noted that it would require at least one battalion at each airfield and that the presence of US troops could cause the GVN to lose interest in the defense of the installations, despite their joint use by the RVNAF, and relax its performance of the security mission. Further, they believed that US troops would not be effective in inhabited areas because of lack of language capability and the absence of authority to search private dwellings.[82]

When the Chief of Staff, Army, visited South Vietnam in early December he discussed the security of air bases and other

---

79. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 1451 to CINCPAC, 1 Nov 64; (TS-GP 2) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC JOO 12962 to CJCS, 2 Nov 64, JCS IN 10617; OCJCS File, "Bien Hoa Incident."

80. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 2413365 to JCS, 6 Nov 64.

81. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 252110Z Nov 64; (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 271150Z Nov 64; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012025Z Dec 64.

82. (TS-GP 4) J-3 Briefing Sheet for CJCS on JCS 2343/501, 22 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (9 Dec 64).

important installations with General Westmoreland. COMUSMACV reiterated his view that it was not possible to establish safeguards that would provide a complete guarantee against damage to any particular base. He was continuing his efforts to improve coordination between the base commanders, responsible for internal security, and the province chiefs who were responsible for external security. General Westmoreland had also directed a study to be made of the possibility of using ground surveillance and countermortar radar to improve the defenses of critical installations.[83]

During JCS consideration of the problem in December, General LeMay pointed out that the 502 personnel recently requested could enhance internal security, but "this proposed increase will have little effect unless there is adequate RVNAF perimeter and airfield area defense." He proposed that CINCPAC be asked for a current assessment of the RVNAF capability to provide reasonable security for US forces from Viet Cong attack. General LeMay said that if the information reported led to a judgment that "the RVNAF is not now accomplishing this task to the satisfaction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then U.S. combat troops should be deployed to South Vietnam to assume this responsibility." On 23 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested such a report from Admiral Sharp.[84]

Third Country Assistance

Secretary of State Rusk returned to Washington in April 1964 after visiting South Vietnam and participating in the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in Manila. The SEATO meeting had been particularly successful from the viewpoint of the United States. It had ended with a communique in which the Foreign Ministers of seven nations joined in expressing "grave concern about continuing Communist aggression against the Republic of Vietnam." They declared that defeat of this aggression was "essential" to the security of Southeast Asia.[85]

Secretary Rusk returned with a list of measures to improve the counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam for recommendation

83. (TS-GP 4) Memo, CSA to CJCS, "Trip Report, Vietnam, 8-12 December 1964," 21 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov-Dec 64.
84. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/501, 9 Dec 64; (S-GP 4) CSAFM L-49-64 to JCS, 23 Dec 64; (S-GP 4) Msg,JCS 3186 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 64; JMF 9155.3 (9 Dec 64).
85. Dept of State Bulletin, L (4 May 64), p. 692.

to the President. The first item, a proposal to seek more assistance from other countries, undoubtedly reflected the encouragement he had received at Manila.

> It is important to engage more "flags" in South Viet-Nam, both on political and practical grounds. There is reason to believe that more help could be obtained from Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. An effort should also be made to increase aid from such non-SEATO countries as Japan, West Germany, Nationalist China and others. Assistance of all types should be welcomed; military units and personnel, economic, technical and cultural.[86]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided their views to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 25 April. They concurred generally with the recommendation, although noting that "direct participation by SEATO or other third country combat units in military counterinsurgency operations in South Vietnam is not considered practical or desirable under present circumstances."

> On the other hand, advisory personnel, supplies, and equipment provided by SEATO and other nations could make significant contributions to the over-all advisory effort while at the same time lending an international character to our involvement. . . . The numbers of personnel contributed by any one nation should be limited, and the organizational arrangements for their employment should be calculated to ensure that US control of the total advisory effort is not jeopardized, and confusion is not introduced as a result of differing military doctrines.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that engineer, medical, and transportation units, in particular, could be employed effectively in a civic action role.[87]

The concept of third country support was not a new one. The United Kingdom, France, Japan, and West Germany had been

86. (S-GP 1) SecState, "Summary of Additional Steps in South Vietnam," 20 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/360, 21 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64).

87. (S-GP 1) JCSM-352-64 to SecDef, 25 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2343/360-1), same file.

providing commodity aid and technical assistance for some time. Australia had deployed a 32-man army training team to South Vietnam in 1962 and had integrated it with the US advisory effort. In early 1964, Chinese Nationalist forces were giving covert support to OPLAN 34A operations and to Father Hoa's pacification program in Hai Yen.[88]

President Johnson mentioned the matter briefly at his press conference on 23 April, expressing the hope that "we would see some other flags in there" in a united attempt to halt the spread of communism. The President's remarks hardly indicated the scope of the campaign being launched by the United States to obtain more third country assistance. The State Department instructed all US Embassies on the matter on 1 May. Meanwhile the GVN had been asked to prepare a "shopping list" indicating the types of assistance needed in South Vietnam. The Department of State circulated a summary of the shopping list to 27 US Embassies for action early in July, while with US encouragement the GVN appealed to a still larger number of nations for assistance.[89]

One of the first to reply was the Government of the Republic of Korea, which offered to send combat units to South Vietnam. The offer was declined with appreciation, it being pointed out that the United States itself had not been asked by the GVN to introduce ground combat forces. The difficulties of employing foreign troops were apparent; even the GVN forces had little success in distinguishing the Viet Cong from the local population. The Republic of Korea soon dispatched a mobile surgical hospital and ten karate instructors.[90]

On 20 July, New Zealand deployed a military engineer team and a surgical team for assignment to civic action projects in South Vietnam. The following month Australia increased its support by sending a detachment of six transport aircraft and 74 personnel, while the Philippine Government contributed 34 personnel, consisting of two medical teams and a number of civic action and psychological warfare specialists. Thailand had given 10,000 galvanized iron sheets and 100 tons of cement.[91]

---

88. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 386. (TS) Msg, State 1865 to Saigon, 7 May 64.

89. Public Papers, Johnson, 1963-1964, vol. I, p. 522. (S-GP 3) JCS 2339/145, 1 Oct 64, JMF 9150 (1 Oct 64). (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 353

90. (S-GP 3) JCS 2339/145, 1 Oct 64, JMF 9150 (1 Oct 64)

91. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. p. 71. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68. pp. 261-263.

In connection with the continuing US encouragement of third country assistance, officials in Washington systematized the criteria for funding the effort in early October. The United States would urge each nation to bear as much of the cost of its contribution as possible but would not insist on this so firmly as to cause the donor to withdraw the offer. When it was clearly impossible for the nation to pay for its contribution, all costs related to MAP-supported end-items owned by that country would be charged to its MAP account. If the end-item was of a type that would be expended in South Vietnam or would remain there, its cost would be charged to the RVN MAP. Where aid in more general types of commodities was involved, "commercial consumables" not paid for by the donor would be charged to the GVN budget, if possible. Should their cost exceed the GVN funds available, the United States would work out some other arrangement for paying for them.[92]

On 3 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff supplied higher authorities with a list of types of contributions the Philippine Government might make, for use during a visit of President Macapagal to Washington. It included a special forces company, engineer and medical units, and technicians in the signal, ordnance, transportation, and maintenance fields. During subsequent consultations at the military level in Manila in November, with COMUSMACV representatives participating, a plan evolved for an 1800-man tri-service task force, which would include Philippine security troops for protection of the engineer, medical, and other units the force contained. The Philippine Government appeared in earnest in considering a contribution of this size.[93]

One of the decisions made by President Johnson on 1 December was to mount a wider and more intensive effort to obtain commitments from other Free World nations. In

92. (C) Msg, State 791 to Saigon, 8 Oct 64.

93. (S-GP 3) JCSM-847-64 to SecDef, 3 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2339/145), JMF 9150 (1 Oct 64). (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, Dir J-3, "Meeting of NSC Principals, 12 December 1964," 12 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964. p. 387.

advising GVN leaders of the US program, Ambassador Taylor said that the United States had no desire to internationalize the war along the lines of the Korean conflict, but it did want to make Free World support "concretely evident" in South Vietnam. In support of this endeavor the US funding policies were revised. The United States was now prepared to pay all costs incurred by other countries in providing units to South Vietnam.[94]

At a Washington meeting of senior officials on 12 December to consider means of implementing the President's decisions, State Department representatives presented the following tabulation of third country assistance that had been made available to South Vietnam to date:

Country	Nature of Aid	Persons in RVN
Australia	Combat advisors, aircraft and crews, medical aid, technical aid, civic action aid, radio station	167
New Zealand	Army engineers, surgical team, educational aid	32
Philippines	Medical aid, psywar assistance	34
Korea	Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, karate instructors	140
Thailand	Aircraft crews, jet training, cement and roofing	17
U. K.	Police aid, professor, educational and technical equipment	7
Canada	Medical aid, scholarships, wheat	1
China	Agricultural aid, psywar assistance, electric power aid	85

94. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1763 to State, 9 Dec 64, JCS IN 48778. The President's decisions of 1 Dec 64 are treated in Ch. 14. (S—NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2010 to USCINCSO et al., 15 Dec 64; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 150134Z Dec 64, JCS IN 55452.

Germany	Professors, technical experts, credits	12
Iran	1,000 tons of petroleum products	0
Italy	Surgical team	9
Japan	Electric power aid, medical aid	80
Malaysia	Counterinsurgency training (outside Vietnam) and equipment	0
Switzerland	Microscopes	0
	Total	584

(France maintains 482 persons in Viet-Nam, primarily engaged in medical and educational activity.)

Additional assistance in immediate prospect included medical aid from Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey, and medical supplies, surgical equipment, or pharmaceuticals from Austria, Brazil, Denmark, and Israel. More significant contributions might be obtained, with proper effort, from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Nationalist China, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea. The expectation of receiving the 1800-man Philippine task force continued, although the project had been slowed by domestic political considerations, including the necessity of obtaining legislative sanction for an expeditionary force (in fact, the Philippine contribution was not to reach these proportions until 1966).

Japan had already provided approximately $1,500,000 in medical and commodity assistance and had completed a large hydroelectric power project in South Vietnam. Japan could be expected to continue economic assistance but would not contribute military units. In South America diplomatic approaches were being made in an effort to obtain politically significant but essentially token assistance. "The best bets in Latin America are Brazil and Argentina," the State Department paper read.

The Government of the United Kingdom regarded its position as Co-Chairman of the 1954 Geneva Conference as precluding any extensive engagement in military activities in South Vietnam; besides, British forces were already committed in defense of Malaysia. Canada and India cited their membership

in the International Control Commission as reason or excuse for avoiding any commitment of personnel, but the Canadian contribution of commodities nearly matched that of Japan in dollar value.[95]

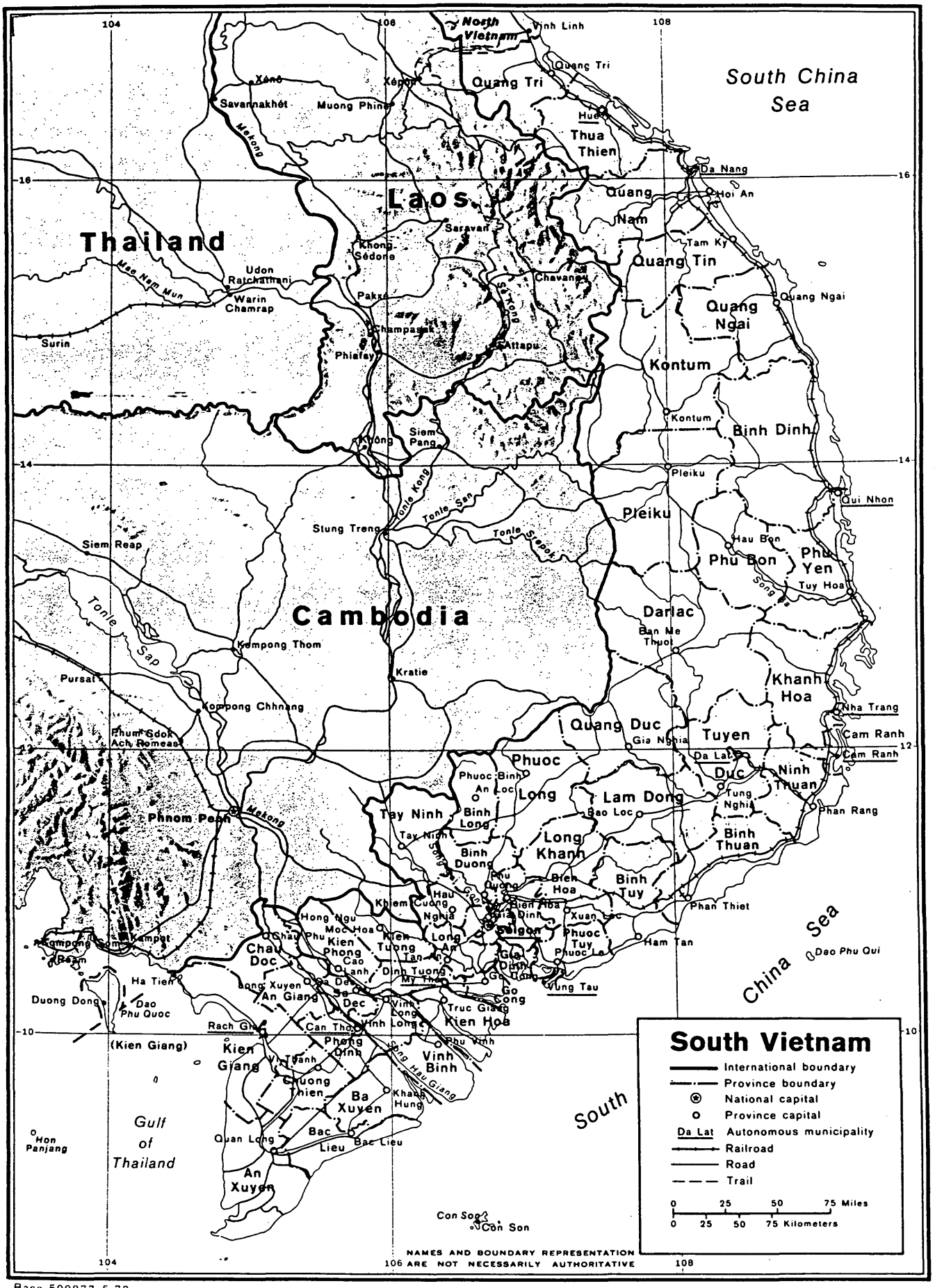
On 18 December the State Department suggested to the Embassy in Saigon that a combined US-GVN-Third Country organization be established to "provide policy and coordinate varied activities of participating nations." Once general policies had been defined, day-to-day coordination of military operations and support activities would be charged to COMUSMACV. Nonmilitary contributions would be the responsibility of USOM or other appropriate agencies.[96]

A US agency, which might later serve as the US element of a combined organization, was established four days later. It was soon titled the Free World Military Assistance Office. Ambassador Taylor had concluded that "Third Country Aid" should be discarded in favor of "Free World Assistance." The latter term suggested that the other participating countries were on the same plane as the United States; the former implied a lesser status.[97]

95. (S) Memo, Dept of State to Pres, "Third Country Assistance to Viet-Nam," 11 Dec 64, Ann B to JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64).

96. (S) Msg, State 1304 to Saigon, 18 Dec 64, JCS IN 59392.

97. (S) Msg, Saigon 1854 to State, 18 Dec 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 71.


South China Sea
North Vietnam
Vinh Linh
Quang Tri
Thua Thien
Hue
Da Nang
Hoi An
Quang Nam
Tam Ky
Quang Tin
Quang Ngai
Kontum
Binh Dinh
Qui Nhon
Pleiku
Phu Bon
Phu Yen
Tuy Hoa
Darlac
Ban Me Thuot
Khanh Hoa
Nha Trang
Cam Ranh
Tuyen Duc
Gia Nghia
Da Lat
Ninh Thuan
Phan Rang
Lam Dong
Bao Loc
Binh Thuan
Phan Thiet
Ham Tan
Phuoc Long
Phuoc Binh
An Loc
Tay Ninh
Binh Long
Long Khanh
Binh Duong
Bien Hoa
Binh Tuy
Xuan Loc
Phuoc Tuy
Vung Tau
Saigon
Gia Dinh
Go Cong
Tan An
Long An
Kien Tuong
Kien Hoa
Vinh Binh
Kien Phong
Cao Lanh
Sa Dec
Vinh Long
Can Tho
Phong Dinh
Chau Doc
An Giang
Kien Giang
Chuong Thien
Ba Xuyen
Khanh Hung
Bac Lieu
An Xuyen
Quan Long
Rach Gia
Ha Tien
Duong Dong
Dao Phu Quoc
Dao Phu Qui
Hon Panjang
Gulf of Thailand
South China Sea
Con Son
Thailand
Laos
Cambodia
Xépon
Savannakhet
Muong Phine
Mekong
Mae Nam Mun
Udon Ratchathani
Warin Chamrap
Surin
Khong Sédone
Saravan
Pakse
Champasak
Attapu
Chavannes
Sa Kong
Phiafay
Khong
Siem Pang
Tonle Kong
Tonle Sen
Tonle Srepok
Stung Treng
Siem Reap
Tonle Sap
Kompong Thom
Kratie
Pursat
Kompong Chhnang
Phum Sdok
Ach Romeas
Phnom Penh
Kampot
Kompong Som
Pursat
Hau Bon
Song Ba
Hau Giang
Song Go
Song Dong Nai
Song Ba Lai
Song Vam Co
Song Tien
Song Hau Giang
Song Cuu Long
Song Ba Lai
Song Go Cong