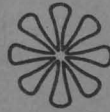


IV.C Evolution of the War (26 Vols.)

Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968
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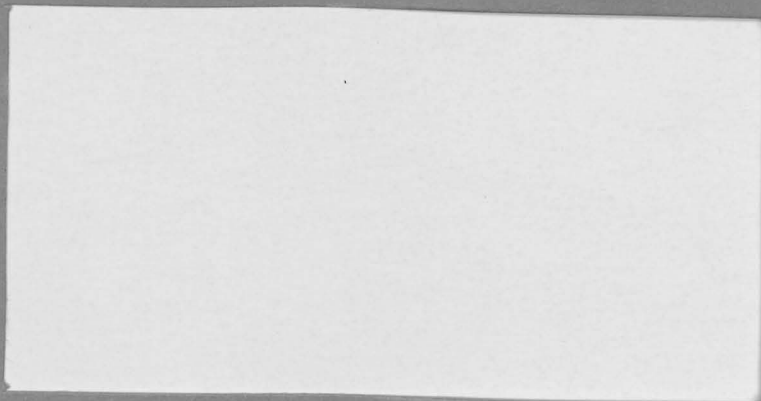
1. U.S. Programs in South Vietnam, November 1963-
April 1965: NSAM 273--NSAM 288--Honolulu

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1945 - 1967



VIETNAM TASK FORCE

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SET #13

IV.C.1.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

U. S. PROGRAMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM,
NOV 1963 - APR 1965

NSAM 273 - NSAM 288

SUMMARY
AND ANALYSIS

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IV.C.1 U.S. PROGRAMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, NOV 1963 - APR 1965;

NSAM 273 - NSAM 288 - HONOLULU

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

During the period from the overthrow of the Diem government in November 1963 until the Honolulu Conference in April 1965, U.S. policy-makers were concerned with a continuing, central dilemma in South Vietnam. An agonizing, year-long internal debate took place against the double backdrop of this dilemma and Presidential election year politics. Although the results of this debate could not be clearly seen until mid-1965, the seeds which produced those results are clearly visible in the official files at least a year earlier.

The basic problem in U.S. policy was to generate programs and other means adequate to secure the objectives being pursued. The central dilemma lay in the fact that while U.S. policy objectives were stated in the very most comprehensive terms the means employed were both consciously limited and purposely indirect. That is, the U.S. eschewed employing all of its military might -- or even a substantial portion of it -- in a battle which was viewed in Washington as determinative of the fate of all of Southeast Asia, probably crucial to the future of South Asia, and as the definitive test of U.S. ability to counteract communist support for "wars of national liberation." Moreover, this limited U.S. resource commitment to practically unlimited ends took an indirect form. U.S. efforts were aimed at helping the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to win its own struggle against the insurgents. This meant that the newly established GVN had to somehow mobilize its human and other resources, improve its military performance against the Viet Cong, and shift the tide of the war.

As events in 1964 and 1965 were to demonstrate, the GVN did not succeed in achieving political stability. Its military forces did not stem the pattern of VC successes. Rather, a series of coups produced "revolving door" governments in Saigon. The military pattern showed, particularly by the spring of 1965, a precipitous decline in the fortunes of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Yet there was no serious debate in Washington on the desirability of modifying U.S. objectives. These remained essentially fixed even as the means for their realization -- limited U.S. material support for GVN -- underwent one crisis and disappointment after another.

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There were no immediate or forceful U.S. reactions in 1964 to this continuing political instability and military frustration in South Vietnam. Declaratory policy raced far ahead of resource allocations and use decisions. As events continued along an unfavorable course the U.S. pursued an ever-expanding number of minor, specific, programmatic measures which were inherently inadequate either to reverse the decline or to satisfy broad U.S. objectives. Concurrently, the U.S. began to make contingency plans for increasing pressures against NVN. It did not make similar plans for the commitment of U.S. ground forces in SVN.

In the aftermath of President Johnson's landslide electoral victory in November 1964, and in the face of persistent instability in SVN, the Administration finally expanded the war to include a limited, carefully controlled air campaign against the north. Early in 1965 it deployed Marine battalions to South Vietnam. By April 1965, while continuing to follow the announced policy of efforts to enable GVN to win its own war, the U.S. had adumbrated a policy of U.S. military participation which presaged a high degree of Americanization of the war effort.

This evolving expansion and demonstration of commitment was neither continuous nor steady. The steps forward were warmly debated, often hesitant, sometimes reluctant. -- But all of the steps taken were still forward toward a larger commitment; there were none to the rear.

THE INITIAL PERIOD: NOVEMBER 1963 - MARCH 1964

The Diem coup preceded President Kennedy's assassination by less than a month. Thus, a new leader took the helm in the U.S. at a natural time to reevaluate U.S. policies and U.S.-GVN relations. President Johnson's first policy announcement on the Vietnamese war, contained in NSAM 273 (26 November 1963), only three days after he had assumed the Presidency, was intended primarily to endorse the policies pursued by President Kennedy and to ratify provisional decisions reached in Honolulu just before the assassination. Even in its attempt to direct GVN's efforts toward concentration on the Delta area, NSAM 273 reflected earlier U.S. preferences which had been thwarted or ignored by Diem. Now was the time, many of the top U.S. policymakers hoped, when convincing U.S. support for the new regime in Saigon might allow GVN to start winning its own war.

Two developments -- in addition to the VC successes which followed Diem's downfall -- undercut this aura of optimism. First, it was discovered that the situation in SVN had been worse all along than reports had indicated. Examples of misleading reports were soon available in Washington at the highest levels. Second, the hoped-for political stability was never even established before it disintegrated in the Khanh coup in January 1964. By February MACV's year-end report for 1963 was available in Washington. Its gloomy statistics showed downward trends in almost every area.

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Included in the MACV assessment was the opinion that military effort could not succeed in the absence of effective political leadership. A special CIA report, forwarded to Secretary McNamara at about the same time made the opposite point: military victories were needed to nourish the popular attitudes conducive to political stability. Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman -- who would shortly leave office after his views were rejected -- stressed the need for physical security in the rural areas and the adoption of counter guerrilla tactics as the preconditions to success. These interesting reversals of nominal functional preferences indicate that there was at least a sufficiently broad awareness within U.S. Officialdom to permit a useful debate on U.S. actions which might deal more successfully with this seamless web of political-military issues. Certainly the intelligence picture was dark enough to prompt such a debate: the SNIE on short-term prospects in Southeast Asia warned that "...South Vietnam has, at best, an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months."

The debate did begin, but in hobbles. The generally agreed necessity to work through GVN and the felt imperative to strengthen GVN left the U.S. in a position of weakness. It was at least as dependent on GVN leaders as were the latter on U.S. support. Moreover, mid-1964 was not an auspicious time for new departures in policy by a President who wished to portray "moderate" alternatives to his opponent's "radical" proposals. Nor was any time prior to or immediately following the elections very appealing for the same reason. Thus, while the debate in high official circles was very, very different from the public debate it still reflected the existence of the public debate.

LIMITED MEASURES FOR LIMITLESS AIMS

The first official internal pronouncement to reflect this difficult policymaking milieu was NSAM 288, in March 1964. Approved verbatim from the report of the most recent McNamara-Taylor visit to Vietnam, it was virtually silent on one issue (U.S. troops) and minimal in the scale of its recommendations at the same time that it stated U.S. objectives in the most sweeping terms used up to that time. The U.S. objective was stated to be an "independent, non-communist South Vietnam, free to accept assistance as required to maintain its security" even though not necessarily a member of the Western alliance. The importance of this objective was underscored in a classic statement of the domino theory:

Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance (all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), accommodate to Communism so as to remove effective U.S. and anti-Communist influence (Burma), or fall under the domination of forces not now explicitly Communist but likely then to become so (Indonesia taking over Malaysia). Thailand might hold for a period with our help, but would be under grave pressure. Even the Philippines would become shaky, and the threat to India to the west, Australia and New Zealand to the south, and Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to the north and east would be greatly increased.

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The present situation in SVN was painted in somber tones of declining GVN control and deterioration within ARVN while VC strength and NVN-supplied arms were on the rise. To introduce U.S. combat troops for the protection of Saigon under these circumstances, McNamara stated, would create "serious adverse psychological consequences and should not be undertaken." A U.S. movement from the advisory role to a role which would amount to command of the war effort was similarly rejected without discussion because of anticipated adverse psychological effects. Thus, the fear of undesirable impacts upon a weak GVN caused at least one major course of action to be ruled out. Although fears of adverse impacts in domestic U.S. politics were not mentioned it is inconceivable that such fears were not present.

Having ruled out U.S. active leadership and the commitment of U.S. troops, Secretary McNamara analyzed three possible courses of action: (1) negotiations leading to the "neutralization" of SVN; (2) the initiation of military actions against NVN; and (3) measures to improve the situation in SVN. The first of these was incompatible with the U.S. objective stated at the beginning of the NSAM; the time was not propitious for adoption of the second; the third was recommended for adoption. Additionally, Secretary McNamara recommended NSAM 288 proclaimed that plans be made so that the U.S. would be in a position at a later date to initiate military pressures against NVN within a relatively brief time after any decision to do so might be made.

Many of the steps approved in NSAM 288 were highly programmatic. It should be observed that they were also palliative, both in scope and degree. Of the twelve approved actions, two addressed possible future actions beyond the borders of South Vietnam. Of the remaining ten, three were declaratory in nature (e.g., "To make it clear that we fully support the Khanh government and are opposed to any further coups"). The seven actions implying additional U.S. assistance (some of it advice) dealt with such matters as exchanging 25 VNAF aircraft for a newer model, replacing armored personnel carriers with a more reliable model, and trebling the fertilizer program within two years. The additional cost of the programs was only slightly more than \$60 million at the most: \$30-\$40 million to support a 50,000 man increase in RVNAF and to raise pay scales; \$1.5 million to support an enlarged civil administrative cadre; and a one time cost of \$20 million for additional and replacement military equipment.

It is clear with the advantage of hindsight that these steps were grossly inadequate to the magnitude of the tasks at hand -- particularly if the broad U.S. objectives stated in the NSAM were to be realized. But such hindsight misses the policymakers' dilemma and the probable process by which the approved actions were decided upon. President Johnson had neither a congressional nor a popular mandate to Americanize the war or to expand it dramatically by "going north." U.S. hopes were pinned on assisting in the development of a GVN strong enough to win its own war. Overt U.S. leadership might undercut the development of such a government in Saigon. The course of policy adopted was not the product of an attempt to select the "best" alternative by means of examining expected benefits; it resulted from a determination of the "least bad" alternative through an examination

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of risks and disadvantages. It reflected what was politically feasible rather than what was desirable in relation to stated objectives. The practical effect of this understandable -- perhaps inescapable and inevitable -- way of deciding upon U.S. policy was to place almost complete responsibility in the hands of the GVN for the attainment of U.S. objectives -- it being assumed that GVN's objectives were compatible with ours.

Midway through 1964 President Johnson changed the entire top level of U.S. leadership in Saigon. General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retired from active military duty (for the second time) to become the U.S. Ambassador. An experienced and highly regarded career diplomat, U. Alexis Johnson, was appointed deputy to Taylor. General William C. Westmoreland stepped up from deputy to commander of U. S. military forces in Vietnam. The new "first team" was not without knowledge about Vietnam but it inescapably lacked the close personal knowledge of leading GVN figures which only time and close association can develop. It set about attempting to help the Khanh government to help itself.

General Khanh, in the event, proved unable to marshal SVN's resources and to establish his regime in a position of authority adequate either to stem or to turn the VC tide. Khanh's failure was, however, neither precipitous nor easily perceivable at the time. As the U.S. entered and passed through a Presidential campaign in which the proper policy to pursue in Vietnam was a major issue, it sometimes appeared that the GVN was making headway and sometimes appeared that it was not.

U.S. policy remained virtually unchanged during this period although significant planning steps were accomplished to permit the U.S. to exercise military pressures against NVN should it appear desirable (and politically feasible) to do so. Thanks to such planning, the Tonkin Gulf incidents of 2-4 August 1964 were answered by "tit-for-tat" reprisal raids with considerable dispatch. The cost was minimal in terms of world opinion and communist reaction. Moreover, President Johnson used the Tonkin Gulf incidents as the springboard to a broad endorsement by the Congress of his leadership and relative freedom of action. When this was followed in November by what can only be described as a smashing victory at the polls, the President's hands were not completely untied but the bonds were figuratively loosened. His feasible options increased.

LIMITED ESCALATION LEADS TO OPEN-ENDED INTERVENTION

Immediately following his election, the President initiated an intense, month-long policy review. An executive branch consensus developed for a two phase expansion of the war. Phase I was limited to intensification of air strikes in Laos and to covert actions in NVN. Phase II would extend the war to a sustained, escalating air campaign against North Vietnamese targets. The President approved Phase I for implementation in December 1964 but approved Phase II only "in principle."

The effect of this decision was to increase the expectation that the air campaign against NVN would be undertaken if the proper time arose.

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What conditions were proper was the subject of considerable disagreement and confusion. Tactically, the U.S. desired to respond to North Vietnamese acts rather than to appear to initiate a wider war. But the strategic purposes of bombing in NVN were in dispute. The initiation of an air campaign was deferred early in 1964 as a prod to GVN reform. By 1965 such initiation was argued for as a support for GVN morale. Some adherents claimed that bombing in NVN could destroy the DRV's will to support the war in South Vietnam. Others expected it to raise the price of North Vietnam's effort and to demonstrate U.S. commitment but not to be decisive in and of itself. The only indisputable facts seem to be that the long planning and debate over expanding the air war, the claimed benefits (although disputed), and the relatively low cost and risk of an air campaign as compared to the commitment of U.S. ground forces combined to indicate that the bombing of NVN would be the next step taken if nothing else worked.

Nothing else was, in fact, working. General Khanh's government was reorganized in November 1964 to give it the appearance of civilian leadership. Khanh finally fell in mid-February 1965 and was replaced by the Quat regime. Earlier that month the insurgents had attacked the U.S. base at Pleiku, killing eight Americans. Similar attacks late in 1964 had brought about recommendations for reprisal attacks. These had been disapproved because of timing. On this occasion, however, the President approved the FLAMING DART retaliatory measures.

Presidential assistant McGeorge Bundy was in SVN when the Viet Cong attacked the U.S. facilities in Pleiku. He recommended to the President that, in addition to retaliatory measures, the U.S. initiate phase II of the military measures against NVN. The fall of the Khanh regime a week later resurrected the worst U.S. fears of GVN political instability. The decision to bomb north was made, announced on 28 February, and strikes initiated on 2 March. A week later, after a request from Generals Taylor and Westmoreland which was debated little if at all, two battalion landing teams of Marines went ashore at DaNang to assume responsibility for security of the air base there. U.S. ground combat units were in an active theater on the mainland of Asia for the first time since the Korean War. This may not have been the Rubicon of the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy but it was a departure of immeasurable significance. The question was no longer one of whether U.S. units should be deployed to SVN; rather, it was one of how many units should be deployed and for what strategic purposes.

The Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, went to Saigon in mid-March and recommended that bombing restrictions be lifted and that a U.S. division be deployed to SVN for active combat. General Taylor strongly opposed an active combat -- as distinct from base security -- role for U.S. ground forces. But the President decided on 1 April to expand the bombing, to add an air wing in SVN, and to send two more Marine battalions ashore. These decisions were announced internally on 6 April in NSAM 328.

General Taylor continued to voice strong opposition to a ground combat role for U.S. forces but his voice was drowned out by two developments.

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First, the air campaign against NVN (ROLLING THUNDER) did not appear to be shaking the DRV's determination. Second, ARVN experienced a series of disastrous defeats in the spring of 1965 which convinced a number of observers that a political-military collapse within GVN was imminent.

As the debate in Washington on next steps revealed, something closely akin to the broad objectives stated over a year earlier in NSAM 288 represented a consensus among U.S. policymakers as a statement of proper U.S. aims. The domestic political situation had changed materially since early 1964. President Johnson was now armed with both a popular mandate and broad Congressional authorization (the extent of which would be challenged later, but not in 1965). Palliative measures had not been adequate to the task although they had continued and multiplied throughout the period. As General Taylor wryly remarked to McGeorge Bundy in a back channel message quoted in the following paper, the U.S. Mission in Saigon was charged with implementing a 21-point military program, a 41-point non-military program, a 16-point USIS program, and a 12-point CIA program "...as if we can win here somehow on a point score."

As fears rose in Washington it must have seemed that everything had been tried except one course -- active U.S. participation in the ground battle in SVN. Palliative measures had failed. ROLLING THUNDER offered little hope for a quick decision in view of the rapid deterioration of ARVN. The psychological barrier against the presence of U.S. combat units had been breached. If the revalidated U.S. objectives were to be achieved it was necessary for the U.S. to make quickly some radical departures. It was politically feasible to commit U.S. ground forces and it seemed desirable to do so.

Secretary McNamara met in Honolulu on 20 April with the principal U.S. leaders from Saigon and agreed to recommend an enclave strategy requiring a quantum increase above the four Marine battalions. An account of the rapidity with which this strategy was overtaken by an offensively oriented concept is described in another volume in this series.* The present volume describes the situational changes, the arguments, and the frustrations as the U.S. attempted for over a year to move toward the realization of ambitious objectives by the indirect use of very limited resources and in the shadow of a Presidential election campaign.

* IV.C.5. Phase I in the Build-Up of U.S. Forces: The Debate, March-July 1965.

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U. S. PROGRAMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, NOVEMBER 1963 - APRIL 1965
NSAM 273 - NSAM 288

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CHRONOLOGY

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IV.C.1.

U. S. PROGRAMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, NOVEMBER 1963 - April 1965
NSAM 273 - NSAM 288

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
20 Nov 1963	Honolulu Conference	Secretaries McNamara and Rusk and their party meet with the entire US country team and review the South Vietnamese situation after the Diem coup.
22 Nov 1963	Kennedy Assassination	President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. Lodge confers with the new President, Johnson, in Washington, during the next few days.
26 Nov 1963	NSAM 273	Drawing on the Honolulu Conference and Lodge's conversations with the President, NSAM 273 established US support for the new Minh government and emphasized that the level of effort, economic and military, would be maintained at least as high as to Diem. All US and GVN efforts were to be concentrated on the Delta where the VC danger was greatest. But the war remained basically a South Vietnamese affair to win or lose.
6 Dec 1963	Report on Long An Province	A report by a USOM provincial representative on Long An Province, adjacent to Saigon, describes the near complete disintegration of the strategic hamlet program. The basic problem is the inability or unwillingness of the ARVN to provide timely support when villages are under attack. Hamlets are being overrun by the VC on an almost daily basis. Ambassador Lodge forwards the report to Washington.
17 Dec 1963	NSC Meeting	After hearing a briefing by General Krulak that falls short of giving an adequate explanation for the Long An report, the President decides to send McNamara on another fact-finding trip.
18-20 Dec 1963	SecDef Trip to Vietnam	During this quick visit to South Vietnam, McNamara ordered certain immediate

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
18-20 Dec (Cont'd)		actions to be taken by the US Mission to improve the situation in the 13 critical provinces. He returns directly to Washington to report to the President.
21 Dec 1963	McNamara Report to the President	McNamara's report substantiates the existence of significant deterioration in the war since the preceding summer. He recommends strengthened ARVN formations in the key provinces, increased US military and civilian staffs, the creation of a new pacification plan, and better coordination between Lodge and Harkins.. His report is especially pessimistic about the situation in the Delta.
7 Jan 1964	McCone Proposes Covert Reporting	The serious failure of the reporting system to indicate the critical state of deterioration of the war prompts McCone to recommend to McNamara a special TDY covert CIA check on the in-country reporting system to make recommendations for improving it.
16 Jan 1964	McNamara Accepts Revised McCone Proposal	McNamara accepts a revised form of McCone's proposal, specifically ruling out any IG-like aspects to the study.
28 Jan 1964	Khanh Warns US Aide of Pro-Neutralist Coup	General Khanh, I Corps Commander, warns his US advisor, Colonel Wilson that pro-neutralist members of the MRC -- Xuan, Don, and Kim -- are plotting a coup.
29 Jan 1964	Khanh Warns Lodge	Khanh repeats to Lodge the warning that pro-neutralist elements are planning a coup. Lodge recommends an intervention with Paris to get DeGaulle to restrict his activity in Saigon. Khanh's efforts are really a screen for his own planned coup.
30 Jan 1964	Khanh Coup	Early in the morning, Khanh acts to take over control of the government in a bloodless internal coup that

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
30 Jan 1964 (Cont'd)		removes the civilian government and puts him in power.
2 Feb 1964	MACV Personal Assessment of 4th Qtr CY 1963	The Diem coup and the subsequent political instability in the fall of 1963 are given by MACV as the main reasons for the rise in VC activity and the decline in GVN control of the country. The tempo of GVN operations was good but the effectiveness low. Military failures were largely attributed to political problems.
10 Feb 1964	CAS Group's Preliminary Report	The preliminary report of the special CAS group cross-checking the reporting system confirms the deterioration of the strategic hamlet program. It documents the decline in rural security and the increase in VC attacks.
12 Feb 1964	SNIE 50-64	This intelligence community evaluation of the short-term prospects for Vietnam confirms the pessimism now felt in all quarters. The political instability is the hard core problem.
18 Feb 1964	Final CAS Group Report	The final CAS group report confirms the black picture of its initial estimate in greater detail and further confirms the previous failings of the reporting system.
	JCSM 136-64	In addition to a long list of recommendations for GVN action, the JCS propose to SecDef major US escalatory steps including bombing of the North.
21 Feb 1964	MACV Comment on CAS Group Findings	General Harkins takes issue not with the specific factual reporting of the CAS Group, but with their broader conclusions about the direction the war is going, and the respective effectiveness of the VC and GVN.
2 Mar 1964	JCSM-174-64	The JCS outline their proposal for punitive action against the DRV to halt Northern support for the VC insurgency. Bombing is specifically called for.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
8 Mar 1964	SecDef and CJCS Begin Five-Day Trip to SVN	The President sends Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on another fact-finding trip to prepare for a major re-evaluation of the war and US involvement. While there, a set of recommendations to the President is decided upon.
12 Mar 1964	McNamara-Taylor see Khanh	Prior to their departure, McNamara and Taylor present their principal conclusions to General Khanh who is responsive to their suggestions and, in particular, declares his readiness to move promptly on a national mobilization and increasing ARVN and Civil Guard.
14 Mar 1964	Hilsman sends Final Memos to SecState	Having resigned over policy disagreement, Hilsman sends Rusk parting memos on SEA and SVN. He describes two principles basic to success in guerrilla warfare: (1) the oil blot approach to progressive rural security; and (2) the avoidance of large-scale operations. He further opposes redirecting the war effort against the North. Political stability is absolutely essential to eventual victory.
	JCSM-222-64	The JCS, in commenting on McNamara's proposed recommendations to the President, reiterate their views of 2 March that a program of actions against the North is required to effectively strike at the sources of the insurgency. The overall military recommendations proposed by McNamara are inadequate, they feel.
16 Mar 1964	SecDef Recommendations to the President	Largely ignoring the JCS reclama, McNamara reports on the conclusions of his trip to Vietnam and recommends the full civilian and military mobilization to which General Khanh has committed himself. This is to be accompanied by an extensive set of internal reforms and organizational improvements. Some increases in US personnel are recommended along with increased materiel support for the GVN.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
17 Mar 1964	NSAM 288	The President accepts McNamara's full report and has it adopted as NSAM 288 to guide national policy. The importance of South Vietnam to US policy and security is underlined and the extent of the US commitment to it increased. While significant increases in actual US participation in the war are rejected as not warranted for the moment, the JCS are authorized to begin planning studies for striking at the sources of insurgency in the DRV.
1 Apr 1964	Embassy Saigon Msg 1880	Lodge reports per State request that Khanh's proposed mobilization measures call for both civilian and military build-ups.
4 Apr 1964	Khanh Announces Mobilization	Khanh announces that all able-bodied males aged 20 to 45 will be subject to national public service, either military or civilian.
	W. P. Bundy Letter to Lodge	In a letter to Lodge, Bundy asks him to comment on a scenario for mobilizing domestic US political support for action against the DRV.
15 Apr 1964	Lodge reports on Mobilization	Lodge reports that Khanh's 4 April announcement was only the precursor of the legal decrees the essence of which he described.
15-20 Apr 1964	General Wheeler, CofS/USA, Visits Vietnam	The Army Chief of Staff, General Earl Wheeler visits Vietnam to make a survey and represent the SecDef during the visit of Secretary Rusk. On 16 April, he meets with Khanh who first mentions his view that the war will eventually have to be taken to the North.
17-20 Apr 1964	Rusk Visits Saigon	Secretary Rusk and party visit Saigon. On 18 April, Rusk sees Khanh who again mentions the eventual necessity of carrying the fight to the North. Rusk replies that such a significant escalation of the war would require much

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
17-20 April (Cont'd)		thought and preparation. At the 19 April meeting with the Country Team, much of the discussion is devoted to the problem of pressures against the North.
25 Apr 1964	President Names General Westmoreland to Succeed General Harkins	General William Westmoreland is named to succeed General Harkins in the summer.
29 Apr 1964	JCS Msg 6073 to MACV	The JCS, worried at the GVN delay, ask MACV to submit the force plan for 1964 by 7 May.
30 Apr 1964	Lodge, Brent and Westmoreland See Khanh	In a showdown with Khanh, Lodge, Brent and Westmoreland state that the fundamental problem is lack of administrative support for the provincial war against the VC, particularly the inadequacy of the piastre support for the pacification program. Khanh promises more effort.
	Embassy Saigon Msg 1889 EXDIS for the President	Lodge informs the President that Khanh has agreed to US advisors in the pacified areas if we are willing to accept casualties. Lodge recommends one advisor for each corps area and one for Khanh, all reporting to Lodge.
2 May 1964	Lodge Reports on Delay in Mobilization	Lodge reports that the draft mobilization decrees have still not been signed or promulgated.
4 May 1964	Embassy Saigon Msg 2112	Having asked to see Lodge, Khanh asks him whether he, Lodge, thinks the country should be put on a war footing. Khanh wants to carry the war to the North and sees this as necessary preliminary.
6 May 1964	NSC Meeting	The NSC confirms Rusk's caution to Khanh on any moves against the North. The President asks McNamara to make a fact-finder to Vietnam.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 May 1964	MACV, US/GVN 1964 Force Level Agree- ment	MACV informs the JCS that agreement has been reached with the GVN on the level of forces to be reached by year's end.
12-14 May 1964	McNamara-Taylor Mission	McNamara-Taylor visit SVN. They are briefed on 12-13 April by the Mission. On 14 April they see Khanh who again talks of going North. McNamara demurs, but insists on more political stability and program effectiveness.
30 May 1964	Honolulu Conference	Rusk, McNamara, McCone and aides meet in Honolulu with the Country Team. A full dress discussion of pressures takes place, but no decisions or recom- mendations are approved. Rather, more emphasis on the critical provinces is approved, along with an expanded ad- visory effort.
5 Jun 1964	Department of State Msg 2184	Lodge is informed of the President's approval of the expanded effort in the critical provinces.
15 Jun 1964	W. P. Bundy memo to SecState and SecDef	Attached to a Bundy memo for considera- tion at a meeting later the same day, are six annexes each dealing with a different aspect of the problem of getting a Congressional resolution of support for the current US Southeast Asian policy. One of the important themes is that an act of irreversible US commitment might provide the neces- sary psychological support to get real reform and effectiveness from the GVN.
23 Jun 1964	President Announces JCS Chairman Taylor as New Ambassador	President Johnson announces the appoint- ment of JCS Chairman, Maxwell Taylor, to succeed Lodge, who is returning to engage in Republican Presidential poli- tics.
30 Jun 1964	Taylor Succeeds Lodge	Lodge leaves Saigon and Taylor takes over as US Ambassador with U. Alexis Johnson as Deputy.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 July 1964	Taylor Forms Mission Council	In an effort to streamline the Embassy and increase his policy control, Taylor forms the Mission Council at the Country Team level.
8 Jul 1964	Taylor Calls on Khanh	Taylor calls on Khanh who expresses satisfaction with the new personnel, approves the Mission Council idea and offers to create a counter part organization.
10 Jul 1964	Department of State Msg 108	The President asks Taylor to submit regular month-end progress reports on all aspects of the program.
15 Jul 1964	Taylor reports increased VC strength, Embassy Saigon Msgs 107 and 108	Taylor raises the estimate of Viet Cong strength from the previous total of 28,000 to 34,000. This does not represent a sudden increase, but rather intelligence confirmation of long suspected units.
17 Jul 1964	USOM Meets With GVN NSC	As he had promised, Khanh creates a coordinating group within the GVN to deal with the new Mission Council and calls it the NSC.
19 Jul 1964	Khanh Makes Public Reference to "Going North"	In a public speech, Khanh refers to the "March to the North." In a separate statement to the press, General Ky also refers to the "march North."
23 Jul 1964	Taylor Meets with Khanh and NSC	In a meeting with Khanh and the NSC, Taylor is told by Khanh that the move against the North is indispensable to the success of the counterinsurgency campaign in the South.
24 Jul 1964	Taylor and Khanh discuss Coups	In a discussion of coup rumors, Khanh complains that it is US support of Minh that is behind all the trouble, Taylor reiterates US support for Khanh.
2 Aug 1964	USS Maddox Attacked in Tonkin Gulf	The destroyer <u>USS Maddox</u> is attacked in the Tonkin Gulf by DRV patrol craft while on a DE SOTO patrol off the DRV coast. Several patrol boats sunk.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
4 Aug 1964	<u>Maddox and C. Turner Joy Attacked</u>	In a repetition of the 2 August incident, the <u>Maddox</u> and the <u>C. Turner Joy</u> are attacked. After strenuous efforts to confirm the attacks, the President authorizes reprisal air strikes against the North.
5 Aug 1964	US Reprisals	US aircraft attack several DRV patrol boat bases, destroying ships and facilities.
7 Aug 1964	Tonkin Gulf Resolutions	At the time of the attacks, the President briefed leaders of Congress, and had a resolution of support for US policy introduced. It is passed with near-unanimity by both Houses.
	Khanh Announces State of Emergency	Khanh announces a state of emergency that gives him near-dictatorial powers.
10 Aug 1964	Taylor's first Monthly Report	In his first monthly report to the President, Taylor gives a gloomy view of the political situation and of Khanh's capacities for effectively pursuing the war. He is equally pessimistic about other aspects of the situation.
11 Aug 1964	President Signs Tonkin Resolution	The President signs the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and pledges full support for the GVN.
12 Aug 1964	Taylor and Khanh Meet	Khanh discusses with Taylor his plan to draw up a new constitution enhancing his own powers. Taylor tries to discourage him.
14 Aug 1964	Khanh shows Taylor Draft Charter	At GVN NSC meeting, Khanh shows Taylor his proposed draft Constitution. Taylor dislikes its blatant ratification of Khanh as dictator.
16 Aug 1964	Khanh Names President	With the promulgation of the new constitution, Khanh is elected President by the MRC.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
27 Aug 1964	MRC Disbands	After ten days of political turmoil and demonstrations, Khanh withdraws the constitution, the MRC names Khanh, Minh and Khiem to rule provisionally and disbands itself.
4 Sep 1964	Khanh Resumes Premiership	Khanh returns from Dalat and ends the crisis by resuming the Premiership.
6 Sep 1964	Embassy Saigon Msg 768	Taylor cables an assessment that "...at best the emerging governmental structure might be capable of maintaining a holding operation against the Viet Cong."
7 Sep 1964	Washington Conference	Taylor meets with the President and the NSC Principals and decisions are made to resume DE SOTO operations, resume 34A operations, and prepare for further tit-for-tat reprisals.
10 Sep 1964	NSAM 314	The 7 September decisions are promulgated.
13 Sep 1964	Abortive Phat Coup	General Phat launches a coup but it is defeated by forces loyal to Khanh. This establishes the power of younger officers such as Ky and Thi.
18 Sep 1964	DE SOTO Patrol Attacked	The first resumed DE SOTO patrol comes under apparent attack. To avoid future incidents, the President suspends the patrols.
26 Sep 1964	Vietnam High National Council	The MRC names a High National Council of distinguished citizens to prepare a constitution.
20 Oct 1964	New Constitution Revealed	The MRC presents the new constitution drafted by the High National Council. A prompt return to civilian government is promised.
1 Nov 1964	Huong Names Premier	Tran Van Huong, a civilian, is named Premier after the appointment of Phan Khac Suu as Chief of State, thus returning the government to civilian control.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1 Nov 1964	VC Attack Bien Hoa Airport	The VC launch a mortar attack on the Bien Hoa airfield that kills Americans and damages aircraft. The military recommend a reprisal against the North; the President refuses.
3 Nov 1964	Johnson re-elected	Lyndon Johnson is re-elected President with a crushing majority.
	Task Force Begins Policy Review	At the President's request, W.P. Bundy heads an inter-agency Task Force for an in-depth review of US Vietnam policy and options. The work goes on throughout the month.
26 Nov 1964	Bundy Group Submits Three Options	The Bundy Task Force submits its draft conclusions to the Principals. They propose three alternative courses of action: (1) continuation of current policy with no escalation and a resistance to negotiations; (2) a significant set of pressures against the North accompanied by vigorous efforts to start negotiations; (3) a modest campaign against the North with resistance to negotiations.
30 Nov 1964	NSC Principals Modify Bundy Proposals	The NSC Principals reject the pure form of any of the recommendations and instead substitute a two-phase recommendation for the President: the first phase is a slight intensification of current covert activities against the North and in Laos, the second after 30 days would be a moderate campaign of air strikes against the DRV.
1 Dec 1964	President Meets with NSC and Taylor	The President, in a meeting with the NSC Principals, and Taylor, who returned on 23 November, hears the latter's report on the grave conditions in SVN, then approves Phase I of the proposal. He gives tentative approval to Phase II but makes it contingent on improvement by the GVN.
3 Dec 1964	President Confers with Taylor	In a last meeting with Taylor, the President stresses the need to get action from the GVN before Phase II.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
8 Dec 1964	Taylor Sees Huong	Taylor presents the President's requirements to Premier Huong who promises to get new action on programs.
14 Dec 1964	BARREL ROLL Begins	BARREL ROLL armed reconnaissance in Laos begins as called for in Phase I of the program approved 1 December.
20 Dec 1964	Military Stage Purge	The struggle within the MRC takes the form of a purge by the younger officers Ky and Thi. They are seeking to curb the power of the Huong Government.
21 Dec 1964	Khanh Declares Support for Purge	Khanh declares his support of the purge and opposes the US, Taylor in particular. He states he will not "carry out the policy of any foreign country." Rumors that Taylor will be declared <u>persona non grata</u> circulate.
24 Dec 1964	US Billet in Saigon Bombed	The VC bomb a US billet in Saigon on Christmas Eve, killing several Americans. The President disapproves military recommendations for a reprisal against the North.
31 Dec 1964	Embassy Saigon Msg 2010	Taylor recommends going ahead with the Phase II air campaign against the North in spite of the political instability and confusion in the South. He now argues that the strikes may help stabilize the situation.
6 Jan 1965	Bundy Memo to SecState	In a memo to the Secretary of State, Wm Bundy urges that we consider some additional actions short of Phase II of the December plan in spite of the chaos in Saigon. It is the only possible course to save the situation.
8 Jan 1965	ROK Troops go to SVN	South Korea sends 2,000 military advisors to South Vietnam.
27 Jan 1965	McNaughton Memo to SecDef	In a memo to SecDef, McNaughton underscores the importance of SEA for the US and then suggests that we may have to adopt Phase II as the only way to save the current situation.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
27 Jan 1965	Khanh Ousts Huong Government	Khanh and the younger officers oust the civilian Huong government. Khanh nominates General Oanh to head an interim regime the next day.
7 Feb 1965	VC Mortar Attack Pleiku	The VC launch a mortar attack on a US billet in Pleiku and an associated helicopter field. Many Americans are killed and helos damaged. The President, with the unanimous recommendation of his advisors, authorizes a reprisal.
	FLAMING DART I	The reprisal strikes involve both US and VNAF planes. A second mission is flown the following day.
	McGeorge Bundy Memo to the President	In an influential memo to the President after a fact-finding trip to Vietnam, Bundy concludes that the situation can only be righted by beginning sustained and escalating air attacks on the North à la Phase II. He had telephoned his concurrence in the FLAMING DART reprisal to the President from Vietnam.
8 Feb 1965	McNamara Memo to JCS	In a memo to the JCS, McNamara requests the development of a limited bombing program against the North. The JCS later submit the "Eight-week Program."
10 Feb 1965	VC Attack Qui Nhon	Thumbing their noses at the US reprisal, the VC attack a US billet in Qui Nhon and kill 23.
11 Feb 1965	FLAMING DART II	The second reprisal strikes authorized by the President attack targets in the North.
18 Feb 1965	Coup Fails, but Khanh Ousted	A coup against the new Premier, Quat, fails when the Armed Forces Council intervenes. They seize the opportunity to remove Khanh and he is forced to leave the country several days later.
24 Feb 1965	ROLLING THUNDER Approved	The President approves the first strikes for the ROLLING THUNDER sustained, escalating air campaign against the DRV.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
2 Mar 1965	ROLLING THUNDER Begins	After being once postponed, the first ROLLING THUNDER strikes take place.
6 Mar 1965	Marines to DaNang	The President decides to send two US Marine Battalion Landing Teams to DaNang to take up the base security function. They arrive two days later.
14 Mar 1965	General H.K. Johnson Report	After a trip to Vietnam, the Army Chief of Staff, General Johnson, recommends a 21-point program to the President. Included are increased attacks on the North and removal of restrictions on these missions.
29 Mar 1965	US Embassy Bombed	Just as Ambassador Taylor is leaving for a policy conference in Washington, the US Embassy in Saigon is bombed by VC terrorists with loss of life and extensive property damage.
31 Mar 1965	State Memo to the President	In a 41-point non-military recommendation to the President, State elaborates on a Taylor proposal.
1 Apr 1965	President Meets With NSC and Taylor	At a meeting with Taylor and the NSC Principals, the President approves the 41-point non-military proposal, plus General Johnson's 21-point proposal. In addition, he decides to send two more Marine battalions and an air wing to Vietnam and to authorize an active combat role for these forces. He also authorizes 18,000-20,000 more support forces.
2 Apr 1965	McCone Dissents from 1 Apr Decisions	In a memo to SecState, SecDef, and Ambassador Taylor, CIA Director John McCone takes exception to the decision to give US troops a ground role. It is not justified unless we take radically stronger measures against North Vietnam.
6 Apr 1965	NSAM 288	NSAM 288 promulgates the decisions of the 1 April meeting.
7 Apr 1965	President's Johns Hopkins Speech	The President, in a speech at Johns Hopkins, offers unconditional talks

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 Apr 1965 (Cont'd)		with the DRV plus help in rebuilding after the war if they will cease aggression.
8 Apr 1965	Pham Van Dong Announces 4 Points	DRV Foreign Minister, Pham Van Dong, announces his four points for a Vietnam settlement. They are a defiant, unyielding repudiation of Johnson's offer.
15 Apr 1965	State Department Msg 2332	McGeorge Bundy informs Taylor that further increments of troops are being considered, plus use of US Army civil affairs personnel.
17 Apr 1965	Embassy Saigon Msg 3419	Taylor takes angry exception to the proposal to increase troops and to introduce military civil affairs personnel into the provinces. He did not think he had agreed on 1 April to a land war in Asia.
20 Apr 1965	Honolulu Conference	In a hastily called conference, McNamara informs Taylor in detail of the new policy directions and "brings him along." An attempt is made to mollify him.

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IV.C.1.

U. S. PROGRAMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, NOVEMBER 1963 - APRIL 1965
NSAM 273 - NSAM 288

I. NSAM-273

1. NSAM-273 -- The Aftermath of Diem

NSAM 273 of 26 November 1963 came just four days after the assassination of President Kennedy and less than a month after the assassination of the Ngo brothers and their replacement by the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). NSAM 273 was an interim, don't rock-the-boat document. Its central significance was that although the two assassinations had changed many things, U.S. policy proposed to remain substantially the same. In retrospect, it is unmistakably clear, but it was certainly not unmistakably clear at that time, that this was a period of crucial and accelerated change in the situation in South Vietnam. NSAM 273 reflected the general judgment of the situation in Vietnam that had gained official acceptance during the previous period, most recently and notably during the visit of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor to Vietnam in late September of that year.

This generally sanguine appraisal had been the basis for the recommendation in that report to establish a program to train Vietnamese to carry out, by the end of 1965, the essential functions then performed by U.S. military personnel -- by which time "it should be possible to withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel." As an immediate gesture in this direction, the report recommended that "the Defense Department should announce in the very near future, presently prepared plans to withdraw one thousand U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963." The latter recommendation was acted upon the same day (2 October 1963) by making it part of a White House statement of U.S. Policy on Vietnam. This White House statement included the following pronouncement.

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported their judgment that the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965, although there may be a continuing requirement for a limited number of U.S. training personnel. They reported that by the end of this year the U.S. program for training Vietnamese should have progressed to the point where one thousand U.S. personnel assigned to South Vietnam can be withdrawn. 1/

The visit of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to Saigon at the end of September was followed by the report to the President in early October and agreements reached with the President at the White House early in October following

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the Diem coup, a special meeting on Vietnam was held at CINCPAC headquarters on 20 November. Although this Honolulu meeting was marked by some concern over the administrative dislocation that had resulted from the coup of three weeks before, the tone remained one of optimism along the lines of the October 2 report to the President. Ambassador Lodge took note of what he called the "political fragility" of the new regime, but he was on the whole optimistic, and even mentioned that the statement on U.S. military withdrawal was having a continued "tonic" effect on the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). General Harkins in his report mentioned a sharp increase in Viet Cong (VC) incidents right after the coup, but added that these had dropped to normal within a week, and that there had, moreover, been compensating events such as additional Montagnards coming out of the hills to get government protection. All in all there was some uneasiness, perhaps, about unknown effects of the coup, but nothing was said to suggest that any serious departure was contemplated from the generally optimistic official outlook of late September and early October. And so, with reference to the statements of October 2, NSAM 273 repeated:

The objectives of the United States with respect to the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel remain as stated in the White House statement of October 2, 1963. 2/

Before examining further the background of NSAM 273 -- especially the appraisals of the Vietnam situation that it reflected -- it is well to review some of the main provisions of that policy statement of 26 November 1963.

NSAM 273 was not comprehensive, as the McNamara-Taylor report of 2 October (discussed below) had been, nor as NSAM 288 was later to be. Mainly it served to indicate continuance by the new President of policies already agreed upon, and to demonstrate full support by the United States of the new government of Vietnam (GVN). Both military and economic programs, it was emphasized, should be maintained at levels as high as those in the time of the Diem regime. In addition, there was an unusual Presidential exhortation -- reflecting the internal U.S. dispute over policy concerning Diem and Nhu that had made embarrassing headlines in October -- that:

The President expects that all senior officers of the government will move energetically to insure the full unity of support for established U.S. policy in South Vietnam. Both in Washington and in the field, it is essential that the government be unified. It is of particular importance that express or implied criticism of officers of other branches be assiduously avoided in all contacts with the Vietnamese government and with the press. 3/

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NSAM 273 was specifically programmatic so far as SVN was concerned only in directing priority of effort to the Delta.

- (5) We should concentrate our efforts, and insofar as possible we should persuade the government of South Vietnam to concentrate its effort, on the critical situation in the Mekong Delta. This concentration should include not only military but political, economic, social, educational and informational effort. We should seek to turn the tide not only of battle but of belief, and we should seek to increase not only the controlled hamlets but the productivity of this area, especially where the proceeds can be held for the advantage of anti-Communist forces. 4/

In general, the policies expressed by NSAM 273 were responsive to the older philosophy of our intervention there, which was that the central function of the U.S. effort was to help the South Vietnamese to help themselves because only if they did the major job themselves could that job in reality be done at all. We would assist stabilization of the new regime and head it in that direction.

- (3) It is a major interest of the United States government that the present provisional government of South Vietnam should be assisted in consolidating itself in holding and developing increased public support. 5/

Definition of the central task in South Vietnam as that of winning the hearts and minds of the people and of gaining for the GVN the support of the people had been the central consideration in the late summer and early fall of what to do about Diem and Nhu. The argument concerning the Diem government centered on the concept that the struggle in South Vietnam could not be won without the support of the South Vietnamese people and that under the Diem regime -- especially because of the growing power and dominance of Nhu -- the essential popular base was beyond reach. In the 2 October report to the President as well as in the discussions later at Honolulu on 20 November this theme was prominent. The U.S. could not win the struggle, only the Vietnamese could do that. For instance, in the report to the President of 2 October, there were these words in the section on "the U.S. military advisory and support effort."

We may all be proud of the effectiveness of the U.S. military advisory and support. With few exceptions, U.S. military advisors report excellent relations with their Vietnamese counterparts, whom they characterize as proud and willing soldiers. The stiffening and exemplary effect of U.S. behavior and attitudes

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has had an impact which is not confined to the war effort, but which extends deeply into the whole Vietnamese way of doing things.

The U.S. advisory effort, however, cannot assure ultimate success. This is a Vietnamese war and the country and the war must in the end be run solely by the Vietnamese. It will impair their independence and development of their initiative if we leave our advisors in place beyond the time they are really needed... 6/ /emphasis supplied/

Policy concerning aid to the Vietnamese may be considered to range between two polar extremes. One extreme would be our doing almost everything difficult for the Vietnamese, and the other would consist of limiting our own actions to provision of no more than material aid and advice while leaving everything important to be done by the Vietnamese themselves. Choice of a policy at any point on this continuum reflects a judgment concerning the basic nature of the problem; i.e. to what extent political and to what extent military; to what extent reasonable by political means and to what extent resolvable by military means even by outsiders. But in this case the choice of policy also reflected confidence that success was being achieved by the kind and level of effort that had already been devoted to this venture. The policy of NSAM 273 was predicated on such confidence. It constituted by its reference to the 2 October statement an explicit anticipation, with tentative time phases expressly stated, of the assumption by the Vietnamese of direct responsibility for doing all the important things themselves sometime in 1965, the U.S. thereafter providing only material aid and non-participating advice at the end of that period. That optimism was explicit in the report to the President of 2 October wherein the conclusion of the section on "The US Military Advisory and Support Effort" consisted of this paragraph:

Acknowledging the progress achieved to date, there still remains the question of when the final victory can be obtained. If, by victory, we mean the reduction of the insurgency to something little more than sporadic banditry in outlying districts, it is the view of the vast majority of military commanders consulted that success may be achieved in the I, II, and III Corps area by the end of CY 1964. Victory in IV Corps will take longer - at least well into 1965. These estimates assume that the political situation does not significantly impede the effort. 7/ /emphasis supplied/

2. First Reappraisals of the Situation in South Vietnam

The caveat given expression in the last sentence of the conclusions cited above offered an escape clause, but it was clearly

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not employed as a basis for planning and for programming. It was not emphasized, and the lack of emphasis was consistent with the general tone of optimism in the report as a whole. This general optimism in fact reflected the judgments proffered by most of the senior officials upon whom the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs had principally relied for advice. It is obvious, however, that the optimism was scarcely consistent with the grave apprehension with which the political situation was viewed at the time.

Ever since the Buddhist crisis began in early summer, the fear had been felt at the highest U.S. policy levels that the explosiveness and instability of the political situation in Vietnam might undermine completely our efforts there. This apprehension had been the reason why the President first dispatched the Mendenhall-Krulak mission to Vietnam in early September, and then, a fortnight later, sent the McNamara-Taylor mission. The political crisis existing in Vietnam was indeed a subject of great concern at the very time of the latter visit. During this visit a decision was made that a proposed Presidential letter of remonstrance to Diem for his repressive policies concerning the Buddhists was tactically unwise and that, instead, a letter over the signature of the Joint Chiefs, ostensibly directed primarily to the military situation, should be delivered to Diem carrying a somewhat modified expression of protest. That letter dated October 1 was delivered to Diem on October 2 and included these judgments:

Now, as Secretary McNamara has told you, a serious doubt hangs over our hopes for the future. Can we win together in the face of the reaction to the measures taken by your government against the Buddhists and the students? As a military man I would say that we can win provided there are no further political setbacks. The military indicators are still generally favorable and can be made more so by actions readily within the power of your government. If you allow me, I would mention a few of the military actions which I believe necessary for this improvement. 8/

And, in closing the letter the CJCS expressed himself in these words:

In closing, Mr. President, may I give you my most important overall impression? Up to now the battle against the Viet Cong had seemed endless; no one has been willing to set a date for its successful conclusion. After talking to scores of officers, Vietnamese and American, I am convinced that the Viet Cong insurgency in the North and Center can

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be reduced to little more than sporadic incidents by the end of 1964. The Delta will take longer but should be completed by the end of 1965. But for these predictions to be valid, certain conditions must be met. Your government should be prepared to energize all agencies, military and civil, to a higher output of activity than up to now. Ineffective commanders and province officials must be replaced as soon as identified. Finally, there should be a restoration of domestic tranquility on the homefront if political tensions are to be allayed and external criticism is to abate. Conditions are needed for the creation of an atmosphere conducive to an effective campaign directed at the objectives, vital to both of us, of defeating the Viet Cong and of restoring peace to your country. 2./

This letter was a policy instrument, of course, rather than exclusively an expression of an appraisal. As a matter of tactics it was softened considerably from the first proposed letter which was to say that the United States would consider disassociating itself from the Vietnam Government and discontinue support unless the GVN altered its repressive policies. It is cited here mainly to indicate the concern, made explicit by the senior members of the U.S. Mission in late September, concerning the possible effect upon military effectiveness of the political unrest.

About a week later, in testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Secretary McNamara repeated the theme that the military situation was good; that the political situation was bad, that the political situation could have a bad affect on the military situation, but it had not had such a bad effect yet.

Following an appraisal of the military situation by Gen. Taylor, Chairman Morgan asked the SecDef. "Mr. Secretary, then you feel and I am sure the General feels, that the military effort is going very well?" To this the SecDef's response was:

Secretary McNamara. Yes we do. I think Gen. Taylor has emphasized and I would like to emphasize again, that while we believe the serious political unrest has not to date seriously and adversely affected the military effort, it may do so in the future, if it continues.

Chairman Morgan. General, or Mr. Secretary, could we say that the military situation is moving well, but the political situation is not - the political situation is bad?

Secretary McNamara. Yes, I think that is a fair summary.

Chairman Morgan. Mr. Secretary, then, from your observations, both you and the General, from the 8 days you spent in the

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country, you can't see any deterioration in the military effort of SVN because of the political situation in the country?

Secretary McNamara. This is a fair statement.

Chairman Morgan. You feel that the Vietnamese Army is moving ahead and is cooperating with our forces in there?

Secretary McNamara. Yes. Certain of the affairs of the Vietnamese Army have been affected by the political unrest of recent months. As Gen. Taylor pointed out, some of their relatives have been arrested and subjected to a violation of their personal freedoms and liberties, and undoubtedly this has tended to turn some of the officers away from support of their government.

But they are strongly motivated by the desire to resist the Communist encroachment...and their anti-Communist feelings are stronger than their distrust of government. So to date there has been no reduction in the effectiveness of their military operations. 10/

There is no record that this express recognition that the bad political situation might affect the military capability was considered a contingency to be foreseen in the program, or that anyone suggested it should be.

Nearly four months later Secretary McNamara had an explanation to offer concerning his view of the situation at the time of this testimony. Appearing once more in Executive Session to testify on the authorization bill for the fiscal year 1965, before the House Committee on Armed Services on 27 January 1964, the Secretary was asked by Mr. Chamberman of the House Committee to explain why

his press conference comments on the situation the day before were clearly more optimistic than those in his Congressional statement. Both were more optimistic than recent news reports from Viet Nam. 11/

In response, the Secretary went back to his Joint Report to the President of 2 October, to cite again the caveat which had been expressed as follows.

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. 12/

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In further amplification of this point the Secretary almost claimed, in effect, to have foreseen and to have forecast the degradation of capability that it was then clear (in January 1964) had occurred and, had, in fact continued ever since November. These were his words,

We didn't say -- but I think you could have predicted that what we had in mind was -- that (1) either Diem would continue his repressive measures and remain in power, in which case he would continue to lose public support and, since that is the foundation of successful counter guerilla operations, the military operations would be adversely affected, or (2) alternatively he would continue his repressive measures and build so much resistance that he would be thrown out, then a coup would take place, and during the period of reorganization following...there would be instability and uncertainty and military operations would be adversely affected. 13/

No fully persuasive explanation has been discovered of the apparent discrepancy between this foresight concerning the possible ill affects of political instability and the generally optimistic prognosis and the program based upon that optimism. The Secretary had had no enthusiasm for the coup. Possibly he adjusted, though reluctantly, to the idea and decided that the political difficulties would either be overcome by means he did not feel it was his duty to explore, or would not be serious or lasting enough to be critical. However, all of the thinking then in vogue about counterinsurgency insisted that favorable political circumstances were essential to success. Therefore, unless it was assumed that favorable political circumstances could be brought about, the counterinsurgency effort was bound to fail. So long as the adverse case was not proved one had to assume ultimately favorable political conditions because it was unthinkable to stop trying.

Even before NSAM 273 was adopted, evidence began to accumulate that the optimistic assumptions underlying it were suspect. First, there was unmistakable and accumulating evidence that, in the period immediately after the coup, the situation had deteriorated in many places as a direct result of the coup. Then came increasing expression of a judgment that this deterioration was not merely an immediate and short lived phenomenon, but something, rather, that continued well after the worst administrative confusions immediately after the coup had been reduced. Finally, the impression, developed in many quarters, and eventually spread to all, that before the coup, the situation had been much more adverse than we had recognized officially at the time. Before the end of December, we decided to institute a system of covert checks on the accuracy of our basic intelligence -- a large part of which came from Vietnamese sources. (There was suspicion that the interests of these officials was often

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served by reporting to us or to their superiors within the GVN what we or the GVN high officials wanted to hear.) As December and January and February passed, the situation reports trended consistently downward, the accumulating evidence seemed to indicate quite clearly that appreciation of setbacks and of adverse developments was regularly belated. The result was that programs tended commonly to be premised upon a more optimistic appraisal of the situation than was valid for the time when they were adopted, whether or not they were valid for an earlier period.

Judgments of the trend of events in Vietnam and of the progress of our program had long been a subject of controversy, both public and within the councils of government. That there had been an undercurrent of pessimism concerning the situation in Vietnam was no secret to the responsible officials who visited Vietnam in September and who reported to the President on 2 October, or to the larger group that convened at CINCPAC HQ on 20 November. Most of the qualifications in their minds related to imponderables of the political situation, which it was always hoped and assumed would be successfully resolved. The focus of the disagreement had generally been the policies of Diem and Nhu especially with respect to the Buddhists. During the summer of 1963, disagreement over the state of affairs in Vietnam had not only been aired in closed official councils, but had flared into open controversy in the public press in a manner that seemed to many to be detrimental to the U.S. It was possible to get directly conflicting views from the experts. One of the better known illustrations of this bewildering diversity of opinions among those with some claim to know is the instance recounted by both Schlesinger and Hilsman of the reports to President Kennedy on 10 September 1963 by General Victor Krulak and Mr. Joseph A. Mendenhall upon their return from their special mission to Vietnam. General Krulak was a specialist in counterinsurgency and Mr. Mendenhall had, not long before, completed a tour of duty in Saigon as Deputy Chief of Mission under Ambassador Durbrow. After hearing them both out (with Krulak painting the rosy picture and Mendenhall the gloomy one), the President, in the words of the Hilsman account, "looked quizzically from one to the other. You two did visit the same country, didn't you?"^{14/}

Much of the disagreement concerning the progress of the anti-Viet Cong effort during the middle of 1963 was related intimately to issues posed by the Buddhist revolt. Where there was pessimism or scepticism about the progress of the war in general or the success of the pacification program, the attitude was generally associated with the judgment that Diem and Nhu were not administering affairs right and were alienating rather than winning the support of the masses of South Vietnamese people. Aside from Diem and Nhu and the Buddhist revolt, the major center of controversy was the situation in the Delta. The fact that NSAM 273 called for priority effort in the Delta reflected official recognition that the situation in the Delta demanded it. The ground work for this was laid during the McNamara-Taylor visit, but recognition of the serious problem there had come slowly and not without controversy.

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A public controversy on the subject was touched off by an article filed in Saigon on 15 August 1963 by David Halberstam of the New York Times. The Halberstam article said that the RVN military situation in the Delta had deteriorated seriously over the past year, and was getting increasingly worse. The VC had been increasing greatly in number, were in possession of more and better arms and had larger stores of them, and their boldness to operate in large units -- up to 600 or even 1,000 men -- had become marked. The VC weapon losses were down, and the GVN weapon losses were up. U.S. military men and civilian officials in the field, according to this article, were reported to be very apprehensive of the effect of all this upon the Strategic Hamlet Program, and the whole future of GVN control in the Delta was in doubt. But, it was hinted strongly, higher echelon authorities were unwilling to perceive the dangers. "Some long-time observers are comparing official American optimism about the Delta to the French optimism that preceded France's route from Indochina in 1954. They warn of "high-level self-deception."

The official refutation of the Halberstam article, prepared for the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs by SACS, categorically denied everything. Based upon what it termed "the most reliable and accurate data available from both classified and unclassified sources" the analysis showed, in the language of its summary, that "the military situation is improving throughout the Republic of Vietnam, not as rapidly in the Mekong Delta as in the North, but improving markedly none the less. The picture is precisely the opposite of the one painted by Mr. Halberstam." 15/ In the body of the refutation, 13 of the principle charges in the Halberstam article were analyzed, one-by-one, and battered by an array of percentages, statistics presented both tabularly and in graphs, and all of the numbers were very impressive and persuasive if taken at face value. They showed, for instance, that the VC armed attacks and VC initiated incidents (not armed), in mid-summer 1963 were below the 1962 average, that the average net weekly loss of GVN weapons to the VC had fallen from 62 in 1961 to 12 in 1962 to only 6 of 1963, and that the rate of both company-sized and battalion-sized VN attacks had fallen markedly, in 1963 from the 1962 level.

Generalizations about how the different groups, agencies, and echelons sided on the issue of the Vietnam situation tend to oversimplify because however they are made, there are exceptions. Most of the senior officers in-field in the direct line of operational responsibility tended to accept the more optimistic interpretation. Examples in this category would include CINCPAC (Admiral Felt), COMUSMACV (General Harkins), Ambassador Nolting (who was soon to be replaced, however, by Ambassador Lodge, who tended to be less optimistic), and CIA Station Chief Richardson. Nolting and Richardson had been charged to develop a close and friendly relationship with Diem, and this involved necessarily a special sort of sympathy for his outlook. The lives of most senior officers charged with operating responsibility have been pointed to giving leadership in situations

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of stress. This leadership includes setting an example of high morale, by their own conduct, to encourage enthusiastic esprit de corps among subordinates, and to project an unfailing image of confidence to the outside world. Such men are likely to find it almost impossible to recognize and to acknowledge existence of a situation seriously adverse to their assigned mission. It is contrary to their lifetime training never to be daunted. This characteristic makes them good leaders for difficult missions but it does not especially qualify them for rendering dispassionate judgements of the feasibility of missions or of the progress they are making. Admiral Felt and General Harkins in the field, and General Krulak in Washington, appear to have been more the gung ho type of leaders of men in combat situations than the cautious reflective weighers of complex circumstances and feasibilities, including political complications.

Officials and agencies in Washington who depended directly or primarily upon these officers for an understanding of the situation tended, very naturally, to put their greatest faith in the judgement of those in the field who were administratively responsible and who had access to the most comprehensive official reports and data. If there were disadvantages in the position of these people, a major one was that most of their information was supplied by GVN officials, who often had a vested interest in making things look good. Moreover, the U.S. officials in positions of operational responsibility had a professional commitment to programs which, often, they had had a hand in establishing. This normally inhibited them from giving the worst interpretation to evidence that was incomplete, ambiguous or inconclusive -- and most evidence was one or more of these. Moreover, the public relations aspects of most positions of operating responsibility make it seem necessary to put a good face on things as a part of that operating responsibility. The morale of the organization seems to demand it. Finally, the intelligence provided on an official basis generally followed formats devised for uniform formal compilation and standard statistical treatment. All along the line, lower echelons were judged, rewarded or penalized by higher echelons in terms of the progress revealed by the reports they turned in. This practice encouraged and facilitated feeding unjustifiably optimistic data into the reporting machinery.

The darker view was easier for those who lacked career commitment to the success of the programs in the form in which they had been adopted. The more pessimistic interpretations were generally based, also, upon sources of information which were intimate, personal, out-of-channels, and with non-official personages. They were particularistic rather than comprehensive, intimate and intuitive rather than formal, impressionistic rather than statistical.

Moreover, some of the principal Cassandras were newsmen whose stories, whether correct or incorrect, made the front page and sometimes even the headlines. This suggested a vested interest in what for one reason or another was sensational. Other Cassandras were military advisors of junior grades, or lesser USOM officers especially those in the provinces, whose views were easy to discount by senior

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officials because, however familiar the junior officers might be with local acts or particular details, they generally lacked knowledge of the overall picture.

There was unquestionable ambivalence in U.S. official attitudes concerning progress and prospects. Despite the repeatedly expressed qualifications concerning the potentially grave affect of the political instability in Vietnam, the programming and policy formulation, as already noted, was without qualification based on optimistic assumptions. In an over-view of the Vietnam War (1960-1963) prepared by SACSA and delivered to the Secretary shortly after his return from South Vietnam, the mission's assessment of military progress was summarized in these terms:

The evidences of overall military progress were so unmistakably clear that the mission, acknowledging the implications and uncertainties of the power crisis underway in Vietnam, concluded that the GVN military effort had achieved a momentum of progress which held further promise of ultimate victory over the Viet Cong; further, that victory was possible within reasonable limits of time and investment of U.S. resources. 16/

The high priority of the Delta problem was recognized, in this same over-view, with the statement that "the mission was impressed with the evidence that the decisive conflict of the war was approaching in the Mekong Delta." The major difficulty there was identified somewhat euphemistically as due to the fact that "the mission found evidences that the Government of Vietnam had overextended its hamlet construction program in these southern provinces." 17/

Not long before this, however, Michael Forrestal in the White House had sent to Secretary McNamara a copy of a Second Informal Appreciation of the Status of the Strategic Hamlet Program dated 1 September 1963, and prepared by USOM Regional Affairs officers. This Appreciation gave province by province summaries that were far from encouraging concerning the Delta. In addition to Long An and Dinh Tuong provinces which were the worst, it was said of Kien Tuong that

the program continues to be slow...few hamlets are completed and a fraction of planned militia trained...the one bright spot...remains the Pri Phap area, which is, however, vulnerable militarily should the VC decide to concentrate their efforts against it. The Chief of Province...we feel is totally unqualified. Vinh Binh, although the hamlet program continued to increase in numbers...the security situation deteriorated in July and August. The removal of a recently introduced RVN battalion damaged the effort, and a change in leadership dislocated projects underway...

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Nhi Long has been severely threatened in August, the route to Vinh Long is again insecure...elsewhere the hamlet program appears to be overextended and with insufficient troop support is under serious threat in former VC strongholds. Security in southernmost Long Toan District, the province VC haven, continues to be very poor... Major Thao, an extremely competent leader,...was replaced in late July...

Vinh Long: Although most signs indicate progress... evaluation of Vinh Long remains largely an evaluation of Lt. Col. Phuoc, Chief of Province...whose idea had previously led him to construct through corvee labor kilometer after kilometer of useless walls, and whose insensitivity to the population had led to considerable popular antipathy. An apparent change of attitude has taken place... and Phuoc now says that the strategic hamlet is a state of mind rather than a fortification. Phuoc's sincerity and commitment to the program are still problematical, however, as is public acceptance of him and of the program...some pessimists feel that this may well prove...the most difficult province in the Delta to pacify.

Chuong Thien: The Communists still control most of the people and land in Chuong Thien...[the] new province chief...has been evasive and has shown no desire really to cooperate...the large relocation effort...risks loss of the province to the VC because the people involved have been alienated.

Ba Xuyen: Shortcoming in the implementation of the hamlet program, as well as a lack of confidence in the province chief...led to the recall in late August of the USOM provincial representative and possible unofficial suspension of USOM...in an effort to build statistics, the province had constructed a number of vulnerable and non-viable hamlets. There has been a forced wholesale relocation, insufficiently justified, poorly financed... numerous occurrences have convinced us that there is venality...and lack of good faith. A new province chief (not presently in prospect) might permit progress in this rich and important area...a major effort to gain popular support for government is needed in this as in many other Delta provinces.

An Xuyen: The province remains under VC control with the exception of a handful of widely separated government strong points... An Xuyen, comprising much of the enemy's main Delta power center, is a primary source of men, money and supplies for the Communists.

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The strategic hamlet program has not succeeded. Under present conditions, given the scarcity of GVN forces and deeply entrenched Viet Cong shadow government, it can not be expected to... 18/

Whether or not the full seriousness of the situation in the Delta was appreciated at the time of the McNamara-Taylor mission in September 1963, it is entirely clear that the Delta was recognized as a high priority problem. The recommendations set forth in their joint Report to the President of 2 October called for "the training and arming of hamlet militia at an accelerated rate, especially in the Delta" and for "a consolidation of the Strategic Hamlet Program, especially in the Delta, and action to insure that in the future strategic hamlets are not built until they can be protected and until civic action programs can be introduced." And in the appraisal of overall progress, the judgments were rendered that

The Delta remains the toughest area of all, and now requires top priority in both GVN and U.S. efforts. Approximately 40 percent of the people live there; the area is rich and has traditionally resisted central authority; it is the center of Viet Cong strength --over one-third of the "hard-core" are found there; and the maritime nature of the terrain renders it much the most difficult region to pacify. 19/

During the Honolulu meeting of 20 November when Gen. Harkins presented a summary of the situation in 13 critical provinces, 7 were in the Delta. Secretary McNamara in a detailed discussion on that occasion of the situation on these provinces suggested that there were three things to be done in the Delta: (1) to get the Chieu Hoi program moving; (2) to get the fertilizer program going in order to increase the output of rice, and (3) most important, to improve the security of strategic hamlets by arming and training and increasing the numbers of the militia. It is recorded that at this point General Taylor made a suggestion that perhaps we needed joint U.S.-Vietnamese province teams to attack problems at the province level because the problems were in fact different in each province. This latter seems worth noting in view of the emphasis that was to be placed, some months later, upon getting more Americans into a supervisory or advisory capacity in the provincial areas.

When General Harkins presented his review of the military situation at this meeting, he indicated that weapon losses were quite high, particularly in November when the government forces lost nearly 3 weapons to every one captured from the VC. The losses were incurred largely by the Civil Guard, the Self-Defense Corps and the hamlet militia. It was also indicated at the meeting that the greatest single difficulty of a pacification program was in the problem of security in the hamlets. Nevertheless, the explanation that the difficulties of November resulted solely from the coup and (would therefore not continue) made it seem unnecessary to change the assumptions that over-all progress in the counter-insurgency effort justified programming a phase-out of the major portion of the U.S.

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contribution. The assumptions were retained that: (1) the Communist insurgency would be brought under control in the Northern two-thirds of the country by the end of calendar year '64, the phase down of the RVNAF could be started at the beginning of calendar year 1965 (instead of the previous estimate of calendar year '66); and this resulted in a reduction from previous estimates of funding for the RVNAF (excluding para-military and police) as follows: (in millions of dollars)

Fiscal year '65	225.2 - 213.3
Fiscal year '66	225.5 - 197.4
Fiscal year '67	143.5 - 131.2
Fiscal year '68	122.7 - 119.7
Fiscal year '69	121.9 - 119.5 <u>20/</u>

While those from Washington who were attending the conference at Honolulu, and Ambassador Lodge, were returning to Washington, President Kennedy was assassinated. The following day, on 23 November, a memorandum was prepared to guide the new President for his meeting with Ambassador Lodge. The main points of this guidance stressed the need for teamwork within this U.S. mission.

It is absolutely vital that the whole of the country team, and particularly Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, work in close harmony and with full consultation, back-and-forth. There must be no back-biting or sniping at low levels such as may have contributed to recent news stories about General Harkins being out of favor with the new regime... 21/

3. First Actions on NSAM 273 and First Misgivings

In response to the call for priority of effort to turn the tide in the Delta, an additional ARVN division was shifted to the Delta, and directives were issued to COMUSMACV to effect an increase in military tempo there, especially to improve tactics, to maintain full strength in combat elements, in arming and training hamlet militia. Along with this, he was to consolidate strategic hamlet programs to bring the pace of construction to a level consistent with GVN capabilities both to provide essential protection and to introduce civic action programs. AID actions to increase production in the Delta were also initiated and accelerated - fertilizer, pesticides, rice seed, the hamlet school program and hamlet medics, generators and radio sets, etc. USOM had, further, conveyed to the GVN its assurance that, subject to Congressional appropriations, the U.S. fully intended to maintain the level of aid previously given to the Diem Government. 22/

Scarcely more than a week after the formalization of NSAM 273 on 26 November 1963, the adverse trend of events that previously had been only rumored or feared moved much closer to being acknowledged to be an unmistakable and inescapable reality. On 7 December (Saigon

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time), Ambassador Lodge forwarded a report of USOM provincial representative Young on the situation in Long An province as of 6 December. Part of that report was as follows:

- (1) The only progress made in Long An province during the month of November, 1963 has been by the Communist Viet Cong. The past thirty days have produced a day-by-day elimination of US/Vietnamese sponsored strategic hamlets and the marked increase in Viet Cong influence, military operations, physical control of the countryside and Communist controlled combat hamlets.
- (2) At the end of September, 1963 province officials stated that 219 strategic hamlets were completed and met the 6 criteria. Effective 30 November 1963 this figure has been reduced to about 45 on the best estimates of MAAG, USOM and new province chief, Major Dao. Twenty-seven hamlets were attacked in November compared with a figure of 77 for June. This would appear to be an improvement. However, the explanation is a simple one: so many strategic hamlets have been rendered ineffective by the Viet Cong that only 27 were worth attacking this month...
- (4) The reason for this unhappy situation is the failure of the government of Vietnam to support and protect the hamlets. The concept of the strategic hamlet called for a self-defense corps capable of holding off enemy attack for a brief period until regular forces (ARVN, Civil Guard, or SDC) could come to the rescue. In hamlet after hamlet this assistance never came, or in most cases, arrived the following morning during daylight hours...
- (5) Two explanations are presented for the lack of assistance: (a) there are not sufficient troops to protect key installations and district headquarters and at the same time go to the assistance of the hamlet. (b) Both official orders and policy prohibit the movement of troops after dark to go to the assistance of hamlets or isolated military posts...
- (9) The strategic hamlet program in this province can be made workable and very effective against the Viet Cong. But help must come immediately in the form of additional troops and new concepts of operation, not in the same reheated French tactics of 1954, beefed up with more helicopters and tanks. The hamlets must be defended if this province is not to fall under complete control of the Viet Cong in the next few months...

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- (11) See also General Don's statement to me on Long An, notably his statement that totally useless and impractical hamlets were built with forced labor so that grafters would receive the money allocated to strategic hamlets...
- (12) I am asking MACV and USOM to find out how the above and the scandalous conditions described by General Don escaped inspection. 23/

This report on Long An province reached Washington about the same time that a Cabinet level meeting at the Department of State was being held to review the situation in Vietnam and discuss possible further actions. A briefing on the situation was presented, on behalf of the Defense Department and the Secretary, by General Krulak. General Krulak's briefing included the following conclusions:

- a. The new GVN shows a desire to respond to U.S. advice and improve its military effectiveness and has the capability to do so. Its plans are basically sound but it is in a state of organizational turmoil which cannot fail to affect its capabilities adversely for the short term.
- b. The VC are making an intensive although loosely coordinated effort to increase their hold on the countryside while the new government is shaking down.
- c. The VC have exhibited a powerful military capability for at least a brief period of intensified operations and their skill at least in counter airborne operations is improving.
- d. There is ground for concern that infiltration of materiel support has increased in the Delta area but there is little hard proof. This is a prime intelligence deficiency since it affects not only the military tactics but our overall Southeast Asia strategy. 24/

The prevailing view at this time seems to have been more apprehensive than Gen. Krulak's briefing would suggest. It was immediately decided that the Secretary should have another look at the situation by returning from the December NATO meeting via Saigon.

The Backup Book for the Secretary of Defense's Saigon trip of 18-20 December contains indications of the major questions that he proposed to look into during his brief projected visit to Vietnam. The Young Report on Long An Province as of 6 December had evidently made a strong impression, and it seems the Secretary was especially anxious to safeguard

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against being misled in the future about the status of programs. With respect to the Strategic Hamlet Program generally, it is evident that there was apprehension concerning the questionable statistics that had been used in the Diem regime's portrayal of the program. It was hoped that it would be possible to identify the requirements for a program of on-going current assessments of the program as quickly as possible. There was also an intention to publish an appropriate set of new guidelines for the coordination of construction, civic action and military programs, and, perhaps more important, to accomplish the consolidation and correction of hamlet programs in the shortest possible time. Five problem areas with respect to the strategic hamlet program were identified prior to the trip, these were:

- a. What progress is being achieved by the surveys and when will the reports be available?
- b. What specific actions were then underway to coordinate the companion military, political and social programs?
- c. When would the new guidelines be published?
- d. What action was underway to indoctrinate the newly assigned province officials to enable them to pursue the program effectively?
- e. Was it plain that one big problem would be to insure that the province and district officials understood and executed vigorously their revised programs? Had any thought been given to adding an additional advisor or two, in the critical provinces, to work at the district level and to insure that the officials actually drove programs forward. 25/

A point to be noted in these is the growing idea of placing an increasing number of advisors at the province and district level.

The Secretary made certain decisions of an immediate nature concerning programs in Vietnam while he was still in Saigon; and immediately upon his return he made his report to the President in which he described the situation as he had found it, and made further recommendations that he had evidently not felt empowered to enact without Presidential approval.

Among the actions agreed upon during the visit to Saigon on 19-20 December were the following:

1. The GVN should be pressed to increase troop density in six provinces in III Corps by about 100% (ten infantry and three engineering battalions), in

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accordance with plans discussed at a meeting with COMUSMACV and the Ambassador.

2. Revise the pacification plans for critical provinces to insure that they reflect scheduling and programming "based on a realistic appraisal of the actual status of the hamlets, the SDC and Civil Guard and ARVN as well as the rehabilitation materials available."
3. Increase U.S. military advisory strength in the thirteen critical provinces (agreed to be critical at Honolulu) in accordance with a table submitted by COMUSMACV.
4. Reinforce USOM representation in thirteen critical provinces starting with Long An in accordance with a proposal from USOM Saigon.
5. Provide uniforms for the SDC with priority on the Delta area.
6. Press the GVN for a clear statement, in form of orders to province chiefs, for continuance and reshaping of the hamlet program.
7. Press the GVN to provide for a Joint General Staff (JCS) chief, and for a III Corps commander with no other responsibilities.
8. Continue to stress to the GVN the need for forceful central leadership and effective and visible popular leadership. 26/

The Secretary's report for the President dated 21 December '63 was gloomy and expressed fear that the situation had been deteriorating long before any deterioration had been suspected (officially). The report began by saying that the situation was "very disturbing," and that unless current trends were reversed within two or three months they would "lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state." The new government of Big Minh was identified as the greatest source of concern because it seemed indecisive and drifting. There seemed to be a clear lack of administrative talent and of political experience. While on the other hand generals who should have been directing military affairs were preoccupied with political matters [i.e., working to assure or to increase their own political power within the RMC].

A second major weakness seemed to the Secretary to be the Country Team. He felt that it lacked leadership and had been "poorly informed" and was "not working according to a common plan." He had found as an

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example of confusion conflicts between USOM and military recommendations, in cases of recommendations to the government of Vietnam and Washington concerning the size of the military budget. "Above all, Lodge has virtually no official contact with Harkins." The Ambassador, the Secretary felt, simply could not conduct a coordinated administration-- not because he did not wish to, but because he had "operated as a loner all his life and cannot readily change now." Concerning enemy progress, the report said

Viet Cong progress has been great during the period since the coup, with my best guess being that the situation has in fact been deteriorating in the countryside since July to a far greater extent than we realized because of undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting. The Viet Cong now control very high proportions of the people in certain key provinces, particularly those directly South and West of Saigon. 27/
[emphasis supplied]

As remedial measures he recommended that the government of Vietnam be required to reallocate its military forces so that its effective strength in these key provinces would be essentially doubled. There would also have to be major increases in both the U.S. military staff and the USOM staff, to the point where the numbers of Americans assigned in the field would give the U.S. a reliable independent U.S. appraisal of the status of operations. (This was a clear enough indication of the Secretary's unhappiness with past reporting.) Third, he stated that a "realistic pacification plan" would have to be prepared. Specifically, they should allocate adequate time to make the remaining government controlled areas secure, and only then work from them into contiguous surrounding areas.

The Secretary stressed that the situation was worst in the Delta and surrounding the capitol, and that in the North things were better, and that General Harkins remained hopeful that the latter areas could be made reasonably secure late in the year. The report expressed considerable concern over the increasing infiltration of men and equipment from North Vietnam. Various proposals to counter this infiltration had been discussed in Saigon, but the Secretary was not yet convinced that there were means that were politically acceptable and militarily feasible of stopping that infiltration.

Minh had strongly opposed any ideas of possible neutralization of Vietnam. (This was taken to dispose of proposals suggested by Senator Mansfield, President DeGaulle, the New York Times, columnist Walter Lippman and others).

Concerning a possible escalation of U.S. effort, the Secretary indicated that he had directed supply of a modest increase in artillery, but, "US resources and personnel cannot usefully be substantially increased."

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In concluding, the Secretary said that his appraisal might be overly pessimistic, and that Lodge, Harkins and Minh, while agreeing on specific points, seemed to feel that January might bring a significant improvement.

Following his report to the President, the Secretary made the following remarks to the press, at the White House:

...We have just completed our report to the President...We observed the results of the very substantial increase in VC activity, an increase which began shortly after the new government was formed, and has extended over a period of several weeks.

During this time, the Viet Cong have attacked and attacked successfully, a substantial number of the strategic hamlets. The rate of that VC activity, however, has substantially dropped within the past week to ten days.

This rapid expansion of activity, I think, could have been expected. It was obviously intended to take advantage of the period of organization in the new government...We received in great detail the plans of the South Vietnamese and the plans of our military advisors for operations during 1964. We have every reason to believe they will be successful. We are determined that they shall be. 28/

4. Efforts To Improve Intelligence On Progress Of The War

The Secretary had made evident in his memo of 21 December to the President that he had become seriously disturbed at the failure of the reporting system in Vietnam to alert him promptly to the deterioration of the situation there. CIA Director McCone had accompanied him on the trip to Saigon and, immediately upon his return, Mr. McCone initiated efforts to improve the reporting system. On 23 December he wrote the Secretary:

...information furnished to us from MACV and the Embassy concerning the current Viet Cong activities in a number of provinces and the relative position of the SVN Government versus the Viet Cong forces was incorrect, due to the fact that the field officers of the MAAG and USOM had been grossly misinformed by the province and district chiefs. It was reported to us, and I believe correctly, that the province and district chiefs felt obliged to 'create statistics' which would meet the approbation of the Central Government.

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I believe it is quite probable that the same practice might be repeated by the new province and district chiefs appointed by the MRC... 29/

McCone, therefore, proposed development of a new, covert method of checking on the information supplied by these regular reporting authorities on the progress of the war and on pacification and other counter-insurgency efforts. A plan was developed within CIA by 3 January 1964 which called for the formation of a mission of 10 to 12 experienced intelligence officers, all drawn from CIA, to proceed to Saigon for a 60 to 90 day TDY beginning about 12 January. There, under the direction of the CAS Station Chief, they would undertake:

1. A survey of Vietnamese/American counter-insurgency reporting machinery;
2. Develop, assess, and recruit new covert sources of information, to serve as a check, and finally,
3. Assist the station chief in developing recommendations, for submission to Washington through the Saigon country team, on means of improving overall GVN and US reporting machinery.

McCone forwarded these plans to McNamara on 7 January for discussion at a meeting that same day. 30/ Following the meeting of 7 January on this original proposal, a revised proposal was drawn up and submitted by McCone to McNamara for concurrence on 9 January. 31/ The revision was largely responsive to a fear of the Secretary that, as originally proposed, the TDY team would serve as a sort of Inspector General functioning independently of both the Country Team and the CAS Station/Saigon. Accordingly the new draft expressly specified that a separate reporting system would not be established, nor a reorganization of the existing reporting system attempted. It would attempt, however, to develop through covert techniques a method of spot checking the accuracy of regular reporting and develop also new covert sources of information on the progress of the war.

In accepting the proposal in a written reply dated 16 January, Secretary McNamara expressed insistence on making this a team effort, first by emphasizing that "I do not believe that the team should have an inspectoral function for the overall reporting system," and second by adding to the draft submitted for his signature the clause, "but it should be a joint program involving all of the affected members of the country team." When the definitive messages went out to Saigon they had the concurrence of State, Defense and CIA. 32/

It is understandable enough from an administrative point of view that a formally coordinated unified effort seemed preferable. There had been notable discords, and failures of communication, and policy disagreement within the Mission in the past and these had caused serious problems. Important sources of disagreement remained, and

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anything resembling an IG inquiry might have brought about morale problems that it was well to avoid. The reverse of the coin was that formalized coordination of intelligence stood the chance of stifling or concealing minority dissent. It was indeed the basic mission of the group to set up checks. But in the extent to which this system of checks were to be coordinated with the system as a whole, it risked losing some part of its independence of the accepted view. And it had been the accepted view that had been proved wrong.

By the time full agreement was reached on the terms of reference for the team, the team was already in Saigon. A month later it submitted a report evaluating the situation in Viet Nam at about the same time that the CAS station chiefs submitted two other evaluations which were apparently for a time mistakenly attributed to the TDY team. These evaluations caused enough uneasiness within the country team to indicate that interpretation of intelligence and situation appraisals remained the touchy matter that the Secretary had foreseen. The "Initial Report of CAS Group Findings in SVN," dated 10 February 1964 began by acknowledging that the group activities had been temporarily disrupted by the Khanh Coup of 30 January (which will be described later), and did not attempt to report on the covert cross checks because before covert cross checks could be established it was necessary to learn the pattern and nature of the reporting system then in use, both American and Vietnamese. 33/ The first appraisals, therefore, were expressly based solely on a new look at what the existing system reported. The first impression of the group was that for the most part the Vietnamese had been reporting honestly to their American counterparts since the 1 November coup and that if current reporting was indeed biased it was biased against the Diem regime.

The first general impression of the situation, expressly subject to further inquiry, was that "the momentum of the strategic hamlet program has slowed practically to a halt." More specific evaluations, which focused on local situations north and east of Saigon and took up most of this initial report, were more pessimistic than the "general impression." Within Binh Long Province, security had deteriorated rapidly during January and the VC now controlled route 13. Well planned and viciously executed VC attacks on hamlets had caused wide fear, and produced doubt among the populace that the GVN could protect them. The former province chief and deputy chief for military operations had been replaced just two days before the Khanh coup. The response to the Khanh coup had been one of disgust. Phuoc Thanh Province, according to the province chief, was 80% controlled by the VC. The VC controlled the roads, making GVN travel impossible without large armed escorts. The VC were moving freely in battalion size units with heavy weapons throughout the province. COMUSMACV had reported that the one to one GVN/VC ratio in the province was misleading because many of the GVN units were tied down in static positions whereas the VC were mobile.

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When the Special CAS group turned in its final appraisal on 18 February, Gen. Harkins was asked by the CGCS to comment. Gen. Harkins offered, 3 days later, a paragraph by paragraph commentary, much of which agreed with the CAS group findings. There were a few minor points of fact that were in disagreement. Where General Harkins pointedly disagreed was in the matter of interpretation and emphasis and where both the CAS group and Gen. Harkins agreed that past performance had not been good, Gen. Harkins tended to emphasize the hope, as the CAS group did not, that under Khanh the situation would perhaps improve. Beyond this, Gen. Harkins was, in general, somewhat disturbed that the CAS group might be exceeding its terms of reference by reporting unilaterally, and misleading the national decision process by forwarding information not coordinated and cleared with other elements of the U.S. reporting mechanism in Vietnam. Perhaps most significant of all, at the very beginning of his comments he offered an observation that, internationally or otherwise, raised very basic issues of the nature, function, and limitations of the intelligence and estimation process.

Except for the spectacular and eye catching lead sentence "Tide of insurgency in all four corps areas appears to be going against GVN", I have no quarrel with most of the statements contained in the CAS Survey Team appraisal. Where the statements are clean-cut, the supporting information was usually provided by my field personnel and reflected in reports already sent to Washington by this headquarters. Where the statements are sweeping, they are based on opinion or an unfortunate penchant for generalizing from the specific. My detailed comments follow and are geared to the specific paragraphs of the CAS message. 34/ emphasis supplied.

If we examine this statement with particular reference to the words and phrases underlined, the large, epistemological problem of the junction of intelligence and national decision-making is pointedly indicated. By "clean-cut," Gen. Harkins undoubtedly referred to phenomena that were concrete, highly specific and narrowly factual. These were the sort of phenomena about which there could seldom or never be any serious dispute. By "sweeping" statements, and by "unfortunate penchant for generalizing from the specific," he was referring to the mental process of bridging the gap from the small concrete detail-- which was seldom or never by itself a basis for large decision-- to the interpretation of that detail-- to the judgment of the significance of that detail. Only upon the basis of interpretations (judgments) of the importance, meaning and relevance of things could policy decisions be made. And that judgment or interpretation was seldom or never inescapably inherent in the measurable, sharply definable, completely unarguable concrete detail. It might be derived from or directly reflect such data, but its form would be determined equally, or

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even more, from the perspective in which it was viewed. And this perspective was comprised of the whole context of incompletely described, not fully identified values, and imperfectly defined priorities, that determined the weight and place given to that factual detail in the mysterious calculus of the decision-maker. If this were not the case, any bright college boy given the same set of "facts" would inevitably derive from them the same judgments of what national policy should be, as the canniest, most generally knowledgeable and experienced veteran.

5. The Unrealized January Upturn and the Khanh Coup

There was hope that as January 1964 wore on the situation would take a turn for the better. But, as the CAS reports cited in the foregoing section suggest, things did not get better. The hope was that the Minh regime would find itself, but before it did the Khanh coup of 30 January came as another blow to progress in the operating program and as a disillusioning surprise to the hopes for the stable political situation generally agreed to be the prerequisite to ultimate success.

Despite the unfavorable news -- which was beginning to excite the first serious proposals within the JCS for carrying the war to the north by expanded clandestine operations and finally by overt bombing -- the Secretary managed to maintain the earlier philosophy that the U.S. involvement would remain limited and that in fact the counterinsurgency effort could not really attain its goals unless the U.S. role continued to be limited and the South Vietnamese did the main job themselves.

Just before the Khanh coup, in testimony on 27 and 29 January before the House Armed Services Committee, the Secretary encountered some sharply probing questions on the continuing costs of the war. The questions centered on the inconclusiveness of the efforts to date and upon the apparent discrepancies between autumnal optimism and the winter discouragements, and between official optimism and the pessimistic reports appearing in newspaper stories. Even Mr. Mendel Rivers, evidently impatient that the VC had not already been subdued and perhaps suspecting that this was due to lack of vigor in our prosecution of the war, asked during these hearings if we were planning to "do anything to bring this war to the VC, any more than what we have done already..." 35/ The Secretary tried to explain that "...It is a Vietnamese war. They are going to have to assume the primary responsibility for winning it. Our policy is to limit our support to logistical and training support." To this, Mr. Rivers replied with the following question: "There are no plans to change the modus operandi of this war, so far as the bleeding of this country is concerned?"

A little later, Representative Chamberlain asked the Secretary if he continued to be as "optimistic" about the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. personnel as he had been in October. The Secretary in reply reaffirmed that he believed that:

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...the war in South Vietnam will be won primarily through the South Vietnamese efforts; it is a South Vietnamese war. It is a war of the counter guerrillas as against the guerrillas. We are only assisting them through training and logistical support.

We started the major program of assistance in training and logistical support toward the latter part of 1961. I think it is reasonable to expect that after four years of such training we should be able gradually to withdraw certain of our training personnel.

Following this, Representative Stratton addressed an inquiry to the Secretary:

Mr. Secretary, I am a little bit worried about your statement in answer to Mr. Chamberlain, that you still contemplate continuing withdrawal of our forces from Vietnam, in line with your previously announced plan. Isn't this a little unrealistic, in view of the fact that when you first made the announcement things were going a bit better than they appear to be going at the moment? And wouldn't you say that in the event that things do not go as well as you hope they will, that unquestionably we can't continue to withdraw any more of our forces?

Secretary McNamara's reply:

No Sir, I would not. I don't believe that we as a nation should assume the primary responsibility for the war in South Vietnam. It is a counter-guerrilla war, it is a war that can only be won by the Vietnamese themselves. Our responsibility is not to substitute ourselves for the Vietnamese, but to train them to carry on the operations that they themselves are capable of.

The theme was next picked up by Representative Kohelan. He said that "One of the things that some of us are quite concerned about is this constant tendency toward a sanguine approach to the problem of Southeast Asia." He went on to recall that when he and other committee members had been out to South Vietnam in November of 1962, when General Harkins was saying the war would be won in 2 years and Admiral Felt said it would be won in 3 years -- although Halberstam and other newsmen were pessimistic at that time and now seemed, to Representative Kohelan, to have been right.

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You could not go from the airfield to Mytho without an armed guard in full daylight, or... transport anything for fear of ambush by ground, although the Vietnamese themselves could move the freight by some kind of pay-off to the Viet Cong.

In response to this the Secretary said that we were in a very different position than the French had been and that in this sort of war improvement was bound to be slow--a matter of years. But this did not mean we should retain all of our existing personnel in South Vietnam. It would be a waste to do so, and by "keeping the crutch there too long we would weaken the Vietnamese rather than strengthen them."

Within a day or two after this testimony was given there came the Khanh coup, which constituted not only another hard blow to our efforts in Vietnam but also to our confidence that we knew what was going on there. The Khanh coup of 30 January 1964 came as an almost complete surprise to the mission and to Washington. What may be considered in retrospect, but only in retrospect, as the first very general danger signal came in the form of a conversation between the US/DCM in Saigon and Italian Ambassador D'Orlandi, on 20 January, and reported that same evening to Washington. In discussing the current French initiative in Asia (recognition of Communist China and advocacy of neutralization of SEA), the Italian Ambassador had said that the greatest danger to the U.S. position in Southeast Asia lay in the effect it might have upon certain pro-French and potentially neutralist members of the MRC. When asked to clarify, D'Orlandi named Generals Tran Van Don and Ton Thap Dinh as potential leaders of a group that might accept a French neutralization formula, especially if the U.S. position on that issue were not clarified immediately. In reporting the incident the Embassy commented it had no hard evidence of either of these two flirting with neutralization, although because of French training they were frequently cited as pro-French. 36/

A few days later Ambassador Lodge issued a public statement which acknowledged existence of neutralization rumors and proceeded to affirm that U.S. policy remained unchanged and that the U.S., "In solidarity with the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, firmly rejects the spurious idea of 'neutralizing' South Vietnam since 'neutralization' would simply be another means of Communist take-over." 37/

The first warning of the coup that may be considered specific and definite, however, did not come until 28 January, when General Khanh told Colonel Jasper Wilson, U.S. Senior MAAG advisor for I Corps, that pro-French, pro-neutralist members of the MRC--Generals Xuan, Don, and Kim--were planning a palace coup that would take place as early as 31 January. 38/ Once the coup was effected, they would call for neutralization of South Vietnam. It was not reported that in the conversation with Wilson, Khanh had expressly suggested that he might try a counter coup action. He did say, however, that he planned to go to Saigon that day or on the morrow. In reporting this conversation to Lodge and Harkins in Saigon and to CIA/Washington, CAS cited four other recent intelligence

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items, from other sources, which might have lent some credence to the Khanh allegations (although in the course of time Khanh's allegations were discounted almost entirely). These were (1) Tran Van Ly gained impression in conversation with Xuan that Xuan favored a coup. (2) Lt. Col. Tran Dinh Lam, recently brought back from Paris at the request of Generals Tran Van Don and Le Van Kim, was reported to have French authorization to spend 2 billion piastres to achieve a neutralization of South Vietnam. (3) An American had observed several military trucks bringing weapons and ammunition to Xuan's police headquarters at Camp DuMare. (4) Generals Kim, Don, Nguyen Van Vy, and Duong Van Duc had been identified by Major General Le Van Nghiem as pro-French and privately in favor of neutralization. Nevertheless, Khanh's charges along with other reports were described by CAS as difficult to evaluate; and it was speculated that he and others making similar charges might be motivated by disgruntlement over failure to obtain better positions for themselves within the MRC.

The next move in this sequence of events was when General Khanh talked to Ambassador Lodge in Saigon on the afternoon of 29 January. The striking thing is that although Khanh evidently made his intentions clear, the Ambassador's first thought was to protest to DeGaulle rather than to warn the GVN. That evening at 8:00 p.m., Ambassador Lodge filed a NODIS (Embtel 1431) suggesting that representations should be made to DeGaulle against French clandestine plotting to upset the GVN and set it thereby upon a neutralist course. 39/ General Khanh had apparently made an impression on the Ambassador with his allegations of French machinations, asking for assurance that the U.S. opposed neutralization and if necessary would help him; Khanh, get his family, then in Da Nang, out of the country. He claimed that he had the support of General Khiem of III Corps and General Tri of II Corps as well as 90 percent of the army and 70 percent of the existing government. Lodge further reported that Khanh made a special point of wanting to continue to use Colonel Jasper Wilson as his exclusive contact with the U.S. Khanh refused absolutely to deal with any other than Wilson because he had had "an unfortunate experience with a CIA representative named Spera, before the 31 October coup." Lodge went on to say that although he had no great faith in Xuan, he believed that Don and Kim were patriotic Vietnamese and "therefore, what General Khanh says about them goes against my deepest instincts." Lodge sensed the intent of a coup, but evidently did not appreciate its imminence; for although he said he expected that there would be more to report later, he decided not to alter the government of Vietnam and had confided the news from Wilson only to Harkins and DeSilva.

However, it was a matter of only about seven hours after reporting this first Khanh feeler that Lodge at 3:15 a.m. of 30 January (Saigon time) advised Secretaries Rusk and McNamara that:

General Khanh has informed us through his contact, Colonel Jasper Wilson, MAAG advisor I Corps, that he together with General Phat and Khiem intend to move at 0400 this morning to secure changes in the composition

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of the MRC. General Khiem states that General Minh has been informed of his move and agrees. The only definite statement we have as yet is that Premier Tho must go. 40/

Over the next two or three days Ambassador Lodge altered considerably his first opinions about the justification for the coup. The U.S. chose to view the act as merely a change of personnel within the same MRC format; and the Ambassador's first attempt to explain the affair revealed his hope that an effort to put a good face on it might not be amiss. (There was little else he could do).

Herewith my preliminary assessment of the new Government in Viet Nam. It is very much subject to change as we move along.

1. General Khanh's coup was obviously extremely disconcerting at first blush. We felt we were beginning to make real progress here with the Minh Government--in the conduct of the effort against the Viet Cong; and in making General Minh into a popular figure. To overthrow a Government which was progressing fairly satisfactorily seemed like a violent and disorderly procedure...

2. On second thought, however, one realized the Generals Don and Kim had never at any time fore-sworn the possibility of a neutral solution at which might seem to them to be the proper time. They had clearly been working, and working effectively, to strengthen the effort against the Viet Cong. But none of us had ever discussed what the next step would be after the Government of Viet Nam had reached a position of strength. Perhaps they did favor the French neutrality solution at that time. We had all concentrated exclusively on winning... Finally, Ambassador D'Orlandi of Italy, who is one of the shrewdest men here, has thought ever since November that the Minh Government was actively in support of General De Gaulle's ideas and would turn overtly neutralist at the proper time. He had said this to me several times and had made much of the fact that both Don and Kim were still French citizens, had been aides to Marshal de Lattre when he was here, and had actively worked in the French Secret Service in the past. Therefore, opinion of the French intentions for neutralization coup might be correct...

4. Finally, in this country it rarely occurs to anyone that an election is an efficient or appropriate way to get anything important accomplished. The traditional way of doing important things here is by well planned, well thought out use of force. What General Khanh has done does not appear to have shocked

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the Vietnamese...However, numerous Vietnamese have expressed the opinion to members of my staff that it was a pity that General Minh was removed because he is a "good man."

5. The real question is, therefore: Is Khanh able? Will he really supply some drive in connection with the effort against the Viet Cong? The evidence to date is that he is able, that he has a lot of drive, and that he is not tolerating any delay...

6. If Khanh is able, his advent to power may give this country one-man command in place of a junta. This may be good. We have everything we need in Viet Nam. The U.S. has provided military advice, training, equipment; economic and social help; and political advice. The Government of Viet Nam has put relatively large number of good men into important positions and has evolved civil and military procedures which appear to be workable. Therefore, our side knows how to do it; we have the means with which to do it; we simply need to do it. This requires a tough and ruthless commander. Perhaps Khanh is it. 41/

Privately we continued, however, to be deeply chagrined and even shaken that we had not seen the coup coming. We recognized it was a severe blow to the stability of government that we had believed was so necessary for South Vietnam, and we doubted the charges that Khanh used as a justification for his actions. But we accepted his explanations, promised to support him, and hoped for the best. About all we could do was threaten to withhold aid and that was ineffective because it was increasingly apparent that we were as committed to the struggle as our clients were -- possibly even more committed. Whatever the real possibilities of influence may have been, we accepted as inescapable the fact that there was nothing we could do but go along with it. The President of the United States quickly offered his public expression of recognition and strong support. And one of our strongest resolves was to see what we might hit upon as a means to assure that we would not be taken again by a similar surprise.

6. Deepening Gloom in February

Among the flood of SitReps that came in soon after the coup was "Commander's Personal Military Assessment of the Fourth Quarter, CY-63." 42/ This was a report that MACV had been directed to establish at the end of the September 1963 visit of the Secretary and the CJCS in order to establish checkpoints by which to measure progress toward achievement of the goals agreed upon at that time. It is not essential here to review all of MACV's report but there are interesting details that are

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worth noting. MACV's report gave central attention to the fact that the political turbulence during the last quarter of 1963 had been reflected in a regression in government control, and corresponding opportunities for the VC. The political instability had resulted, especially, in a decline of GVN control within the 13 provinces listed as critical at Honolulu on 20 November. The strategic hamlet program had received setbacks which forced the GVN's military forces to adopt a defensive posture. After this there came a somewhat equivocal statement that:

Analysis disclosed that, in spite of political turbulence, a satisfactory tempo of operation was maintained during this quarter. On the other hand, statistics clearly supported previous convictions that GVN operations were not effective when judged by reasonable standards of results versus effort expended. The immediate response to this analysis is to focus the advisory effort at all levels on the need for radical improvement in the effectiveness of operations. 43/

What this seems to say is that GVN operations were satisfactory by the criteria which had been adopted for judging them, yet they did not achieve results. This seems to amount to an admission that the criteria by which operations were judged did not lead to good judgments concerning the results that were being achieved by these operations.

This appears, indeed, to have been very near the truth. Throughout this report there was a recognition of the effect of political and psychological and motivational factors upon real and effective capabilities. On the matter of training, the assessment was that it had "proven to be quantitatively satisfactory and flexible enough to meet the pressures and accelerated time schedules." But this expression of satisfaction that the nominal goals of training had been met was followed by the qualification that "the degree to which training can, in fact, develop combat aggressiveness or compensate for the lack of other motivation remains a matter for concern and continuing scrutiny." The anomaly was expressed in words, but the fact of it seems to have gone almost unrecognized.

When he turned to the two major areas of military action, first in the north and center and later in the Delta, MACV was obliged to admit that "there was little substantial progress toward completing the military progress in either of the two major regions." But he seemed to have been so thoroughly imbued with a chin-up, never-say-die spirit that he rejected the pessimistic implications which he explicitly acknowledged were present.

If the military aspects of the fourth quarter of calendar year 1963 were viewed in isolation, or

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could in any way be considered typical, the forecast would be pessimistic in nature and a complete reappraisal of U.S. effort, approach, and even policy would be indicated. However, viewed in the light of January operational improvements, the forecast remains one of potential long term military progress. 44/

The improvements cited as grounds for not accepting the pessimistic implications were a new military plan to support the pacification program; adoption of U.S. advice concerning GVN management to cope with increasing VC threats, especially around Saigon; and some government operations that seemed to demonstrate improved military leadership, and what he called "victories" while admitting they were not decisive. The difficulty here was that the judgment did not include consideration that these happier signs had come under the regime which had just been overturned by the Khanh coup a day or two before this report was dispatched, which coup, it was acknowledged, would have a disturbing and disruptive effect upon GVN capabilities as they had existed before the coup. Although it was still too soon to predict the full impact of the coup, it seemed "likely that at least part of the operational momentum which was being slowly generated earlier this month will be slowed for a time..."

In closing this assessment, MACV philosophized, in words with which few would disagree, that experiences of the last quarter of calendar year 1963 disclosed "the extent to which military opportunities are dependent upon political and psychological policies and accomplishments in a counter-insurgency environment." And he found the big lesson -- "the broad implication" -- was, that

no amount of military effort or capability can compensate for poor politics. Therefore, although the prospects for an improved military posture are good, the ultimate achievement of the established military goal depends primarily upon the quality of support achieved by the political leadership of the government of Vietnam at all levels. 45/

Here again was an explicit judgment that the sine qua non of an effective counter-insurgency operation was a stable, broadly based, popular and effective government. It was acknowledged at this time, as it had been acknowledged before concerning other governments, that a government of these qualities did not exist. But along with the acknowledgment that what was described as the sine qua non did not exist, there was apparently always the hope that fate would not close in before something happened to change the situation.

The U.S. mission Monthly Status Report, dated 9 February 1964, agreed with MACV that it was too soon to judge the effects of the Khanh coup. The Mission Report, following a week after the personal report of MACV, did not hesitate to express explicit regret over the

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departure of Minh and Tho. In the "overall evaluation", there was the following key paragraph:

January witnessed distinct, if limited, progress in GVN's organization and action, both on political front in Saigon and on counter-insurgency front in countryside. Nevertheless, by January 30, when General Khanh moved swiftly and bloodlessly to take over reins of government, GVN had still not achieved sufficient momentum either to stem growing tide of popular criticism against it or to register meaningful gains against VC. In retrospect, greatest single positive achievement during three months of post-Diem regime was measurable success of General Minh in establishing himself as popular national leader. Measure of his success reflected in General Khanh's obvious effort to keep Minh on his side and exploit Minh's growing popularity for benefit of second post-Diem regime. 46/

On the same day that the Mission Report was dispatched, CIA addressed to the Secretary of Defense a special report which had just been received by the Director of CIA by Mr. Peer de Silva (CAS station chief in Saigon) and Mr. Lyman D. Kirkpatrick, concerning the situation in Vietnam with particular respect to the conduct of the war and the prognosis of the stability of the Khanh regime. The de Silva judgment was that

The situation at this moment must be characterized as one in which the population at large appears apathetic, without enthusiasm either for the GVN or the VC sides but responsive to the latter because it fears the VC. The most important single factor appears to be whether or not the rural population will be willing to defend itself against the VC and to support GVN actions against the VC. In this sector there now seems to be less conviction and resolution, and a more widespread inclination to avoid the problems of opposing the VC, and to play both sides in hopes of somehow getting on peacefully and without personal commitment.

...What is needed in this regard and very soon are a series of GVN successes in the military sphere which would go toward implanting and nourishing a popular attitude that the GVN has the means of bringing security and a sense of ease to the rural population and is clearly determined to do so on an ever broadening front throughout the countryside. Only within some such atmosphere of hopefulness can

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the will and resolve to oppose the VC be strengthened, and it must be if this war is to be won. 47/

Mr. Kirkpatrick's comment was based upon his recent trip to South Vietnam:

I agree with the above but must note that even armed with your pessimistic comments following your last visit, I have been shocked by the number of our (CIA) people and of the military, even those whose jobs is always to say we are winning, who feel that the tide is against us. Admittedly, this is based on a limited number of discussions here and in Danang in three days. There are ominous indications that the VC are able to mount larger operations than in the past using bigger arms, including antiaircraft. Vietnamese government reactions are still slow, defensive and reminiscent of French tactics here a decade ago. There are still really no fundamental internal security measures of any effectiveness such as identity cards, block wardens, travel controls, etc....It is evident that a major factor in VC victories is their superior intelligence based on nationwide penetrations and intimidations at all levels....Finally, with the Laos and Cambodia borders opened, this entire pacification effort is like trying to mop the floor before turning off the faucet. 48/

Two days later the Secretary received an advance copy of SNIE 50-64, "Short-term Prospects in Southeast Asia." Its leading conclusion was:

- (a) That the situation in South Vietnam is very serious and prospects uncertain. Even with U.S. assistance as it is now, we believe that, unless there is a marked improvement in the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese government and armed forces, South Vietnam has, at best, an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months. 49/

In further explanation of this judgment, it was stated that the situation had been serious for a long time and in recent months it had deteriorated further. The VC had exploited dislocations caused by the November coup and then more recently by the January coup. Just as Minh's reorganization was beginning to be established, Khanh's coup upset everything, and Khanh's regime was not yet assessable. Meanwhile, the VC had improved in their organization and armament, were increasingly aggressive and acting in larger units.

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7. Two General Alternative Directions of Policy

Thus as winter drew to an end in February-March 1964, it was recognized, as it had never been fully recognized before, that the situation in Vietnam was deteriorating so rapidly that the dimensions and kinds of effort so far invested could not hope to reverse the trend. This was indeed a turning point. The proposals for neutralization that had been loosely suggested in late fall and early winter having been rejected, the issue to be resolved was what kinds of new efforts, and what new dimensions of U.S. effort, would be decided upon. One direction of effort which might have been chosen had, as its most articulate advocate, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Roger Hilsman. This was the policy line that, for better or for worse, was largely rejected. Mainly because of this policy disagreement, Mr. Hilsman left his post at almost the time it became evident that his views were conclusively overruled. At the time of his departure he wrote two memos to the Secretary of State (dated 14 March 1964); one on the Southeast Asia problem generally, one on South Vietnam. The latter of the two affords not only a good summary of his views on the subject, but also a statement of the policy alternatives that were, in significant measure, rejected. (The rejection was of course by no means total. It was a matter of degree and a question of where emphasis should lie among some programs that were not in dispute generically. But the matter of degree and emphasis was in dispute, and it was sufficient not only to induce Hilsman to resign but to alter drastically the course of U.S. involvement.) Hilsman wrote:

In my judgment, the strategic concept that was developed for South Vietnam remains basically sound. If we can ever manage to have it implemented with vigor, the result will be victory.

The concept is based on the assumption that villages in Southeast Asia are turned inward on themselves and have little or no sense of identification with either the national government or Communist ideology - that the villagers are isolated physically, politically, and psychologically. In such circumstances it is not difficult to develop a guerrilla movement...

A corollary...is that the villagers' greatest desire is security and that if the villagers are given security, some simple progress towards a better life, and -- most important of all -- a sense that the government cares about them and their future, they will respond with loyalty...

On the basis of...[this] assumption, the

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strategic concept calls for primary emphasis on giving security to the villagers. The tactics are the so-called oil-blot approach, starting with a secure area and extending it slowly, making sure no Viet Cong pockets are left behind, and using police units to winkle out [sic] the Viet Cong agents in each particular village. This calls for the use of military forces in a different way from that of orthodox, conventional war. Rather than chasing Viet Cong, the military must put primary emphasis on clear-and-hold operations and on rapid reinforcement of villages under attack. It is also important, of course, to keep the Viet Cong regular units off balance by conventional offensive operations, but these should be secondary to the major task of extending security...

At the heart of this strategic concept are two basic principles:

The first is that of the oil blot. In the past the GVN sought to blanket the whole country with so-called strategic hamlets...The result was to blanket the Delta with little Dienbienphus-- indefensible, inadequately armed hamlets far from reinforcements...In effect these were storage places of arms for the Viet Cong which could be seized at any time. After November first, the military began to demobilize some of these vulnerable villages...and a race developed between the government and the Viet Cong. The race may have ended in a tie, but...the Viet Cong now have much better weapons and greater stocks of ammunition than they ever had before.

The second basic principle is that the way to fight a guerrilla is to adopt the tactics of a guerrilla...In spite of all our pressures, this has never been done in Vietnam. Instead, the emphasis has been on large operations...

As to the question of operations against North Vietnam, I would suggest that such operations may at a certain stage be a useful supplement to an effective counterinsurgency program, but...not be an effective substitute...

My own preference would be to continue the covert, or at least deniable operations...Then,

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after we had made sufficient progress in the Delta so that all concerned began to realize that the Viet Cong were losing the support of the population, and that their ability to continue the war depended solely on North Vietnamese support, I think we should indicate as much privately to the North Vietnamese and follow this by selected attacks on their infiltration bases and training camps.

In my judgment, significant action against North Vietnam that is taken before we have demonstrated success in our counterinsurgency program will be interpreted by the Communists as an act of desperation, and will, therefore, not be effective in persuading the North Vietnamese to cease and desist. What is worse, I think that premature action will so alarm our friends and allies and a significant segment of domestic opinion that the pressures for neutralization will become formidable.

In sum, I believe that we can win in Vietnam with a number of provisos.

The first proviso is that we do not over-militarize the war--that we concentrate not on killing Viet Cong...but on an effective program for extending the areas of security gradually, systematically, and thoroughly...

My second proviso is that there be political stability in Saigon... 50/

Some of the Hilsman recommendations were to be adopted, none rejected out-of-hand. The so-called oil blot principle had many adherents, and was in fact already coming into vogue. Over the ensuing months, the phrase was much honored, though the execution may have faltered. No one disputed the principle that the hamlets needed security above all else, nor that everything depended on a stable government in Saigon. Nevertheless, emphasis shifted toward greater emphasis on military operations, perhaps for the pressing reason that the VC were out now in increasing numbers, with more and better weapons, seeming to invite, if not to require, conventional military operations if the VC threatening the hamlets were to be destroyed or reduced to powerlessness. And, above all, the more elusive the VC were, the stronger they grew, and the more unstable and unpopular the GVN became, the more tempting the idea of attacking the north seemed to be.

Much more influential than these Hilsman views were those of the JCS, especially as set forth in the memorandum of 18 February 1964 to the SecDef from the CJCS:

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1. Reference is made to the memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dated 22 January 1964... It sets forth a number of actions which the United States should be prepared to take in order to ensure victory...the Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the situation in South Vietnam with the view of determining additional actions which can be recommended for implementation immediately.

2. The Government of Vietnam has developed, with the close collaboration of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, a new National Pacification Plan which provides for the orderly pacification of the insurgency in accordance with a realistic phasing schedule...and it provides for consolidation of secure areas and expansion of them (the 'spreading oil drop'). U.S. military assets in Vietnam will fully support this plan. What is now required is implementation of additional actions which will insure an integrated political, socio-economic, and psychological offensive to support more fully the military effort. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the Country Team be directed to implement the following actions at the earliest practicable time:

a. Induce the GVN (General Khanh) military to accept U.S. advisors at all levels considered necessary by COMUSMACV. (This is particularly applicable in the critical provinces)...

b. Intensify the use of herbicides for crop destruction against identified Viet Cong areas as recommended by the GVN.

c. Improve border control measures...

d. Direct the U.S. civilian agencies involved in Vietnam to assist the GVN in producing a civilian counterpart package plan to the GVN National Pacification Plan...

e. Provide U.S. civilian advisors to all necessary echelons and GVN agencies...

f. Encourage early and effective action to implement a realistic land reform program.

g. Support the GVN in a policy of tax forgiveness for low income population in areas

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where the GVN determines that a critical state of insurgency exists...

h. Assist the GVN in developing a National Psychological Operations Plan...to establish the GVN and Khanh's 'images,' create a 'cause' which can serve as a rallying point for the youth/students of Vietnam, and develop the long term national objectives of a free Vietnam.

i. Intensify efforts to gain support of U.S. news media representatives in Washington...

j. Arrange U.S. sponsored trips to Vietnam by groups of prominent journalists and editors.

k. Inform all GVN military and civilian officials...that the United States (a) considers it imperative that the present government be stabilized, (b) would oppose another coup, and (c) that the United States is prepared to offer all possible assistance in forming a stable government ...all U.S. intelligence agencies and advisors must be alert to and report cases of dissension and plotting in order to prevent such actions.

3. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize that the implementation of the foregoing measures will not be sufficient to exercise a decisive effect on the campaign against the Viet Cong. They are continuing study of the actions suggested in the memorandum of 22 January 1964, as well as other proposals...Among the subjects to be studied as a matter of urgency are the following:

a. Intensified operations against North Vietnam to include air bombings of selected targets.

b. Removal of restrictions for air and ground cross-border operations.

c. Intelligence and reporting.

d. U.S. organizational changes

e. Increased U.S. Navy participation in shore and river patrol activities.

f. Introduction of jet aircraft into the Vietnamese Air Force and the U.S. Air Commando unit...51/

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Except for 2f, 2g, 2i, 2j, and the escalatory military actions of paragraph 3 that had been suggested previously by the JCS, this memorandum outlined much of the program that was to be adopted by the SecDef in March after his trip to Saigon, and approved by the President thereafter as NSAM 288.

8. The Fact Finding Mission and NSAM 288

Before the Secretary left for Vietnam, trip books were prepared for his use and the use of others in his official party. In this trip was an appraisal of the Vietnam situation, dated 3 March 1964, prepared especially for this occasion by the normally optimistic SACSAs. It began with this summary:

The RVN faces the most critical situation in its nearly 10 years of existence. This situation is the result of political erosion, culminating in two changes of government within three months and in a nationwide revamping of civil administrators, and of the continued growth of a well-organized, dedicated Communist insurgency movement. 52/

This was followed by a political discussion wherein there was mention of the chronic shortage of competent administrators. The government was credited with superior material resources, but, "unless it is able to demonstrate the willpower and political skill to bring this potential to bear, the political and security situation will continue to deteriorate." It was considered hopeful that Khanh seemed determined to provide dynamic leadership, but it was observed that he would have to overcome "widespread public and official apathy, lack of confidence, low morale, and factionalism among key personnel."

Khanh's efforts and attributes were catalogued approvingly, but this only lead to a concluding paragraph as follows:

Encouraging as Khanh's performance has been to date, he has not been able to counteract the overall trend of events in South Vietnam. In many of the most critical provinces, pacification programs remain at a virtual standstill and there is an evident lack of urgency and clear direction. 53/

This was followed by a section entitled "Military and Security Situation." This section contained an interesting judgment, which represented a reversal by SACSAs of opinions expressed six months or more before concerning the time when the situation had begun to deteriorate.

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By the final quarter of 1963, the conclusion was inescapable that despite the considerable improvement in the offensive capabilities of the RVN's counter-insurgency forces, the VC likewise had improved their own capabilities. It became apparent that a gradual erosion of the government's position throughout the country had been underway since at least August 1963. This erosion became progressively worse after the November coup, although late in January 1964, the Minh government exhibited some signs of assuming the initiative. This initiative dissolved with the Khanh coup on 30 January. Organizational dislocations brought about by coups have weakened the national direction of most of the counter-insurgency programs underway throughout the country. The large number of personnel changes, both locally and nationally, have played a crucial role in the indecision and lack of energetic direction of the government's programs.

Despite General Khanh's expressed determination to prosecute the war vigorously, available statistics since his coup reflect a gradual decline in small-scale ARVN operations. In addition, Communist forces continue to enjoy the initiative and to execute disruptive operations at times and places of their own choosing...

All available evidence points to a steady improvement in the VC's military posture, both quantitatively and qualitatively, throughout 1963 and the first two months of 1964...[Emphasis supplied.] 54/

In advising the Embassy in Saigon of the intended visit of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor in March, a Joint State/Defense message outlined the issues that it was hoped would be taken up during the visit. Five major subject areas were named, each of which was divided into parts. Objectives were described, in general, as "to produce best possible evaluation of situation, assist you in measures to improve it, and help Washington make future policy decisions." 55/

The first subject area was a Review of Situation, in three parts: political, economic, and military. It was suggested that the political review should be in executive session limited to the three principals (McNamara, Lodge and Taylor) and the DCM, Harkins, Brent, de Silva, and

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perhaps Zorthian. The subjects of prime interest were how Khanh was taking hold, and the dangers of further coups. Next in importance were the effectiveness of the civil administration and the morale of major religious and political groups, and measures to strengthen and buttress the Khanh regime. On the economic side, the Secretary hoped to get a full review of the economy, the budget, price and supply trends, AID operations, and, finally, the possibility of land reform and tax forgiveness. On the military side, it was suggested they begin with the broad picture, and later proceed to selected critical provinces and specific provincial plans.

The main interest, with respect to intelligence and reporting, was to review Country Team recommendations concerning periodic assessments and joint reporting requirements. After this the interest centered on intelligence concerning the VC --specifically the extent of their control and activities in the provinces, intentions and tactics, and indicators thereof. Then, clearly in anticipation of possible requirement for public relations materials for use in U.S.:

4. Handling of intelligence bearing on control and direction of Viet Cong from North Vietnam including infiltration of personnel and weapons and operation of communications net. One of our basic projects here is preparing strongest possible material on this subject for use as appropriate to support stronger measures. We need to be sure your intelligence effort is geared to furnish such information promptly in usable form.

5. Review of draft (which we will supply) of control and support of VC by North Vietnam. 56/

Concerning current operational problems, the items foreseen to be of interest were policy on possible evacuation of dependents, review of GVN national and provincial plans, rural rehabilitation plans, adequacy and deployment of ARVN, status and problems of paramilitary forces, current status and possible expansion of the U.S. Special Forces' role in connection with Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG), status of plans to reduce or reorganize U.S. forces as GVN became capable of performing functions currently performed by U.S., review of political and psywar progress, and of military tactics against VC, and "possible modification of existing operation [al] restrictions."

The special third country problems of French activities in RVN, and of Cambodia and Laos, would be dealt with in executive session.

The last item listed for special consideration was to review Operations Plan 34A-64, for feasibility, adequacy, and possible expan-

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sion, with special consideration to advantages derivable "from making it an overt Vietnamese program with participation by U.S. as required to obtain adequate results." 57/

The language and the tone of this message suggest that, however pessimistic may have been the appraisals of the situation, there was no disposition to recognize any doubt that the struggle could be won or that we would undertake whatever measures were necessary to win it. Previously unprecedented escalatory measures of a military nature were beginning to be studied tentatively as a response to the bad news that kept coming. Most of these were to be rejected, for the time being, except for moves to convey to NVN that an exchange of air blows between NVN and SVN was a possibility. This, it was hoped, might exploit NVN fears that if they persisted aiding the VC they faced the loss of their industrial establishment. The inferential significance of our considerations at this time seems to have been that we were already committed, by the momentum of our past actions, to a course which forbade turning back, however reluctant we might be about taking any forward step.

A schedule for the trip was set up extending from the planned arrival on 8 March 1964 through 12 March. In the course of five days of briefings, conferences, and field trips, most of the details of a program, to implement policies already evidently largely agreed upon, were decided upon in the light of views and information elicited from our own and GVN officials. In the final meeting with General Khanh and his GVN associates, most of the programs for Vietnam which were later to be recommended to the President by Secretary McNamara were discussed. The exchange of views at that time was made a matter of record by a memcon, a summary of which was transmitted the next day by Ambassador Lodge.

General Khanh...proposed National Service Act for SVN. Khanh said his government prepared embark upon program to mobilize all human and material resources to fight VC. As envisaged by General Khanh proposed National Service Act would have two major components: military service and civil defense...

Military service comprised of: RVNAF... (actual strength: 227,000; planned: 251,683); Civil Guard (actual: 90,032; planned: 119,636). SDC & Hamlet Militia...(actual: 257,960; planned: 422,874). Civil Defense comprised of Civil Service Corps, Cadre Corps, National Youth, and Political-Administration Corps...

Civil Defense component included Civil Administration Corps for work in countryside. Khanh emphasized that in civil defense sector all civilians would be included...this segment also included civic action teams for hamlets and villages.

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Khanh emphasized figures were planning figures only and designed give idea of number of military and civilians required and indicate financial implications of plan...

McNamara stated that U.S....would wish to study strength figures carefully; however, his first impression was that figure of 422,874 SDC and Hamlet Militia appeared unduly large and would be difficult to support. Khanh responded that in actual practice total numbers may not reach this level. In fact, number may not exceed 300,000 SDC and Hamlet Militia actually deployed against VC...

Thieu stated that all men from age 18 through 40 would be required to participate in national pacification effort. Most of them... would serve in same positions they now occupy. Others, such as National Youth Group up to age 40, would be required serve in city and country-side and would be organized into small groups to assist ARVN and Civil Guard. Category of Political-Administration Corps would consist of cadres planned for assignment to villages and hamlets. General Thieu estimated that 125,000 such cadre would be required...McNamara stated that general approach appeared excellent but he questioned whether GVN would need 125,000 cadre...This number added to total figures for Civil Guard, SDC and Hamlet Militia, constituted an extremely large figure...population appeared disproportionate...desirable to look most closely at planning figures.

Khanh replied that he intended make maximum effort in first instance in 8 critical provinces surrounding Saigon...However, a National Service Act would have a very good effect in Saigon and the other urban areas.

McNamara inquired whether upon his return to Washington he could tell President Johnson that General Khanh's government was prepared embark on a program of national mobilization of human and material resources and whether President Johnson in turn could inform the American people...Khanh replied in the affirmative...McNamara indicated that he viewed concept favorably and ...Ambassador stated that he

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avored general concept but thought that detailed figures should be looked into carefully. Ambassador also believed that emphasis should be placed first on 8 critical provinces surrounding Saigon...

General Harkins noted that a mobilization law was in fact in existence but that few people knew about it. He pointed out that ARVN, CG and SDC were not up to their authorized military strengths. Khanh said that he realized this but believed it still desirable to have a new law setting forth a national service or mobilization program. Harkins stated that MACV and other elements of U.S. Mission would like to work closely with Khanh...in developing such a law. Khanh replied this well understood. McNamara said it was agreed on American side that general concept was a wise one and that we should proceed on this basis.

Khanh then inquired whether it was desirable to raise CG to same relative status as ARVN as regards salary, pensions, survivors benefits, etc. He estimated that total cost would be in neighborhood of one billion piasters. McNamara thought this was highly desirable...

McNamara inquired how long...it would take to recruit and train administrative cadre for 8 critical provinces near Saigon. Khanh estimated approximately one month, in any event he believed cadres could be in place by end of April. Khanh said GVN would aim for volunteers for this effort and it was not necessary to await promulgation of National Service Act.

In response Taylor's question as to how long Khanh anticipated it would take to draft and promulgate National Service Law, Khanh observed that...law could be ready for his signature in very short time. Taylor pointed to necessity give due regard to democratic forms in developing and announcing a National Service Act. Khanh agreed and said that at same time a major effort was being made to pacify the countryside. He intended push for concurrent development of democratic institutions and forms. McNamara suggested that when Khanh ready announce a National Service Act that he also re-emphasize related actions...such as those for expansion of national

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economy, for increased educational opportunities in hamlets, for increased production of rice, for marketing of fish, and so forth. McNamara believed a well publicized announcement of this nature would find ready response among people and would materially assist Khanh to obtain and hold support of Vietnamese people.... 58/

9. NSAM 288

The program formulated in March 1964 in connection with the trip to Vietnam was reported orally to the President by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on their return, then presented formally to the President and the NSC by memorandum to the President dated 16 March. It was finally approved as NSAM 288 dated 17 March 1964. As such NSC documents go, NSAM 288 was comprehensive and programmatic. It reviewed U.S. objectives, appraised the situation, discussed various alternative courses of action, and finally recommended a rather detailed program intended to serve the defined objectives and to meet the situation as it had been described. It consisted of seven parts. The first was a discussion and definition of objectives, the second a description of U.S. policy, the third an appraisal of the present situation, the fourth a discussion of alternative courses of action, the fifth a consideration of possible actions, the sixth a mention of other actions considered but rejected, and seventh and last, a statement of specific recommendations.

NSAM 288, being based on the official recognition that the situation in Vietnam was considerably worse than had been realized at the time of the adoption of NSAM 273, outlined a program that called for considerable enlargement of U.S. effort. It involved an assumption by the United States of a greater part of the task, and an increased involvement by the United States in the internal affairs of South Vietnam, and for these reasons it carried with it an enlarged commitment of U.S. prestige to the success of our effort in that area.

In tacit acknowledgement that this greater commitment of prestige called for an enlargement of stated objectives, NSAM 288 did indeed enlarge these objectives. Whereas, in NSAM 273 the objectives were expressly limited to helping the government of South Vietnam win its contest against an externally directed Communist conspiracy, NSAM 288 escalated the objectives into a defense of all of Southeast Asia and the West Pacific and redefined American foreign policy and American security generally. In NSAM 273 the statement of objectives was comparatively simple and limited:

It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and the government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed

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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. 59/

In contrast to this, the statement of "U.S. Objectives in South Vietnam" in NSAM 288 was considerably more extensive and more central to U.S. security interests:

We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam. We do not require that it serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western alliance. South Vietnam must be free, however, to accept outside assistance as required to maintain its security. This assistance should be able to take the form not only of economic and social measures but also police and military help to root out and control insurgent elements.

Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance (all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), accommodate to Communism so as to remove effective U.S. and anti-Communist influence (Burma), or fall under the domination of forces not now explicitly Communist but likely then to become so (Indonesia taking over Malaysia). Thailand might hold for a period without help, but would be under grave pressure. Even the Philippines would become shaky, and the threat to India on the West, Australia and New Zealand to the South, and Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to the North and East would be greatly increased.

All of these consequences would probably have been true even if the U.S. had not since 1954, and especially since 1961, become so heavily engaged in South Vietnam. However, that fact accentuates the impact of a Communist South Vietnam not only in Asia but in the rest of the world, where the South Vietnam conflict is regarded as a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation to meet the Communist "war of liberation."

Thus, purely in terms of foreign policy, the stakes are high... 60/

The argument in the next to last paragraph of NSAM 288 that "all these consequences would probably have been true even if the U.S. had not since 1954, and especially since 1961, become so heavily engaged in SVN" is clearly debatable. But the logic that the increasing U.S.

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involvement led to increasing commitment of U.S. prestige is probably beyond argument. And it is probably also true that, in the extent to which we defined the issues simply and centrally as a symbolic confrontation with Communism, wherein far more is at stake than the immediate battlefield (in South Vietnam) on which we fought -- and acted upon this definition and proclaimed it as the issue -- we tended more and more to endow the issue with that significance whether or not it had in fact been the issue in the first place. And this point, if closely examined, might logically have raised the question of whether it is absolutely necessary to accept any challenge put to us, and if so what advantage this confers upon our enemies in granting them the choice of issue and of battleground. Finally, a struggle so defined came close to calling for war a outrance -- not the centrally political war, with severe restriction upon violent means, following counter-guerrilla warfare theory.

Despite the encompassing nature of the definition of objectives, and although NSAM 288 proposed a marked increase in U.S. involvement, our implementing programs remained comparatively limited as if we did not fully believe these strong words. We even expressed agreement with the older idea of helping the Vietnamese help themselves.

We are now trying to help South Vietnam defeat the Viet Cong, supported from the North, by means short of the unqualified use of U.S. combat forces. We are not acting against North Vietnam except by a modest "covert" program operated by South Vietnamese (and a few Chinese Nationalists) -- a program so limited that it is unlikely to have any significant effect...61/

There was a further statement of this older policy theme:

There were and are some sound reasons for the limits imposed by the present policy -- the South Vietnamese must win their own fight; U. S. intervention on a larger scale, and/or GVN actions against the North, would disturb key allies and other nations; etc. In any case, it is vital that we continue to take every reasonable measure to assure success in South Vietnam. The policy choice is not an "either/or" between this course of action and possible pressures against the North; the former is essential and without regard to our decision with respect to the latter. The latter can, at best, only reinforce the former. 62/

At the end of this section, which described measures that we would take to assist the Khanh government in administering internal programs, there was a final admonition:

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Many of the actions described in the succeeding paragraphs fit right into the framework of the /Pacification/ plan as announced by Khanh. Wherever possible, we should tie our urgings of such actions to Khanh's own formulation of them, so that he will be carrying out a Vietnamese plan and not one imposed by the United States. /Emphasis supplied/ 63/

The discussion of the situation in Vietnam began with the statement that the military tools and concepts that had been adopted were sound and adequate. But much needed to be done in terms of a more effective employment both of military forces and of the economic and civic action means already available. This improved effort might require some selective increases in the U.S. presence. These increases were not considered to be necessarily major in nature and not in contradiction to "the U.S. policy of reducing existing military personnel where South Vietnamese are in a position to assume the functions..."

No major reductions of U.S. personnel in the near future were expected, but it continued to be the basic policy that there would be gradual U.S. withdrawal from participation. This was considered to be sound because of its effect "in portraying to the U.S. and the world that we continue to regard the war as a conflict the South Vietnamese must win and take ultimate responsibility for." And along this line there was the continued hope that "substantial reductions in the numbers of U.S. military training personnel should be possible before the end of 1965. (The language here suggested a beginning retreat from NSAM 273).

It was conceded, however, that "the situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September..." Forty percent of the territory was then under the Viet Cong control or predominant influence, and twenty-two of the forty-three provinces were controlled fifty percent or more by the Viet Cong. Other indications of the continuing deterioration were that large groups of the population displayed signs of apathy and indifference, while frustration was evident within the U.S. contingent. Desertion rates within the ARVN and the Vietnamese paramilitary were particularly high and increasing -- especially in the latter. Draft-dodging was high; but the Viet Cong were recruiting energetically and effectively. The morale of the hamlet militia and of the SDC, upon which the security of the hamlets depended, was poor and falling. The position of the government within the provinces was weakening.

The machinery of political control extending from Saigon down to the hamlets had virtually disappeared following the November coup. Of forty-one incumbent province chiefs on November 1, thirty-five had been replaced. Nine provinces had had three province chiefs in three months, and one province had had four. Lesser officials had been re-

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placed by the score. Almost all major military commands had changed hands twice since the November coup and the faith of the peasants had been shaken by disruptions in experienced leadership and loss of physical security.

There was an increase in North Vietnamese support, and communication between Hanoi and the Viet Cong had increased. CHICOM 75 millimeter recoilless rifles and heavy machine guns were increasingly in evidence among the Viet Cong.

The greatest source of weakness in the present situation was the uncertain viability of the Khanh government. The greatest need, therefore, was to do the things that would enhance the stability of that government, and at the same time provide the advice and assistance that was necessary to increase its capabilities to deal with the problems confronting it.

Among the alternatives considered, but rejected for the time being (along with complete adoption of the Hilsman formulations), were overt military pressure on North Vietnam, neutralization, return of U. S. dependents, furnishing of a U.S. combat unit to secure the Saigon area, and a full takeover of the command in South Vietnam by the U.S. With respect to this last proposal, it was said that

...the judgement of all senior people in Saigon, with which we concur, was that the possible military advantages of such action would be far outweighed by adverse psychological impact. 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. 64/

The areas of action that were favored and that formed the basis of the specific recommendations to which the paper led, fell under two major and two minor headings. The two major headings were, (1) civil and military mobilization and (2) improvement of military forces. The two minor headings were (1) additional military equipment for the GVN and (2) economic actions.

The first point under civil and military mobilization was to put the whole country on a war footing. The purpose was to maintain and strengthen the armed forces, to assist other national efforts, and to remedy the recognized inequities and under-utilization of current manpower policies. Specifically, there was proposed a new national mobilization plan including a national service law, which was to be developed on an urgent basis by the Country Team in collaboration with the Khanh Government. To this end the third of the several recommendations at the conclusion of the report called

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for the U.S. to "support a program of national mobilization (including a national service law) to put South Vietnam on a war footing."

A second measure under this heading was to strengthen the armed forces, both regular and paramilitary by at least 50,000 men. Of these, about 15,000 would be required to fill the regular armed forces (ARVN) to their current authorized strength, 5,000 would be needed to fill the existing paramilitary forces to their authorized strengths, and the remaining 30,000 would be to increase the strength of the paramilitary forces. To this end it was specifically recommended that the U. S. "assist the Vietnamese to increase the armed forces (regular plus paramilitary) by at least 50,000 men."

The third measure of mobilization was to assist in an increase of the civil administrative corps of Vietnam by an additional 7,500 in 1964, with the ultimate target of at least 40,000 men for service in 8,000 hamlets and 2,500 villages, and in 3 provincial centers. It was specified that in accomplishing this the United States should work with the GVN to devise necessary recruiting plans, training facilities, financing methods and organizational arrangements, and should furnish training personnel at once under the auspices of the AID mission. The specific recommendation was "to assist the Vietnamese to create a greatly enlarged civil administrative corps for work at province, district and hamlet levels."

The improvement of SVN military forces was to be accomplished not only by the increase in numbers specified above, but also by internal reforms and organizational improvements. What remained of the current hamlet militia and related forces of part-time nature for hamlet defense should be consolidated with the self-defense corps into a single force which would be compensated by the national government. The pay and collateral benefits of the paramilitary groups should be substantially improved. Strength of the forces should be maintained and expanded by effectively enforced conscription measures and by more centrally directed recruitment policies. It was recommended that U.S. personnel should be assigned to the training of the paramilitary forces. The National Police required further special consideration. An offensive guerrilla force should be created to operate along the border and in areas where VC control was dominant. These measures were included in specific recommendations to "assist the Vietnamese to improve and reorganize the paramilitary forces and to increase their compensation" and "to assist the Vietnamese to create an offensive guerrilla force."

Under the last two headings there were recommendations to provide the Vietnamese Air Force with 25 A-1H aircraft in exchange for their T-28s and to provide the Vietnamese Army additional M-113 APCs (withdrawing the M-114s there) and also to provide additional river boats and approximately 5 to 10 million dollars worth of related additional materiel. A

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fertilizer program to increase the production of rice in areas safely controlled by the government was to be expanded and announced very soon.

Although VC successes in rural areas had been the prime feature of the downswing over the past half year or more, pacification was to receive less comparative emphasis, in fact, in the next year or so than it had before. Nevertheless, Khanh's statement of a pacification strategy -- which was later to form a conceptual basis for the ill-fated Hop Tac program -- was approved in principle, and a critique of it was accorded a place as Annex B of NSAM 288.

In simplified outline, the plan was based on a "clear and hold" concept, including for each area these steps:

1. Clearing organized VC units from the area by military action;
2. Establishing permanent security for the area by the Civil Guard, Self Defense Corps, hamlet militia, and national police;
3. Rooting out the VC "infrastructure" in the hamlets (particularly the VC tax collector and the chief of the VC political cadre);
4. Providing the elements of economic and social progress for the people of the area: schools, health services, water supply, agricultural improvements, etc.

These general ideas were to be (1) adapted and applied flexibly... (2) applied under the clear, undivided and decentralized control of the province chief; and (3) applied in a gradually spreading area moving from secure to less secure areas and from more populated to less populated areas (the "oil drop" principle)...

The major requirements for success of the Pacification Plan were:

First, and of by far the greatest importance, clear, strong, and continuous political leadership...

General Khanh and his top colleagues were to supply this requirement. Their ability to do so was as yet untested, but some early evidence was good...

A second major requirement for success of the Pacification Plan was the adoption of government policies which would give greater promise of economic progress and greater incentives to rural people. The three key areas were:

- the price of rice to farmers, which was artificially depressed and held substantially below the world market price;
- uncertain or oppressive tenure conditions for many farmers (a

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land reform program was half completed some years ago); the VC had been exploiting the situation very effectively;

- oppressive marketing conditions for fisherman (fisheries accounted for 25 per cent of the rural product of SVN).

General Khanh's initial statement about the land reform problem was not very encouraging; Mr. Oanh was not even aware of the rice problem until a conversation with U.S. visitors on March 10th.

A third major requirement for success of the Pacification Plan was to improve greatly the leadership, pay, training, and numbers of some of the kinds of personnel needed, notably:

- pay and allowances for Civil Guards and S.D.C...
- recruitment and training for more civilian technicians...also increased pay and supporting costs for them; and recruitment and training of a new kind of rural worker--"hamlet action teams"--to move into newly cleared hamlets and start improvement programs...

The real problems were managerial: to develop concepts, training schools, action programs, and above all, leadership at the provincial level and below.

Other requirements for success of the Pacification Plan included: improvement in the leadership and attitudes of the ARVN particularly at levels which came into contact with villagers; greatly increased military civic action programs by the ARVN; much more flexibility and decentralization of authority in the administration of GVN civilian agencies; and a far clearer and more consistent pattern of rewarding excellence and penalizing poor performance in the management of both military and civilian agencies of the GVN.

Finally, there was one prominent recommendation (it was in fact the second of twelve): that the U.S. "make it clear that we fully support the Khanh government and are opposed to any further coups." This reflected our deep concern over the political instability and our dismay at having been surprised by the Khanh coup at the end of January.

An immediate measure to provide this kind of support to Khanh was the issuance on the following day (17 March) of a White House release which gave Presidential public blessing to the Khanh regime, saying in part that, to meet the difficulties and setbacks that had arisen since last October, "General Khanh and his government are acting vigorously and effectively.../having/ produced a sound central plan for the prosecution of the war, recognizing to a far greater

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degree than before the crucial role of economic and social, as well as military action..." 65/

This statement helped to solidify the Khanh regime by giving it explicit assurance of continuing U.S. support. It did not fully take care of our dismay over the surprise that the Khanh coup had been, and our fear that such a coup might be repeated. In addition to making it clear that we fully supported the incumbent regime, therefore, it seemed necessary that we should discourage attempted coups, or, getting wind of them, head them off before they passed the point of no return. On 18 March, W. H. Sullivan of State sent out a message to Saigon as follows:

Point 2...[of NSAM 288] stipulated that U.S. government agencies should make clear our full support for Khanh government and our opposition to any further coups. While it is recognized that our chances of detecting coup plotting are far from fool-proof...all elements [of] U.S. mission in Vietnam should be alerted against coup contingencies.

Mission should establish appropriate procedure which will assure that all rumors of coup plotting which come to attention [of] any U.S. government personnel in Vietnam will be brought to attention of Ambassador without delay. This is not, repeat not, a responsibility solely for intelligence elements [of the] U.S. mission. 66/

The program embodied in NSAM 288 was by no means judged adequate by all concerned. One major dissent had been registered by the JCS, who tended to view the problem primarily in its military dimensions, and who believed that the source of VC strength in the North must be neutralized. In a memorandum dated 14 March 1964, the CJCS had provided the Secretary of Defense with comments on the SecDef's draft memo to the President (NSAM 288). The general view of the JCS was that the program being recommended by the Secretary of Defense was inadequate militarily, and that much more aggressive policies, mainly against NVN, but also against the Cambodian sanctuaries of VC forces, were necessary.

a. The JCS do not believe that the recommended program in itself will be sufficient to turn the tide against the Viet Cong in SVN without positive action being taken against the Hanoi government at an early date. They have in mind the conduct of the kind of program designed to bring about cessation of DRV support for operations in SVN and Laos outlined in JCSM-174-64, subject "Vietnam," dated 2 March 1964.

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Such a program would not only deter the aggressive actions of the DRV but would be a source of encouragement to SVN which should significantly facilitate the counterinsurgency program in that country. To increase our readiness for such actions, the U.S. Government should establish at once the political and military bases in the U.S. and SVN for offensive actions against the North and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders, including measures for the control of contraband traffic on the Mekong.

b. In view of the current attitude of the Sihanouk Government in Cambodia, the JCS recommend authorizing now hot pursuit into that country...67/

As already noted, however, this sort of escalation had already been rejected for the time being. And in any event, there were both a new regime in Vietnam and an enlarged program of U.S. aid to support it, although not as enlarged militarily, as the JCS would wish. (That form of enlargement would not come until later.) But it was the first program since 1961 enlarged in explicit recognition that the programs preceding it had not succeeded, had indeed fallen far short of their goals. And in that sense at least it was the end of one period and the beginning of another.

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IV.C.1.

II. NSAM-288 - TONKIN GULF

1. General Character of the Period from NSAM-288 to Tonkin Gulf

In enunciating the policies of NSAM-288 we had rhetorically committed ourselves to do whatever was needed to achieve our stated objectives in South Vietnam. The program decided upon and spelled out in NSAM-288 reflected our recognition that the problem was greater than we had previously supposed and that the progress that we had previously thought we were making was more apparent than real. The program constituted a larger effort than we had undertaken before; it corresponded to our increased estimates of the magnitude of the task before us. Nevertheless, we might have chosen to do more along the lines of what we did decide to do, and above all we might have chosen to do some things that we specifically chose not to do at this time (although we began to plan for some of these on a contingency basis). If there were to be new or greater problems in the future it was because we did not correctly appraise the magnitude of the problem nor fully foresee the complexity of the difficulties we faced. There were indeed some who believed that the program we decided upon was not enough, notably the JCS who had gone on record that until aid to the VC from outside of South Vietnam was cut off, it would be impossible to eliminate the insurgency there. But the program as decided upon in 288 did correspond to the official consensus that this was a prescription suited to the illness as we diagnosed it.

There were many inhibitions that discouraged doing more than the bare necessity to get the job done. These inhibitions related to the image of the U.S. in world affairs, to possible risks of over-reaction from the Communist side, to internal American hesitations about our operations there, and finally to a philosophy concerning the basic social nature of what was happening in Vietnam and how wise it was for the U.S. to become very deeply involved. We had given serious thought to a program of pressures upon the North, largely covert and intended more to persuade than to compel. This was on the theory that the heart of the problem really lay not in South Vietnam but in North Vietnam. But these measures, although far from forgotten, were put on the shelf in the belief, or at least the hope, that they would not be needed.

The long year from March 1964 to April 1965 is divisible into three periods that correspond to major modifications or reformulations of policy. The first would be from March (NSAM-288) to the Tonkin Gulf affair in early August 1964, the second would be from August 1964 to February of 1965, and the third would be from February to April 1965.

From March to August 1965 we tried to make a go of it with the program approved in NSAM-288, in hope that that program would carry us toward our

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objectives by increasing the amount of aid and advice we gave to the South Vietnamese in order to enable them better to help themselves. But almost from the beginning there were signs that this program would not be enough. And as time passed it became more and more evident that something more would be needed. Soon we began to be turned from full concentration upon the NSAM-288 program by a major distraction--instability and inefficiency of the GVN. This was a distraction that from the first we had feared but had hoped against hope would not grow to major proportions.

A year before, in 1963, it had become more and more evident as time wore on that the unpopularity and inefficiencies of the Diem-Ngu regime destroyed the hope of permanent progress in the pacification program and the ultimate chance of success of the whole counter-insurgency effort. This time it was the increasing instability of the Khanh regime and the inefficiency of his government--the regime that had supplanted the regime that had supplanted Diem and Ngu. Now we feared the inability of the Khanh government to attract and hold the loyalties of the politically active groups within the cities, and we had no confidence in its competence to administer the pacification programs, and thereby win the support of the politically inert peasantry in the rural areas.

But we wanted no more coups. Although Khanh's coup had surprised us and even shaken our confidence somewhat, we quickly made him our boy, put the best possible face on the matter, and made it a prime element of U.S. policy to support Khanh and his colleagues, and discourage any further coups. Each coup that occurred, it seemed, greatly increased the possibility of yet another coup.

Through the first period from March until July, we concentrated upon making the NSAM-288 program work. In addition to the increases in U.S. aid and advice, we sought to strengthen Khanh by patching things up with Big Minh and mollifying the other Generals he had thrown out. We hoped he could somehow subdue the politically active Buddhists, the Catholic political activists, the Dai Viet, and the miscellaneous ambitious colonels and generals.

But execution of the 288 program began to fall behind the plans. The GVN administration of the program had troubles. There were troubles getting piastres--which the U.S. government in effect provided--from the central government to the provinces and districts where they were needed. Agreed pay increases and force increases in the GVN armed forces were only tardily and partially met. Civil servants needed to operate the program in the provinces and districts were not available, were not trained, or, if available and trained, were often not paid, or were insufficiently or tardily paid, or were not provided with necessary expenses. Funds for the provision of necessary goods in the provinces and districts were not met. Payments to peasants for relocation as a part of the pacification program were tardy or inadequate or not made at all. There seemed to be a business as usual.

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attitude in the central government, and the strength of the RVNAF declined. Viet Cong depredations continued and pacification efforts fell behind.

As we pressured Khanh to adopt reforms to remedy the deficiencies of the GVN administration of programs within South Vietnam, his frustrations over these difficulties and failures were increased. He had no taste for the long, unspectacular social reform and social rebuilding that were the tasks of pacification. He soon began to talk increasingly of a scapegoat--a march to the North. He wanted to get the struggle over with. This corresponded to the means that we had considered but had for the time being rejected--seeking escape from our own frustrations in South Vietnam by pressure on the North. We moved gradually in this direction, impelled almost inevitably to ultimate actions of this sort, but always reluctantly and always hesitant to commit ourselves to more than very minor moves, until suddenly and dramatically the Tonkin Gulf affair of early August provided an occasion to make a move of the sort we had long been anticipating but had until then always deferred. But during this period the debate over possible measures of this sort, and the instability of the Khanh government, increasingly distracted attention from programs focussed directly on the problems of pacification and of winning the loyalties of the Vietnamese for the GVN.

In the immediate aftermath of the Tonkin Gulf affair, Khanh, feeling his position strengthened, took ill advised measures to consolidate the gains that he believed had been made thereby, and quickly precipitated an overriding governmental crisis. Thereafter, the stability of the regime became the dominant factor in all considerations. Attention had to shift from pacification of the millions of rural Vietnamese, who made up the vast majority of the people, to the very few in Saigon, Hue and Danang who were struggling for power.

2. NSAM-288 Programs Mid-March to Mid-May 1964

Recommendation #3 of NSAM-288 was "to support a program for national mobilization (including a national service law) to put South Vietnam on a war footing." Responsibility for this was shared between ASD/ISA and AID.

A first step was taken on 20 March when the country team was asked to report on the status of GVN plans and also country team views concerning the adoption of a national service act. The points of greatest concern were what would be the main provisions of the act, and what would be the administrative machinery set up to implement it. The Country Team was also advised that economic mobilization measures should be deferred until after a joint U.S.-GVN survey had been completed. 68/

On 1 April Ambassador Lodge replied, with MACV concurrence, that Premier Khanh planned two categories of mobilization, one civil and one

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military. The Ambassador said that proposed decrees had been prepared and that if promulgated they would give the GVN adequate power. Details were not included, however, in the Ambassador's report. The Ambassador proposed, on a personal basis, that, if Washington approved, he would try to persuade Khanh to proceed with a mass media presentation of it. ^{69/} Washington agreement to the Embassy evaluation came three days later, although only the general concept had been explained. On that same day, 4 April 1964, Khanh publicly proclaimed a basic decree prescribing broad categories of national service. Its main terms were that all able-bodied males ages 20-45 were subject to national public service. This national public service was to consist of either (a) military service or (b) civil defense service.

This initial decree of 4 April 1964 amounted evidently to nothing more than a statement of intention by the Prime Minister. This was quite short of a law that would go into effect, be administered and thereby made to accomplish something.

On 10 April, the Embassy was informed by a telegram from State that Khanh's decrees had received little publicity in the United States, and the Embassy was asked for a text of the implementing decrees. Five days later on 15 April 1964, Ambassador Lodge reported in more detail on the basic terms of the national public service decree, to wit:

- (1) All able-bodied males 20-45 would be subject to national public service and females would be permitted to volunteer.
- (2) National public service would consist of either military service or civil defense service.
- (3) Civil defense service would be managed by the Ministry of Interior.
- (4) The duration of military service would be three years of RVNAF or four years in Regional Forces (Civil Guard) and Popular Forces (Civil Defense Corps and Hamlet Militia).
- (5) Call-up priority would be based on age and number of dependents.
- (6) Drafted personnel were to be paid by the force to which they were assigned.

This came closer to a law to be administered, but on 28 April Washington told the Embassy that the status of implementation of the recommendations was still not clear. Four days later, on 2 May, Ambassador Lodge reported that draft decrees were still not signed in fact, and that the final nature of the Civil Defense Decree was still in doubt. However, he reported agreement on the principle that the objectives of the National Mobilization Plan

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should give priority to: (1) bringing the armed forces to authorized strength, (2) improving their morale, (3) carrying out conscription more effectively, and (4) obtaining qualified civilian workers. 70/

Before he was able to make this report of 2 May, however, Ambassador Lodge had a showdown meeting with Khanh over the failure of the GVN to carry out many of the necessary actions called for by the NSAM-288 programs. On 30 April, accompanied by Westmoreland and Brent (USOM chief), Lodge met with Khanh, Oanh, Khien, and Thieu, to discuss the GVN failure to provide operating funds to provincial and lower local levels, and to correct manpower deficiencies.

Lodge opened the meeting with a prepared statement which he read in French. He said that direct observation by U.S. provincial advisors throughout Vietnam proved that nowhere was there an adequate effort to provide piastres to Corps, Division and sectors, to increase the pay of ARVN and paramilitary forces, to bring these troops to authorized strength, to recruit added forces, or to compensate incapacitated soldiers or families of those killed. In fact, he said, there were confirmed reports from Corps and Division headquarters of deceased soldiers being kept on the roles as the only means of compensating their families and preventing further deterioration of ARVN and paramilitary morale. There had been a steady decline in the strength of RVNAF since October 1963, notably including a decrease of 4,000 in March alone; and the current strength was almost 20,000 below the authorized figure agreed necessary by both governments. Likewise, the force level of SDC had decreased in the same period by almost 13,000, leaving that force 18,000 below its authorized strength. The Civil Guard was almost 5,000 below the required strength. The ARVN and CG desertion rate was double what it had been in February, and SDC desertion rate was up 40%. Only 55% of the conscription quotas were being met and volunteers were below the expected level.

Failure to provide funds was blamed as a major reason for these military manpower deficiencies. The shortage was so great that the current trend in effectives could not be reversed before August in any event. Lodge went on to say that USOM and MACV visits to the provinces also confirmed that failure to provide piastres to local headquarters also led to shortages of resources for pacification efforts. The result was that most of the McNamara program of reforms and improvements (of NSAM-288) was failing, not due to lag in support promised by the United States, but simply because the Saigon government did not provide piastre support for the joint pacification program agreed upon by the two governments. The war, Lodge concluded, was being lost for want of administrative initiative in printing and distributing the necessary local funds for the agreed programs. Lodge conceded that the government had made a forward step in announcing its intentions to decentralize procurement authority from the Director General of the Budget and Foreign Aid to the ministries, but further decentralization to provincial and district authorities was advisable.

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Khanh passed the buck to Oanh, who explained that the MRC had inherited enormously complicated bureaucratic procedures based on older French practices, with checks and counterchecks before actions could be effected, and that these practices were being reformed. New regulations were about to go into effect and it was hoped that they would improve the situation. 71/

Recommendation #5 of 288 had been "to assist the Vietnamese to create a greatly enlarged administrative corps." Effective action upon this recommendation was considered essential to effective progress in the pacification program, as is clearly implied by the following list of the lines of action that were to be strengthened by the enlarged administrative corps. These were:

1. Training and pay of new hamlet action cadres, of new village secretaries, of district chiefs and other district staff, of a new assistant for pacification for each Province Chief, and of hamlet school teachers, health workers, district agricultural workers, and rural information officers.
2. Special incentive pay for government workers in rural areas.
3. Selective pay raises for some civil servants.
4. Increasing enrollment in the National Institute of Administration (NIA) to full capacity (this was a training school for civil servants), including provision of short term in-service training by NIA.
5. Organization of a joint U.S.-GVN Committee on governmental reform to review, recommend, and install needed provisions in governmental procedures.
6. Expanding and training National Police especially for rural areas consistent with other recommendations to strengthen military and paramilitary forces. 72/

Along with this increase in Vietnamese administrative personnel there was to be an increase in U.S. advisory personnel to assist them. On 2 April the Mission advised Washington that a general agreement had been reached with the GVN and estimated that 12 additional USOM public administration personnel were needed. On the following day, however, the Ambassador expressed his reservations over the large increase in staff. On 30 April in an EXDIS to the President, Lodge said that Khanh was willing to accept U.S. administrators in pacified areas provided the U.S. felt willing to accept casualties. Lodge recommended a high level civil administrative advisor to Khanh himself; and on 4 May in an EXDIS to the Secretary of State he recommended four AID public administrative advisors, one to each of the four Corps areas, all to be directly under the Ambassador. 73/

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As of mid-May, however, while there were some accomplishments, on the whole there had been more discussion than action. Before the mid-May meeting for Secretary McNamara in Saigon the status of progress was summarized for him in the Mid-May Briefing Book as follows:

1. The initiation of a two-week training program for district chiefs had started and the first class had graduated.
2. Assignment had been made of one entire graduating class, 82 of them with three full years of training, to be district chiefs.
3. Training of 75 hamlet action cadres for use in the Pacification Plan had been initiated.
4. Assignment of 700 Saigon civil servants to the III Corps area had been completed (but two-thirds of them had returned by mid-May as either unfit or in excess of needs).
5. The long standing training programs for hamlet workers had continued.
6. A course to train 2500 new village secretaries had been initiated.
7. Assurance that all future graduates of NIA would be assigned to the countryside had been made.
8. There was a promise to undertake to double the output of graduates from the NIA.

No action had been taken, however, on other measures. The most salient inaction was the failure to set up the promised U.S.-GVN committee on government reform. Further, the GVN was not inclined to provide incentive pay to key rural workers.

At the time that Secretary McNamara and his party went to Saigon in the middle of May, the problem areas with respect to implementation of NSAM-288 recommendations were identified as follows:

1. Inadequate provision of piastres for proper utilization of already trained officials and technicians.
2. Possible inability of GVN to get the job done without direct U.S. participation.
3. Lack of information from the field on plans for aggressive implementation of all aspects of this recommendation. 74/

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Recommendations 4, 6, and 7 of NASM-288 concerned increases in GVN military forces and capabilities and were generally considered together:

4. To assist the Vietnamese to increase the armed forces (regular plus paramilitary) by at least 50,000 men.
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.

On 23 March 1964 a joint State-Defense-AID message asked the country team to refine (and elaborate) these concepts and recommend a program of implementing actions. The mission was authorized to initiate appropriate first steps without waiting for final agreement between the USG and the GVN. There followed, as already noted, the pertinent proclamations of early April, but they were only proclamations, nothing more. On 27 April General Harkins reported that GVN planning for reorganization of paramilitary forces and development of a concept for programs was still in process. General Phat, the Minister of Interior, was considering a merger of SDC and Combat Youth into a single organization (the Popular Forces) under the Ministry of Interior. The Civil Guard would go under the Army high command. Operational control of Popular Forces would be vested in sector and sub-sector commanders at province and district levels. At village levels, Popular Forces would encompass the total local security force and would include both full-time and part-time personnel. Details of compensation and the logistic mechanism were not clear. Harkins judged that the concept was consistent with the Pacification Plan, but the total anticipated strength of Popular Forces could not be projected until more detailed planning had been accomplished. Detailed negotiations with the GVN were continuing and a further report was to be made on 10 May. 75/

Two days later, on 29 April 1964, the JCS commented on the slowness of the GVN in implementing recommendations for 6 and 7 and pointed out an apparent divergence between MACV and GVN on the strength and organization of the GVN forces. They explained that the 50,000 figure was an interim planning figure, and that further increases should be recommended when and as necessary. COMUSMACV was asked to submit his detailed plan for implementing 4, 6, and 7 by the 7th of May. 76/

Almost simultaneously with this JCS message, Harkin's deputy, General Westmoreland, was accompanying Ambassador Lodge to see Khanh on the occasion, already described, when Ambassador Lodge made his strong *démarche* with the Vietnamese Premier. Westmoreland expatiated on the military aspects of the Ambassador's complaint, especially the RVNAF deficiencies, specifying increased desertion rates and inadequate enlistments and draft

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callups. He calculated that at the current rates of desertion, casualties and recruitment the RVNAF at the end of the year would be smaller not larger than at present.

Finally, on 7 May, Harkins was able to report that a USG-GVN agreement had been reached on calendar year 1964 force goals for the RVNAF, Civil Guard and the National Police, although there was not yet an agreement on the SDC and Combat Youth. The agreement on the RVNAF, CG, and SDC force levels were as shown in the tabulation below: 77/

	Current Authorized Strength	Recommended Strength CY 64	Amount Increase	Estimated Cost
RVNAF	227,000	237,600	10,600	1. GVN = 1.4 billion piastres 2. U.S. = \$18 million for pay; \$5 million MAP
Civil Guard	90,015	97,615	7,600	1. .8 billion piastres 2. \$ 2.2 million MAP (no esti- mate of cost of pay increase)
SDC	110,000	110,000	-	No estimates of cost (no agree- ment yet)
Combat Youth	180,000 (trained) 80-90,000 (trained and armed)	200,000	20,000	No estimates of cost (no agree- ment yet)
National Police	24,250	34,900	10,650	500,000 million piastres \$1.2 million

With respect to the perennial problem of assisting the Vietnamese to develop their own offensive guerrilla force, in mid-May there was some progress to report, although the accomplishments were less than had been hoped. Efforts were continuing to improve the distribution of Ranger battalions for use against VC base areas and in border areas of I and II Corps. Plans also were being developed at that time for better border control, and for intelligence integration, coordination of Vietnamese Special Forces operations, and air surveillance. Efforts were also being made towards integration of Vietnamese Special Forces and U.S. Special Forces staffs at all command echelons. Vietnamese junior officers and NCO's, including Montagnards, were being initiated to training and guerrilla warfare techniques in the new VNSF/USSF Center at Nha Trang. This was

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expected to encourage the VNSF to adopt bolder and more confident tactics. 78/

Recommendations 8, 9, and 10 were accomplished rather simply and expeditiously because they consisted entirely of supplying the South Vietnamese materials that they needed. It did not involve our inducing the Vietnamese themselves to do anything. Recommendation 8 was to provide the Vietnamese Air Force 25 A1H aircraft in exchange for present T-28's. Recommendation 9 was to provide the Vietnamese army additional M-113 APC's (withdrawing the M-114's there), additional riverboats and approximately \$5-10 million worth of additional materiel. Recommendation 10 was to announce publicly the fertilizer program and to expand it with a view to trebling within two years the amount of fertilizer currently made available.

MAP funding for Recommendation 8 was approved by ISA on 25 March 1964 following approval of the delivery schedule on 22 March. On 1 May 1964, 19 A1H's were delivered and six more scheduled for delivery 10 days later. A Navy unit of 4 support officers, 8 instruction pilots and 150 men arrived on 30 April 1964 to train Vietnamese crews until they could assume full responsibility, which was estimated to be in three to six months. By early May planning and funding action for the provision of the M-113's had been completed. According to the schedule developed in response to the request for this materiel made by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 17 M-113's were shipped to arrive in Saigon 17 April, 16 were due to arrive 29 April, 30 were shipped to arrive by 1 June, and 30 more were to arrive by 10 July. There was an agreement between CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that no additional howitzers, riverboats or AN/PRC/41s were to be recommended at that time. Eighty-five thousand tons of fertilizer had been requested and procured by early May for spring planting, and this had been publicized by the GVN and in Washington. A distribution scheme was being developed and refined in early May with provision for further expansion including a probable 18,000 tons requirement in the fall. 79/

There were two important visitations to Saigon during April. The first was by General Earle G. Wheeler, then Chief of Staff, USA, who visited Saigon from 15-20 April and represented Secretary McNamara and the JCS during the visit of the Secretary of State to Saigon 17-20 April. It was during these meetings that Khanh's desire to shift the emphasis of the struggle to an attack on the North first became emphatically evident. In the meeting with Khanh on 16 April, Wheeler, in company with General Harkins, was informed by Khanh that eventually the war must be moved north. Harkins later told Wheeler that this was the first time Khanh had ever said that extending operations to the North was inevitable. Khanh explained that when the move to the North occurred MACV would have to take over all the logistics. He further said he was ready to start planning for an extension of operations to the North.

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Two days later on 18 April Khanh again brought the matter up, this time with Secretary of State Rusk. Rusk replied that this was a big problem, that political preparation would be needed, and that while the U.S. was prepared to take any action necessary to win the war, it had to be very clear that such action was indeed necessary before the U.S. would embark on it. 80/

A fortnight before on 4 April 1964 W. P. Bundy had written a letter to Ambassador Lodge with enclosures which concerned a possible political scenario to support action against North Vietnam and for the earlier, so-called "Blue Annex" (considerations of extended actions to the North) completed during the McNamara-Taylor visit in March 1964. In Washington there was considerable theorizing, in this period, about the best manner of persuading North Vietnam to cease aid to the NLF-VC by forceful but restrained pressures which would convey the threat of greater force if the North Vietnamese did not end their support of the insurgency in South Vietnam. In certain circles in Washington at least, there was what appears now to have been an amazing level of confidence that we could induce the North Vietnamese to abandon their support of the SVN insurgency if only we could convince them that we meant business, and that we would indeed bomb them if they did not stop their infiltration of men and supplies to the South.

This confidence, although ultimately accepted as the basis for decision, was neither universal nor unqualified. This was evident, for instance in the meeting of 19 April, when the subject was discussed in Saigon with Rusk, Lodge, Harkins, Nes, Manfull, DeSilva, Lt. Col. Dunn, General Wheeler, W. P. Bundy, and Solbert of ISA. Much of the discussion on that occasion centered on the political context, objectives, and risks, of increasing military pressure on North Vietnam. It was understood that it would be first exerted solely by the Government of Vietnam, and would be clandestine. Gradually both wraps and restraints would be removed. A point on which there was a good deal of discussion was what contact with the DRV would be best in order to let Hanoi know the meaning of the pressures and of the threats of greater pressures. Ambassador Lodge favored a Canadian ICC man who was about to replace the incumbent. The new man he had known at the UN. While Lodge was willing to participate in discussions of the mechanisms, he was explicitly unsure of Hanoi's reaction to any level of pressure. Lodge was not always fully consistent in his views on this subject, and it is not clear that his reservations on this score led him to counsel against the move or to express other cautions. However, he did say he doubted that we could meet massive intervention by the DRV by purely conventional measures. Rusk hoped that the threatened pressures against Hanoi would induce her to end her support for the VC. Rusk emphasized the importance of obtaining the strongest possible evidence of DRV infiltration. It was during this discussion that the question of the introduction of U.S. Naval forces -- and hints of Cam Ranh Bay -- arose as a measure which it was hoped would induce increased caution in Hanoi. The presence of military power there, it was hoped, might induce Hanoi to be more restrained in its actions toward South Vietnam. There was

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speculation about whether the use of nuclear weapons against North Vietnam would bring in the Russians. Rusk had been impressed, so he said, by Chiang Kai-shek's recent, strongly expressed opposition to any use by the United States of nuclear weapons. There was mention that Khiem had sought Chinese Nationalist military forces but their utility was generally deprecated. Bundy conjectured, for argument's sake, that nukes used in wholly unpopulated areas solely for purposes of interdiction might have a different significance than if used otherwise. It is not reported that any examination of effectiveness or of obviously possible countermeasures was essayed; and no decisions were made. But the direction of thinking was clearly away from measures internal to Vietnam, and clearly headed toward military actions against the North. 81/

At the conclusion of his visit to Vietnam in mid-April Secretary Rusk drew up the two-part summary list of added steps that he believed necessary. The first part, composed of actions presenting no substantive policy problems listed the following actions:

1. Engage more flags in South Vietnam.
2. Increase GVN diplomatic representation, and GVN information activity (to widen support of the GVN cause).
3. Enlist General Minh in the war effort.
4. Mobilize public support for war effort by civilian groups.
5. Improve the psychological warfare effort.
6. Discreetly cooperate with Khanh for the expulsion of "undesirable characters."
7. Empower Ambassador Lodge to make on-the-spot promotions to U.S. civilians in Vietnam.

Among the actions the Secretary felt should be considered, but which involved policy problems, were:

1. Maintain U.S. naval presence at either Tourane or Cam Ranh Bay, as a signal to Hanoi (to suggest to them our deep interest in affairs in Vietnam).
2. Spend more money in developing pacified provinces instead of concentrating efforts almost exclusively on trouble spots.
3. Push GVN anti-junk operations gradually north of the DMZ.

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4. Remove inhibitions on the use of Asian intelligence agents in Cambodian-Laos border areas. 82/

By the end of another fortnight Khanh's mood had turned much more strongly toward insistence upon his march to the North. On the morning of 4 May 1964, Khanh asked Lodge to call, and Khanh began by asking if he should make a declaration putting the country on a war footing. This, he said would involve getting rid of "politicians" in the government and having a government composed frankly of technicians. It would involve suspension of civil rights ("as had been the case under Lincoln in your civil war"). There would be a curfew, Saigon would cease to be a city of pleasure, and plans laid to evacuate the diplomatic corps and two million people. Khanh then said that an announcement should be made to Hanoi that any further interference with South Vietnam's internal affairs would lead to reprisals, and Khanh specifically asked if the U.S. would be prepared to undertake tit-for-tat bombing each time there was such interference.

Continuing, Khanh talked further, somewhat wildly, of defying Cambodia and breaking diplomatic relations with France; and he even mentioned a declaration of war against the DRV at one point. He conveyed the impression of a desperate desire to press for an early military decision by outright war with the DRV. Lodge sought to discourage this sort of adventurism, but acknowledged that if the DRV invaded South Vietnam with its Army, that act would raise a host of new questions of acute interest to the U.S. Possible entry of Chinese forces would have to be considered. The question then would be whether such an Army could be made ineffective by interdicting its supply lines. He could not envision the U.S. putting into Asia an Army the size of the U.S. Army in Europe in World War II. Khanh said that he understood this but that an "Army Corps" of U.S. Special Forces numbering 10,000 could do in Asia as much as an Army group had done in Europe. "One American can make soldiers out of 10 Orientals." [Sic!] It was illogical, wasteful, and wrong to go on incurring casualties "just in order to make the agony endure."

Near the end of his report of this conversation, the Ambassador inserted this comment, "this man obviously wants to get on with the job and not sit here indefinitely taking casualties. Who can blame him?" Then he added, as a further comment:

His desire to declare a state of war...seems wholly in line with our desire to get out of a 'business as usual' mentally. He is clearly facing up to all the hard questions and wants us to do it, too. 83/

Lodge's report of Khanh's impatient wish to strike north drew an immediate flash response from Rusk, which began with a statement that made it clear that the message had been considered carefully at the White House. Extremely grave issues were raised by the conversation, and reactions had

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to be developed with great care. There would still be another meeting with the President on the matter, on 6 May, before McNamara departed for the trip that would take him to Saigon (after Bonn). McNamara would take up issues with Lodge upon his arrival there. But before the 6 May meeting with the President, would Lodge please answer seven questions as a contribution to the Washington consideration of the issue.

The questions raised by the Secretary and the answers provided later by the Embassy follow:

1. What were Khanh's motivations? Does he believe that mobilization makes sense only as a preparation for military action against North Vietnam? Reply: Khanh as professional soldier thinks in terms of victory. Not a matter of pique. Honestly seeking a means of putting country on war footing.

2. Is there a trace of despair in Khanh's remarks? Does he think he can win without attacking north? Reply: No.

3. Previously Khanh told McNamara it would be necessary to consolidate a base in South Vietnam for attacking North Vietnam. Previous counter guerrilla experience in Greece, Malaya, and Korea supports this judgment. Reply: Khanh does not want to move regardless of progress in the South.

4. Khanh's talk of evacuating seems fantastic. Reply: Agree. Khanh's concern was an ability to administer the city if attacked. (This referred to Khanh's discussion of evacuating the city.)

5. Were Khanh's talks of warning to Hanoi and Cambodia and action against the French integral parts of mobilization? Reply: Yes. But he should have evidence against French nationals.

6. How to interpret Khanh's remarks about U.S. "Army Corps?" Reply: Loose talk. This reaction came after (Lodge's) discouraging reply about the possibility of the U.S. bringing in large numbers of forces.

7. Was the GVN capable of administering limited mobilization? Reply: Question is a puzzler. However, some such thing might be a way of overcoming "business as usual." 84/

The response to Khanh's proposal that came out of the 6 May meeting was that the Secretary of Defense was to tell Khanh, when he was in Saigon, that the U.S. did "not intend to provide military support nor undertake the military objective of rolling back Communist control in North Vietnam." 85/

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3. The Secretary's Visit to Saigon May 1964

Accompanied by General Wheeler, and MM. Sylvester and McNaughton, and his military aide, the Secretary of Defense made a brief visit to Saigon 12-14 May enroute home from Bonn. In informing Saigon on 4 May of his projected visit he said that his primary objective was to get full information as to the current status and future plans, with targets and dates, for the following items for the rest of calendar year 1964:

1. Augmentation of GVN military and paramilitary forces, with a breakdown by area and service category.
2. Increased compensation for GVN military and paramilitary personnel.
3. Reorganization of military and paramilitary forces.
4. Creation of the Civil Administrative Corps.
5. Implementation of the national mobilization plan.
6. The steps and timetables, both military and civil, for our implementation of the oil-spot concept of pacification.

Additionally, it was further specified that he wanted information on the following:

1. A map of population and areas controlled by the VC and the GVN.
2. Progress of military operations in extending control by the oil-spot theory.
3. Brief reports on the critical provinces.
4. The Country Team's appraisal of Khanh's progress in strengthening national, provincial and district governments.
5. The Country Team's evaluation of Khanh's support by various groups (constituting Vietnamese political power centers).
6. MACV's forecast of likely VC and GVN military activity for the rest of 1964.
7. Recommendations on cross-border intelligence operations.
8. Report on the extent to which the U.S. contribution of added resources or personnel (either military or civilian) for civil programs could strengthen the GVN counterinsurgency program. 86/

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The trip books prepared for the members of the Secretary's party also indicated that one major concern was to reinforce Lodge's demarche of 30 April concerning facilitating the flow of piastres to the provinces for counterinsurgency support. It was suggested that possibly the rigid and conservative director of the budget, Luu Van Tinh might have to be dismissed if Oanh couldn't make him do better. A list of problems that were created by lack of piastres in the provinces followed:

1. Health workers trained by AID were not employed for lack of piastres.
2. Provincial and district officers (both health and agricultural extension workers) were severely restricted in travel to villages for lack of per diem and gasoline.
3. Bills for handling AID counterinsurgency cargo at the port of Danang were not paid, resulting in refusal and threat of refusal, by workers and groups, to handle more cargo.
4. Several categories of GVN workers had not been paid salaries owed to them for months.
5. Truckers were threatening to refuse to handle AID counterinsurgency cargo because they had not been paid for past services by the Government of Vietnam.
6. There were inadequate funds to compensate villages for food, lodging, water and services provided by peasants to the ARVN, the CG, and the SDC.
7. There had been nonpayment or delayed or only partial payment of promised relocation allowances to relocated authorities.

In the light of these problems it was considered that two USOM piastre cash funds might be established: (1) a petty cash fund to support the Ministry of Education; and (2) a substantial USOM-controlled piastre fund to break bottlenecks in such matters as transportation of goods, spare parts, per diem payment of immobilized Vietnamese personnel, and emergency purchases on the local market. AID Administrator Bell in Washington had made commitments to Secretary McNamara that all piastres necessary for counterinsurgency would be forthcoming even if deficit financing were needed. But because there were plenty of commodity imports at hand, that posed no problem. USOM and MACV and the public administration advisors who were then being recruited should review carefully whether U.S. civil administration advisors to the provincial chiefs could facilitate the flow of funds and commodities, and expedite paper work. Finally, the use of rural affairs provincial staffs should be increased by one or more per province, perhaps using Filipinos or Chinese Nationals. 87/

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The first day of the Secretary's stay in Saigon was spent in briefings, and not all of what he heard was encouraging. There was first a briefing from the Ambassador, who said the administrative mechanism of the central GVN was not functioning smoothly, that Khanh overcentralized authority, and that although the situation might work out the prospects were not good. One bit of encouragement was that Khanh was requesting more U.S. advisors -- this was taken as a token of good intentions and of willingness to cooperate with the U.S. The provincial government would continue to be weak, and the corps commanders' authority handicapped the provinces. Khanh's 23 new province chiefs and 80 new district chiefs had improved the quality of leadership, he thought. But the Buddhists, although fragmented, remained politically active and Thich Tri Quang was agitating strongly against Khanh. The Catholics were about to withdraw their chaplains from the Army. The students supported Khanh but the intellectuals did not. Lodge thought that the current U.S. program was of about the right size but that better leadership was needed. He would like U.S. civilian advisors in each corps area. When USOM Director Brent gave his briefing he made the point that USOM was 25 percent short of authorized personnel strength. This led the Secretary to ask about the use of U.S. military personnel, FSOs, or Peace Corps personnel to fill the shortage. Forrestal was asked to look into the problem and report. The NIA was short of faculty because seven instructors had been assigned elsewhere and there was, moreover, an inadequate budget. 88/

In the afternoon briefing, General Harkins said he was guardedly optimistic in spite of the fact that 23 province chiefs, 135 district chiefs, and practically all senior military commanders had been replaced since the last coup. In discussing "Population Control" (pacification), it was decided to use 1 April 1964 as a base for statistical measurements of pacification progress. When he came to the subject of the planned augmentation of ARVN and the paramilitary forces, the figures presented by General Harkins showed that achievement lagged behind the agreed goals. Although the agreed MAP program called for 229,000 RVNAF personnel at that time and 238,000 for the end of calendar year 1964, there were actually only 207,000 currently in RVNAF. (This showed no improvement over March). The strength of RVNAF had in fact been decreasing consistently from a high of 218,000 in July 1963 because of increased activity (hence losses through casualties), desertions, budget problems and miscellaneous lesser causes. 89/

Among the topics receiving considerable attention during the meeting on the morning of the 13th of May was that of VNAF pilot training program. This subject assumed special importance for three reasons. First, the March program of providing helicopters to the Vietnamese Air Force called also for the provision of pilots to fly them. Second, there had just previously been some embarrassing publicity concerning the participation of USAF pilots in covert combat roles, an activity that had not been publicly acknowledged. Third, the meeting with the President on 6 May had led to the instructions to the Secretary, already noted, to discourage Khanh's hopes of involving the United States in his March to the North.

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In this discussion of VNAF pilot training, it was revealed that there were 496 VNAF pilots currently at hand, but that 666 were required by 1 July. Thirty helicopter pilots were to finish by 1 July, 30 liaison pilots to finish by 27 June, and 226 cadet pilots were in the United States whose status was not known at the time of the meeting. The Secretary emphasized that it had never been intended that the USAF participate in combat in Vietnam, and current practices that belied this were exceptions to that policy. The Administration had been embarrassed because of the Shank affair--letters which had complained that U.S. boys were being killed in combat while flying inferior aircraft. The Secretary emphasized that the VNAF should have a better pilot-to-aircraft ratio. It should be 2 to 1 instead of 1.4 to 1 as at present. And, as a first priority project, VNAF pilots should transition from other aircraft to the A-1Hs to bring the total to 150 qualified to fly that aircraft. It was tentatively agreed to fix that objective for 120 days and accept the consequent degradation of transport capability. 90/

Following this there was a discussion of offensive guerrilla operations and cross-border operations, both of which were agreed to be inadequate. Creation of an offensive guerrilla force had been one of the Secretary's March recommendations. General Westmoreland said that Special Forces of both the U.S. and the GVN were over-extended, and he added he believed that they should be expanded. As a result of this conversation MACV was directed to study the six-month duty tour of the U.S. Special Forces. The Secretary considered it possibly too short and thought it might have to be extended to a full year. On the subject of cross-border operations, the concept was to drop six-man teams in each of authorized areas in North Vietnam and Laos and pick them up, 30 days later, by helicopter. The objective was two teams by 15 June; and this potential was to be doubled each month thereafter. It was decided that operations should begin approximately 15 June 1964. 91/

In his subsequent report on this second SecDef-MACV conference, MACV reported that the Secretary of Defense had expressed disappointment that the civil defense decree of the GVN did not constitute a counterpart to military conscription. Furthermore, MACV recorded that in the course of the discussion of means of strengthening the VNAF the Secretary of Defense had reaffirmed basic U.S. policy that fighting in Vietnam should be done by Vietnamese. The FARMGATE concept was explained as a specific, reluctantly approved exception, a supplementary effort transitory in nature. 92/

The Secretary's military aide, Lt. Col. Sidney B. Berry, Jr., recorded the decisions taken by the Secretary at Saigon. They were these:

1. Have the first group of six-man reconnaissance teams for cross-border operations ready to operate by 15 June 1964, then double the number of teams each month thereafter. The Secretary was anxious to get hard information on DRV aid to the VC. The Secretary was to

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get authority for additional cross-border operations in addition to the operations already authorized in two locations.

2. Concerning the VNAF training program, there was never any intent, nor was it the policy of the USG to have USAF pilots participate in combat. Exception to this should be considered undesirable and not setting a precedent. MACV was therefore to give first priority to manning 75 AlHs with two Vietnamese pilots per aircraft, for a total of 150 Vietnamese pilots; and he was also to determine the optimum size of the VNAF, tentatively using a figure of 125 to 150 AlH aircraft. In connection with this the Secretary approved assignment to the VNAF of 25 more AlHs by 1 October 1964 to replace 18 RT-28s on hand.

3. When the Secretary asked Harkins if he needed additional Special Forces, Harkins replied, "Yes." The Secretary then said that when COMUSMACV stated requirements he would approve them if they were valid. He said that a six-month duty tour was too short and the normal tour should be extended to one year, reserving the right, of course, to make exceptions for special cases.

4. When General Harkins handed the Secretary a shopping list for items and funds totalling about \$7 million, the Secretary immediately approved the list.

5. The Secretary directed COMUSMACV to submit in writing requirements for South Vietnamese military housing.

6. Concerning MACV needs, the "SecDef made unequivocal statement that MACV should not hesitate to ask for anything they need. SecDef gives first priority to winning the war in SVN. If necessary he will take weapons and equipment from U.S. forces to give the VNAF. Nothing will be spared to win the war. But U.S. personnel must operate in compliance with USG policies and objectives." 93/

Near the end of the Secretary's stay General Khanh met with McNamara, Lodge, Taylor and Harkins; and judging from the report of the meeting sent in by the Ambassador, Khanh put on a masterful performance. Khanh began his talk by reviewing the recent course of the war claiming to have established control, in the last three months, over some three million Vietnamese citizens [sic]. However, the danger of reinfiltration by the Communists still existed. Khanh said that the biggest and most time-consuming problems were political, and he was unskilled in such things and wanted to lean for advice on Ambassador Lodge. But religious problems were also pressing. There was religious conflict between Catholics and Buddhists and within the Buddhist movement. The Government of Vietnam was in the middle. The real trouble-maker was Thich Tri Quang. Lodge was trying to help Khanh in this. There was also a problem with the press, and with "parlor politicians" (civilians). Khanh said that he was a soldier, not a politician,

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and wished he could spend his time mounting military operations and in planning long-term strategy instead of dealing with political intrigues and squabbles. But he had to think about the security of his regime.

The Secretary then referred to the Ambassador's report of Khanh's desire not to "prolong the agony," and said that he, the Secretary, wanted to hear more about this. Khanh said that in speaking of not wanting to "make the agony endure" he did not mean he would lose patience, but rather wanted to speed up the effort by something like a proclamation that South Vietnam was being attacked from the north and was therefore being put on a war footing. The statement would also say that if this attack from the north did not stop within a specified period of time, South Vietnam would strike back in ways and degrees comparable to the North Vietnamese attacks on South Vietnam.

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 at treetop level and blow up key installations or mine the Port of Haiphong.

The Secretary asked in return if Khanh judged it wise to start operations at that time. Khanh replied that he needed first to consider the enemy's probable reaction, including the reaction of Communist China. The NLF and VC were only arms and hands of the monster whose head was in Hanoi "and maybe further north." To destroy the thing it was necessary to strike the head. The purpose of going on a war footing was to prepare for ultimate extension of the war to the north. Taylor asked how best to attack the North. It had been noted that small-scale operations had had no success. With respect to RVNAF capabilities, Khanh said that they either were equal to the task already, or soon would be--the problem was to be sure of enjoying full U.S. support. Khanh conceded that there were always unknowns that created uncertainties. Taylor recalled that in March Khanh had favored holding off the attack on North Vietnam until there was a stabler base in South Vietnam. Khanh hedged on this point at first; then, after conceding some GVN weakness, said an attack on the North was the best way to cure that weakness. It would be a cure for weakness to draw clear lines of battle and thereby engage men's hearts in an all-out effort.

The Secretary at a later point reminded Khanh of the 72,000-man increase in ARVN, and another 72,000-man increase in paramilitary forces, that had been agreed upon in March; and pointed out that accomplishments in April did not suggest that the GVN was on schedule. The Secretary emphasized he made the observation only to introduce his main point, which was that the U.S. Government would help in any way it could to get the program back on schedule. Then he produced a chart showing what should have been achieved and what actually had been achieved. The USG would supply any needed funds, and fighter-type aircraft, but the GVN must emphasize to the provinces that program funds must be disbursed. Khanh blamed

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the piastre disbursement difficulties on inherited French budget practices, and promised to pressure the province chiefs further on the matter. There was talk about incompetent personnel within the GVN and of the problems of replacing them.

4. The Honolulu Conference of 30 May 1964

The next landmark of policy formation for Vietnam was the Honolulu Conference of 30 May 1964. On 26 May, the President sent out to Lodge his call for the Honolulu Conference:

I have been giving the most intense consideration to the whole battle for Southeast Asia, and I have now instructed Dean Rusk, Bob McNamara, Max Taylor and John McCone to join Felt in Honolulu 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.

I am sending you this message at once to give you private advance notice because I hope this meeting can occur very soon - perhaps on Monday. Dean Rusk will be sending you tomorrow a separate cable on the subjects proposed for the meeting, and Bob McNamara will put a plane at your disposal for the trip...

Other parts of the message referred to matters related to impending changes in the mission in Saigon - the retirement of General Harkins and his replacement by General Westmoreland and the strengthening of the civilian side of the country team. 95/

The promised policy guidance followed promptly. It constituted both an appraisal of the current situation and a statement of the needs - flowing from that appraisal - that it seemed evident had to be met, along with some proposals for meeting those needs.

I. You will have surmised from yesterday's telegram from the President and the Secretary that we here are fully aware that gravest decisions are in front of us and other governments about free world's interest in and commitment to security of Southeast Asia. Our point of departure is and must be that we cannot accept overrunning of Southeast Asia by Hanoi and Peiping. Full and frank discussion of these decisions with you is purpose of Honolulu meeting...

2. President will continue in close consultation with Congressional leadership (he met with Democratic leadership and Senate Republicans yesterday) and will wish Congress associated with him on any steps which carry with them substantial acts and risks of escalation. At that point there will be three central questions:

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- a. Is the security of Southeast Asia vital to the U.S. and of the free world?
- b. Are additional steps necessary?
- c. Will the additional steps accomplish their mission of stopping the intrusions of Hanoi and Peiping into the south?

Whether approached from b or c above, it seems obvious that we must do everything within our power to stiffen and strengthen the situation in South Vietnam. We recognize that...the time sequence of Communist actions may force the critical decisions before any such preparatory measures could achieve tangible success.

II. Nevertheless, in Honolulu, we would like you...to be prepared to discuss with us several proposals...perhaps the most radical...is the one which...would involve a major infusion of U.S. efforts into a group of selected provinces where Vietnamese seem currently unable to execute their pacification programs...

We would therefore propose that U.S. personnel, both civilian and military, drawn from the U.S. establishment currently in Vietnam, be 'encadred' into current Vietnamese political and military structure...

Specifically, this would involve the assignment of civilian personnel, alternatively military personnel with a civilian function, to work in the provincial administration, and insofar as it is feasible, down to the logistic level of administration. On the military side it would mean the introduction of mobile training teams to train, stiffen and improve the state of the Vietnamese paramilitary forces and district operation planning...

In order to test the utility of such a proposal, we would suggest that seven provinces be chosen for this purpose. We would offer the provinces of Long An, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia, which are five critical provinces in the immediate vicinity of Saigon. Additionally, we would propose Quang Ngia.... and finally Phu Yen....

...U.S. personnel assigned to these functions would not appear directly in the chain of command.... They would instead be listed as "assistants" to the Vietnamese officials. In practice, however, we would expect them to carry a major share of the burden of decision and action...

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...This proposal might also require a close integration of U.S. and Vietnamese pacification activities in Saigon....

III. In addition to these radical proposals...we continue gravely concerned about the differences between Khanh and the generals, the problem of Big Minh, and the religious differences....

IV. Finally, we wish to consult with you on the manner in which we can...eliminate the business as usual attitude in Saigon We will also wish to examine the best means of reducing the problems of dependents..... 96/

On the same day that the foregoing policy guidance went out to Ambassador Lodge, a meeting was held in Washington at William Sullivan's suggestion. Attended by Mr. McGeorge Bundy, John McNaughton, General Goodpastor and William Colby, it considered a policy memo drawn up by Mr. Mendenhall covering most of the same points raised in the message to Lodge. The gist of the memo was that the GVN was not operating effectively enough to reverse the adverse trend of the war against the VC, that the Khanh government was well intentioned but its good plans were not being translated into effective action, and that it was necessary therefore to find means of broadening the U.S. role in Vietnam in order to infuse efficiency into the operations of the GVN. In general, the memo argued the U.S. should become more deeply involved both militarily and otherwise, abandoning the passive advisor role but avoiding visibility as a part of the chain of command. Vietnamese sensitivities imposed limitations, and if it should appear that the United States intruded, the Vietnamese might come to resent our presence. The memo proposed, nevertheless, that the meeting carefully consider a phased expansion of the U.S. role. First, military advisors might be placed in paramilitary units in seven provinces -- about 300 added advisors would be needed for this purpose. Second, in the same seven provinces -- Long An, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia, Quany Ngia, and Phu Yen -- U.S. civilian and military personnel should be interlarded in the civil administration, about 10 per province for a total of 70. Third, as an experiment, the U.S. might try civilians at district levels to supplement the U.S. military personnel being assigned there. "In view of the traditional distrust of the Vietnamese peasants for military personnel, it is of considerable importance to begin an introduction of American civilian presence at this level to help win support of the peasant population." [Sic] To back up these field operations it was suggested that a joint Vietnamese-American Pacification Operations Committee be established, with high level representation from MACV and USOM on the U.S. side, and from the Defense Ministry, the Joint General Staff (JGS), the Vice President for Pacification, and the Directorate of the Budget and Foreign Aid on the Vietnamese side. This Joint Pacification Operations Committee should be concerned not with policy but with implementation of policies. (This was judged the weak side of the GVN.) U.S. personnel might, in addition, be introduced at reasonably high levels into the Ministries of Rural Affairs, Interior, Information, Education, Health,

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Public Works, and, in fact, into any other agency concerned with pacification. Finally, the U.S. personnel so assigned should come from among those Americans already on the spot -- partly from civilians and partly from military officers already on assignment there -- and the vacancies caused by these reassignments should be filled by recruitment from the U.S. 97/

A cable from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV indicated that (in addition to some questions on Laos) the Secretary of Defense wanted the views of the two senior commanders in the Pacific (CINCPAC and MACV) on a series of questions largely but not exclusively military in nature:

1. What military actions, in ascending order of gravity, might be taken to impress Hanoi with our intentions to strike North Vietnam?
2. What would be the time factors and force requirements involved in achieving readiness for such actions against North Vietnam?
3. What should be the purpose and pattern of the initial air strike against North Vietnam?
4. What was their concept of the actions and reactions which might arise from progressive implementation of CINCPAC plans 37-64 and 32-64?
5. How might North Vietnam and Communist China respond to these escalating pressures?
6. What military help should be sought from SEATO nations?

There was a second group of queries which referred not to the possibility of military pressures of one sort or another against North Vietnam, but rather were directed mainly to the counterinsurgency efforts within South Vietnam.

1. What were their views on providing four-man advisory teams, at once, for each district in the seven selected provinces, and later in all of the 239 districts in SVN?
2. In what other ways could military personnel be used to advantage in forwarding the pacification program in the seven selected provinces?
3. What was the current status of:
 - a. The proposed increase in regular and paramilitary forces of the GVN, including the expansion of the VNAF, the reorganization

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of paramilitary forces and the increased compensation for GVN military forces?

b. Formation of an intelligence net of U.S. advisors' reporting on conditions in the RVNAF?

c. Development of a capability for offensive guerrilla operations?

d. Progress under decrees for national mobilization?

e. Progress in detailing and in carrying out operational plans for clear-hold operations (the oil-spot concept)? 98/

Along with the solicitation of opinion from COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, summary proposals were developed by SACSA on the "feasibility of strengthening RVNAF, CG and SDC by increased advisory efforts and/or encadrement." SACSA's proposals, intended for consideration at the Honolulu meeting, centered on three subjects. The first elaborated a concept which was called "U.S. Advisory Assistance to the Vietnamese Civil Guard" which consisted of a phased program of U.S. detachments at the district level to provide operational assistance to paramilitary forces. About one and one-half years (or until the end of calendar year 1965) would be needed to expand the current effort -- which consisted of two-man teams for only 13 districts -- to 239 districts with larger advisory teams (one officer and 3 NCO specialists). Thus, by the end of 1965, according to this plan, approximately 1,000 men would be assigned to the districts. To support this effort in the districts about 500 more personnel would be needed, raising the total to 1500. The limiting factor on this effort would be a shortage of interpreters.

The second program proposed for consideration by SACSA was a "Pilot Program for Provision of Advisory Assistance to Paramilitary Forces in Seven Provinces." This was directed exclusively to the seven critical provinces, namely, Long An, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, Hau Nghia, Tay Ninh, Quang Ngai and Phu Yen. The concept in this case was to assign one advisory detachment with one company grade officer and three NCOs to each of the 49 districts in the seven provinces. In addition to this total of 200 persons, a 35 percent manpower overhead slice plus some augmentation at the province level (70 + 30) would be required. This would mean about 100 men in addition to the 4 x 49 in the districts, or an overall total of about 300. In addition, a minimum of 49 interpreters would be needed.

The third proposal for discussion was a suggestion that U.S. advisors be placed at company level in regular ARVN units. In investigating this proposal, CINCPAC, COMUSMACV and advisors on the spot had been asked their judgment, and all were reported to believe that this extension of advisors

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to company level was not necessary, and that the current advisory structure to ARVN was adequate.

The problem areas cited in all of these proposals to extend the advisory system were the questionable acceptability to the Vietnamese of further intrusion by American advisors, the shortage of interpreters, and finally the inevitable increase in U.S. casualties. 99/

The political problems demanding solutions in order to permit the GVN to proceed effectively in its struggle against the VC were identified in the U.S. preparations for the Honolulu Conference as:

- a. The disposition of the senior political and military prisoners from the two coups (there was resentment by some groups over the detention of prisoners at Dalat; on the other hand, there was possible danger to the Khanh regime if they were released).
- b. The rising religious tension both Catholic and Buddhist.
- c. The split between Buddhists under Thich Tam Chau (moderates) and under Thich Tri Quang (extremists).
- d. Petty politicking within the GVN.
- e. GVN failure to provide local lectures.
- f. GVN failure to appoint Ambassadors to key governments.
- g. Inadequate GVN arrangements to handle third country aid.
- h. RVNAF failure to protect the population. 100/

It was not within the competence of the Honolulu Conference to come to any decisions concerning the touchy matter of additional pressures against the North; this could be done only at the White House level. Agreement was reached, however, on certain specific actions to be taken with respect to the critical provinces and very shortly after the return of major participants to Washington these actions were approved and instructions were sent to the field accordingly.

On 5 June the Department notified the Embassy in Saigon that actions agreed upon at Honolulu were to be taken with respect to the critical provinces as follows:

1. Move in added South Vietnamese troops to assure numerical superiority over the VC.

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2. Assign control over all troops in each province to the province chief.
 3. Execute clear-and-hold operations on a hamlet-by-hamlet basis following the "oil spot" theory for each of the approximately 40 districts within the seven critical provinces.
 4. Introduce population control programs (curfews, ID papers, intelligence networks, etc.).
 5. Increase the number of provincial police.
 6. Expand the information program.
 7. Develop special economic programs for each province.
 8. Add U.S. personnel as follows:
 - a. 320 military advisors in provinces and districts.
 - b. 40 USOM advisors in provinces and districts.
 - c. 74 battalion advisors (2 for each of 37 battalions).434 TOTAL
 9. Transfer military personnel as needed to fill USOM shortages.
 10. Establish joint US/GVN teams to monitor the program at both National and Provincial levels. 101/
5. Preparation for Increased Pressure on North Vietnam

The critical question of pressures against North Vietnam remained theoretically moot. The consensus of those formulating policy proposals for final approval by highest authority appears to have been that these pressures would have to be resorted to sooner or later. But the subject was politically explosive, especially in a presidential election year. Accordingly, not only did the basic foreign policy issues involved need careful exploration, but the domestic political framework needed preparation before any binding commitments to serious actions could be decided upon.

On 15 June 1964, McGeorge Bundy addressed a memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense announcing a meeting in the Secretary of State's conference room that same day at 6:00 p.m.

The principal question for discussion will be to assess the desirability of recommending to the President that a Congressional resolution on Southeast Asia should be sought promptly.

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The second question is what the optimum recommendation for action should be if in fact a congressional resolution is not recommended..... 102/

There were six enclosures included for the consideration of those attending the conference. The first was a memorandum on the subject of "Elements of a Southeast Asia Policy That Does Not Include a Congressional Resolution". The second was a Sullivan memorandum summarizing the current situation in South Vietnam. The third was a memorandum by W. P. Bundy dated 12 June 1964 on "Probable Developments and [the] Case for Congressional Resolution on Southeast Asia." The fourth was a draft resolution on Southeast Asia for Congressional approval. The fifth suggested basic themes to be employed in presenting the resolution to the Congress. The sixth and last consisted of a long series of questions and answers regarding the resolution of the public relations sort that it was thought should surround the effort.

The proposed "Elements of a Policy That Does Not Include a Congressional Resolution" consisted largely of an elaboration of the covert measures that were already either approved or nearing approval. This included RECCE STRIKE and T-28 Operations all over Laos and small-scale RECCE STRIKE Operations in North Vietnam after appropriate provocation. Apparently the sequence of actions was thought of as beginning with VNAF Operations in the Laotian corridor, followed by limited air and sea deployments of U.S. forces toward Southeast Asia, and still more limited troop movements in that general area. Military actions were to be accompanied by political actions which would maximize diplomatic support for Laos and maximize the support and visible presence of allies in Saigon. This last was explicitly stated to be particularly desired by "higher authority." Diplomatic moves, it was hoped, would also intensify support of Souvanna. In Vietnam, the paper argued, we should emphasize the critical province program, strengthen the Country Team, shift the U.S. role from advice to direction, discourage emphatically any further coup plots, and give energetic support to Khanh. In the U.S. there should be expanded publicity for opposition to both aggressive adventure and withdrawal. It is probably significant that the last words of this study were that "this outline does not preclude a shift to a higher level of action, if actions of other side should justify or require it. It does assume that in the absence of such drastic action, defense of U.S. interests is possible within these limits over the next six months." 103/

The Sullivan memorandum warrants special attention because, although nominally a report on the situation, it speculated on policy and courses of action in a way very significant to the policy formulation processes at this time. In discussing the role of morale as a future consideration it approached a level of mysticism over a pathway of dilettantism. It was stated that at Honolulu both Lodge and Westmoreland had said the situation would remain in its current stalemate unless some "victory" were introduced. Westmoreland defined

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victory as determination to take some new military commitments such as air strikes against the Viet Cong in the Laos corridor; while Lodge defined victory as willingness to make punitive air strikes against North Vietnam. "The significant fact...was that they [both Westmoreland and Lodge] looked toward some American decision to undertake a commitment which the Vietnamese would interpret as a willingness to raise the military ante and eschew negotiations begun from a position of weakness." Although Khanh had had some success, Vietnamese morale was still not good and needed leadership had not been displayed.

If we can obtain a breakthrough in the mutual commitment of the U.S. in Vietnam to a confident sense of victory, we believe that we can introduce this sort of executive involvement into the Vietnamese structure.... No one....can define with precision just how that breakthrough can be established. It could come from the external actions of the U.S., internal leadership in Vietnam, or from an act of irreversible commitment by the United States. 104/

The "logic" of this seemed to be that Khanh had not been able to provide the necessary leadership, despite all the aid and support the U.S. had given. No level of mere aid, advice, and support short of full participation could be expected to supply this deficiency, because Khanh would remain discouraged and defeated until he was given full assurance of victory. He would not be able to feel that assurance of victory until the U.S. committed itself to full participation in the struggle, even to the extent of co-belligerency. If the U.S. could commit itself in this way, the U.S. determination would somehow be transfused into the GVN. The problem before the assembled U.S. policy-makers, therefore, was to find some means of breakthrough into an irreversible commitment of the U.S.

The actions contemplated in this memorandum were not finally decided upon at this juncture, as we know. But we were gravitating inexorably in that direction in response to forces already at work, and over which we had ceased to have much real control. The situation in Vietnam had so developed, by this time, that by common consent the success of our programs in Vietnam--and indeed of our whole policy there, with which we had publicly and repeatedly associated our national prestige--depended upon the stability of the GVN. Conditions being what they were, the GVN equated, for the future to which plans and actions applied, with the Khanh regime. We were therefore almost as dependent upon Khanh as he was beholden to us. Circumstances had thus forced us into a situation wherein the most immediate and pressing goal of our programs in Vietnam was recognized to be using our resources and prestige to perpetuate a regime that we knew was only one faction--opposed by other factions--and without any broad base of popular support. We were aware of that weakness, and fully intended, whenever it was expedient, to find ways to broaden that basis of popular support. But that was something that could be--and indeed had

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to be--deferred. Meantime we had to do first things first--we had to bolster the Khanh regime, and since this could only be done by endowing it with some of our own sense of purpose and determination for the cause that was in the first instance theirs, not ours, we would prepare to do the things Khanh indicated were necessary to give him courage.

6. Increasing U.S. Involvement and Growing GVN Instability

The changing of the guard in the U.S. mission in Saigon at the half year point, when Ambassador Lodge returned to the U.S. to participate in election year politics, symbolized the growing importance attached by the U.S. to its Southeast Asia commitment. The combination of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as Ambassador, backed up by a Deputy Ambassador in the person of U. Alexis Johnson, a former Under Secretary of State who had been U.S. Ambassador to Thailand and was well known in SEA, made a prestigious and impressive team. Moreover, in sending the new Ambassador, the President endowed him with unusual powers.

Dear Ambassador Taylor: As you take charge of the American effort in South Vietnam, I want you to have this formal expression not only of my confidence, but of my desire that you have and exercise full responsibility for the effort of the United States government in South Vietnam. In general terms this authority is parallel to that set forth in President Kennedy's letter of May 29, 1961, to all American Ambassadors; specifically, 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.

I recognize that in the conduct of the day-to-day business of the military assistance command, Vietnam, you will wish to work out arrangements which do not burden you or impede the exercise of your overall direction.

At your convenience I should be glad to know of the arrangements which you propose for meeting the terms of this instruction, so that appropriate supporting action can be taken in the Defense Department and elsewhere as necessary.

This letter rescinds all conflicting instructions to US officers in Vietnam.

Sincerely,

Lyndon B. Johnson

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The new U.S. team set out immediately to systematize U.S. operations in Vietnam, including reorganization of the upper echelons of the Mission. Added to this was an effort to improve the efficiency of the GVN and USG-GVN cooperation by developing a coordinate, parallel GVN organization. On 7 July Ambassador Taylor reported that, following recommendations from Deputy Ambassador Johnson and agency heads there, he had organized U.S. mission operations under the direction of a U.S. Mission Council, over which he would preside. The Council was to consist of himself, Johnson, Westmoreland, Killen (temporarily Hurt), Zorthian, DeSilva and Sullivan. This group was to meet once a week as an executive organization. To support this council he also established a Coordinating Committee to be chaired by Sullivan. This would carry out Mission Council decisions and prepare the agenda for Council meetings. On the following day, 8 July, Ambassador Taylor reported that he had called upon Khanh, and that Khanh had expressed satisfaction over the new U.S. personnel, and noted the rising morale their appointments had caused within the government. Taylor told Khanh about the formation of the Mission Council and Khanh asked for an organization chart so that he could develop a coordinate set-up within the GVN. Khanh said moreover that the U.S. should not merely advise, but should actually participate in GVN operations and decisions. "We should do this in Saigon (as well as in the provinces), between GVN ministries and offices and their American counterparts." 105/

The new Ambassador did not delay in plunging into the substance of the problems that were plaguing Vietnam. In his first conversations with Khanh he asked about the status of the religious problem, and according to Taylor's report of the conversation, Khanh said the situation was still delicate, that the Catholics were better organized and were the aggressors, that Thich Tri Quang appeared reasonable when in Saigon but less so when in Hue. When the Ambassador queried Khanh about the progress of the recruiting effort, Khanh said that it was not going as well as he would like. With respect to the new pacification plan, HOP TAC, that had been agreed upon, the Ambassador expressed his approval of the general idea because paramilitary forces existed in this area to relieve ARVN. The Ambassador next took up the question of high desertion rates to which Khanh appears to have replied rather fuzzily. He said that the problem was complicated by many factors, that the Vietnamese liked to serve near home and sometimes left one service to join another. He implied that the figures might not mean exactly what they seemed to mean.

The lively interest of the President at this time was indicated by his 10 July request directly to the Ambassador for a coordinated Country Team report at the end of each month to show "where we stand in the process of increasing the effectiveness of our military, economic, information, and intelligence programs, just where the Khanh government stands in the same fields, and what progress we are making in the effort to mesh our work with theirs along the lines of your talk with General Khanh." 106/

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Five days later on 15 July, Ambassador Taylor transmitted estimates (not the monthly report) of VC strength which raised the previous estimate from 28,000 to 34,000. In so doing he explained that this was not a sudden and dramatic increase, but rather amounted to acceptance of the existence of units that had been suspected for two or three years but for which confirming evidence had only recently been received.

This increased estimate of enemy strength and recent upward trend in VC activity in the North should not occasion over-concern. We have been coping with this strength for some time without being accurately aware of its dimensions.

The figures were interpretable as a reminder, however, of the growing magnitude of the problem, and of the need to raise the level of GVN/US effort. As a result the Ambassador commented that he was expediting formulation of additional requirements to support the plans in the ensuing months. 107/

For a while, there was a serious effort to coordinate USOM-GVN planning, and on 17 July 1964, USOM met with Khanh, Hoan, Oanh and others -- a group Khanh called the National Security Council. This cooperation was approved, as well as cooperation between USIS and the GVN information office -- a more sensitive problem. On 23 July 1964, Taylor and Khanh discussed this cooperation in another NSC meeting and it was agreed that, to facilitate things, mutual bureaucratic adjustments would be made. In this same meeting of 23 July, Khanh revived his pressure for offensive operations against North Vietnam and expressed again his impatience with the long pull of counterinsurgency and pacification programs.

This reopening of the "march to the north" theme on 23 July was not the first revival. On 19 July, General Ky had talked to reporters about plans for operations in Laos, and on the same day Khanh himself had made indiscreet remarks about "march to the north" at a unification rally in Saigon. This led to stories and editorials in the Saigon press. The Ambassador protested the campaign as looking like an effort to force the hand of the U.S. This became a central pre-occupation of Ambassador Taylor thereafter. He firmly opposed Khanh's pressure on the one hand, and on the other had argued for patience with the GVN even though the GVN defense ministry put out an embarrassing press release immediately after the long Taylor-Khanh talk which followed on 24 July 1964.. 108/

The political pressures in Saigon were at that time increasing vastly. Both Khanh and other top Vietnamese politicians and political generals were reacting in increasingly strong ways. The very evident instability of the current regime increased rapidly and at the same time there was a tendency to try to escape from the dilemmas posed

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within South Vietnam by actions against North Vietnam, actions which it had been hoped would lead to a unity within South Vietnam impossible under the current circumstances. There was a CAS report, for instance, of coup plotting on 24 July that said a decision had been made by the generals to remove Khanh, but that it was not clear who would replace him or whether the planned removal would be opposed. 109/ This was the same day that the Ambassador, who had scarcely been in Saigon a fortnight, had first protested to Khanh concerning his indiscreet remarks about a march to the north. The Ambassador also talked to Khanh, following the Mission Council meeting, concerning the rumors of a possible coup. Khanh said that because he (Taylor-- i.e., the U.S) had imposed Minh on the MRC as Chief of State, and because of Minh's support of Generals Kim and Xuan and other partisans of French neutralist policies, Defense Minister Khiem and Chief of State Thieu were leading a group that was pressing Khanh to get rid of Minh. This Khiem block was permeated by Dai Viet political influence. Khanh asked Taylor if he should resign. Taylor said the USG could not contemplate the consequences of another change of government. Because no other leader was in sight, Khanh had our support and he must continue in the face of adversity. "Could we help?" Taylor inquired. Khanh asked that we let it be known that we wanted no more changes of government and asked Taylor to talk to Khiem and his supporters about the bad effects of politics in the armed forces. 110/

One means of demonstrating U.S. support of Khanh was to let Khanh make the first announcement of increased U.S. aid, followed by a background statement by the Ambassador. To carry this out, the Ambassador submitted a draft statement for Khanh to use. One part of this draft statement mentioned the increase of U.S. military advisors and their extension "to the district level." When Taylor and Johnson discussed this with Khanh at Dalat two days later, Khanh saw advantages to the proclamation in general, but preferred to change the reference "advisors at the district level" to read "advisors throughout the provinces", because the original suggested an undesirably deep penetration of the GVN by the U.S. 111/

When Ambassador Taylor on 25 July reported further on Khanh's revival of the march to the north theme, he interpreted it as response to political and morale problems within South Vietnam. The Ambassador suggested several possible motivations, and commented that if Khanh had been reasonably sincere his objective probably was to:

...talk "march north" but really have in mind getting U.S. committed to program of reprisal bombing. Such a limited program could be first step to further escalation against Hanoi. 112/

On 10 August, when the storm clouds had already appeared but before the gale had begun to blow, Ambassador Taylor filed his first monthly U.S. mission report. The report began by expressing surprise that the first sampling of advisor-level opinion revealed more

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optimism than among the senior U.S. officials in Saigon. Following this preliminary flourish, the report gave an introductory definition of the problem which was, in simplest terms, that the Hanoi/NLF strategy was not to defeat GVN military forces in battle but rather to harass and terrorize the SVN population and leadership into a state of such demoralization that a political settlement favorable to NVN would ensue. At that point they could proceed by stages to the full attainment of their goals. To oppose this strategy, the Khanh government had a complex not only of military programs, but of social, economic, psychological and above all administrative programs. This complex of programs Taylor reported on under three captions: "Political," "Military" and "Overall." On the political side he reported:

The most important and most intractable internal problem of South Vietnam in meeting the Viet Cong threat is the political structure at the national level. The best thing that can be said about the Khanh government is that it 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. Although opposed by Minh and resisted less openly by Dai Viet sympathizers among the military, Prime Minister Khanh seems for the time being to have the necessary military support to remain in power. However, it is an ineffective government beset by inexperienced ministers who are also jealous and suspicious of each other...

On the positive side, Khanh seems to have allayed the friction between Buddhists and Catholics at least for the moment, has won the cooperation of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, and has responded to our suggestions for improved relations between the GVN and the U.S. mission...

...Khanh has not succeeded in building any substantial body of active popular support in the countryside. In the countryside...that support for the GVN exists in direct proportion to the degree of security established by government forces...

The intriguing inside his government and the absence of dramatic military or political successes react upon Khanh...moody...subjective to fits of despondency. Seeing the slow course of the counterinsurgency campaign frustrated by the weakness of his government, Khanh has turned to the "march north" theme to unify the home front and to offset the war weariness which he asserts is oppressing his people and his forces.... 113/

The state of mind of Khanh and his colleagues would be an important factor in the future conduct of the war, Taylor judged.

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They found slow, hard-slugging contest fatiguing to their spirits. The reprisals of 5 August (Tonkin Gulf) had given them a lift, but if indecisive bloodshed with the VC continued, they would probably exert continuing and increasing pressure for direct attack upon Hanoi.

Concerning pacification, the Ambassador observed that the most difficult part of the program was the civilian follow-up after the clearing operation in the clear-and-hold program. The difficulty stemmed from the inefficiency of the ministries. To energize these civilian functions, USOM had increased its provincial representation from 45 in March to 64 in July, but this was still insufficient, despite the judgment of critical inefficiency in the ministries. Taylor next reported that "U.S. observers reported in July that in about 3/4 of the provinces GVN provincial and district officers were performing effectively...." It was too soon to go into details regarding Hop Tac, and the report on that program was in effect a description of its objectives and rationale rather than a progress report.

The Ambassador reported that on the military side, the personnel strength of RVNAF and of the paramilitary forces was slowly rising and by January should reach about 98 percent of the target strength of 446,000. COMUSMACV had reported at the end of July that the actual GVN strength stood at 219,954 RVNAF, 88,560 Regional Forces (formerly Civil Guard), and 127,453 Popular Forces (formerly Self Defense Corps). 114/

III. FROM TONKIN TO NSAM-328

1. Tonkin Gulf and Following Political Crises

As already noted, the Ambassador's first monthly report was filed just before the internal Vietnamese political storm broke in full force. Through the late spring and into July of 1964, the Buddhist-Catholic quarrel intensified. Students again began to demonstrate in Saigon and Hue. By July a coup plot was developing against Khanh led by his disgruntled Vice Premier, Dr. Nguyen Ton Hoan, who was backed by the Dai Viet and several top military leaders. But according to one of the best authorities, known U.S. opposition to a coup made its leaders hesitate and nothing immediately developed. 115/ Then came the Tonkin Gulf affair of 2-4 August, and the U.S. retaliatory strikes of 4-5 August.

An immediate effect of the raids was to shore up Khanh's weakening position. But contrary to prevailing theories and hopes, stability was very short-lived. Khanh sought to exploit the affair by a radio appeal for unity and national discipline. He did not arrest the coup

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plotters however, which many Vietnamese -- but not the U.S. Embassy -- advised. Instead, on 7 August, he announced a state of emergency, re-imposed censorship and other prescriptions and restrictions on liberties and movements of the Vietnamese people. 116/

Apparently hoping to further exploit the opportunity, Khanh hurriedly sought to draw up a new charter to centralize and increase his powers. On 12 August he discussed this for the first time with Ambassador Taylor. The Ambassador made two comments, one suggesting caution lest "renewed instability...result from these sweeping changes," the other urging a public explanation of the need for the changes because of a state of emergency. 117/

Two days later at a joint NSC planning session, Khanh showed Ambassador Taylor a rough translation of the proposed draft of a new charter. It was hastily drawn and included both dubious provisions and gruff language. The Ambassador was immediately afraid this would lead to criticism in the U.S. and the world press; he assigned Sullivan and Manfull to work on a revision. But they had little time and were unable to exert much influence. A day later, August 15, the Ambassador reported the document still did not satisfy him but that the MRC fully intended to impose it and he saw no alternative to trying to make the best of it. Certain passages evidently had been toned down and something resembling a bill of rights inserted. Nevertheless the charter gave virtually complete power to Khanh. A special session of the MRC approved Khanh's new charter and elected him President. Minh was expediently removed: the charter abolished his job as Chief of State. Since his overthrow at the end of January Minh had been inactive and sulky; but whatever his faults he had a considerable following within South Vietnam. It had been American policy to convince Khanh to bring Minh into his government thereby endowing the Khanh regime with some of Minh's popularity. Khanh had acceded to U.S. wishes. But Minh's presence had not yielded the hoped for unity. Ambassador Taylor, Minh's friend for several years, had attempted to patch up the deteriorating relations between the two generals but these efforts only incurred Khanh's suspicion of Taylor. 118/

In the period immediately following the Tonkin Gulf affair, Washington officials sought agreement on Southeast Asian policies. We were entering a new era. On 14 August, State cabled a summary of a tentative policy paper to Saigon, Vientiane and CINCPAC for comment. The paper began by stating that during the next fortnight no precipitate actions that might relieve the Communists of the onus of further escalation should be taken. DESOTO patrols should be held up; there should be no extra 34A operations. But low morale and lost momentum in SVN had to be treated. The best means to improve morale in South Vietnam and at the same time pressure North Vietnam at the lowest level of risk had to be found. This was the guiding philosophy. Basically required were military pressures plus other actions to convince Hanoi and Peking to cease aggression. Negotiation without continued military pressure would not achieve these

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objectives. The paper listed seven courses of limited pressure similar to those already exerted, then discussed more serious actions. Lesser pressures, it was stated, were to relay the threat of systematic, military action against the DRV. Hanoi was to be informed that incidents arising from the lesser actions or deterioration in South Vietnam-- particularly clear evidence of increased infiltration from the North-- could trigger that sustained action. In any case, for planning purposes the paper looked to 1 January 1965 as the starting point for the more serious systematic pressures. 119/

The Mission comment took the form of an alternative draft. It began by agreeing with the assumption of the proposed Department paper, that the present pacification plan, by itself, was insufficient to maintain national morale or to offer reasonable hope of eventual success. Something more was clearly needed. The main problem in the immediate future was to gain time for the Khanh regime to achieve a modicum of stability and thereby provide a viable base for operations.

In particular, if we can avoid it, we should not get involved militarily with North Vietnam or possibly with Red China if our base in South Vietnam is insecure and Khanh's Army is tied down by the VC insurgency.

A second objective was to maintain the morale of the GVN. The mission judged that this would not be difficult if we could assure Khanh of our readiness to bring added pressure on Hanoi in return for evidence of his ability and willingness to do his part. A third objective would be to hold the DRV in check and restrain further infiltration to aid the VC buildup.

1 January 65 was agreed upon, for planning purposes, as the date to begin the escalating pressure on the DRV. Three aspects of these pressures were considered by the Mission: first, actions to be taken with the Khanh government; second, actions against Hanoi; and third, after a pause, "initiation of an orchestrated air attack against North Vietnam." The first of these involved a commitment. "We should express our willingness to Khanh to engage in planning and eventually to exert intense pressure on North Vietnam providing certain conditions are met in advance." Thus, before we would agree to go all out against the North, Khanh must stabilize his government and make progress in cleaning out his own backyard. Specifically, he would be required to execute the initial phases of the HOP TAC plan successfully. This would have to succeed to the extent of pushing the VC away from the doors of Saigon. Moreover, the overall pacification program, including HOP TAC, should progress sufficiently to allow earmarking at least three division equivalents for the defense of the I Corps area should the DRV step up military operations in that area.

In making these commitments to Khanh, the Mission would make clear to Khanh the limited nature of our objectives--that we were not ready

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to join in a crusade to unify the North and the South, nor to overthrow Ho Chi Minh. Our objective was to be limited to inducing Hanoi to cease its subversive efforts in the South. Pursuant of this philosophy, the Mission draft proposed a program roughly comparable to that suggested by Washington. The specific difference was the emphasis in the Mission draft on the need for a stable base in South Vietnam before beginning overt pressures on the North; and, to effect this, the policy of a quid pro quo -- getting Khanh to clean up his house and make some progress in pacification as the price of our commitment to pressures against the North. 120/

During the fast moving events of the third week of August, the President decided to bring Ambassador Taylor back to Washington for consultation early in September. In a joint State-Defense message on 20 August, Taylor was advised of questions that officials in various departments would want to ask during his forthcoming visit. The visit was first scheduled for the end of the month, but along with the draft policy paper of mid-month, the original plans were overtaken by political events (turmoil) in Vietnam, and the meeting was postponed about two weeks, from late August to mid-September. It is worth noting, nevertheless, that among the items still prominent in the intended discussions with Taylor, at the time of the first notice of the meeting, were the status of pacification programs--HOP TAC especially--Corps, division and provincial plans; the joint US/GVN committees; the newly established operations center; the role of Popular Forces and of Regional Forces; and the RVNAF police and local security plans. Pacification was the first item, and detailed interest was indicated. 121/

Shaplen calls the week from 16 August--when Khanh publicly announced the new charter--to 23 August critical, because of Khanh's failure to establish a broadly based civilian government under the authority of the new charter. He had been warned by many Vietnamese that the pressures of civilian and religious demands for a voice in the government were building up, but nothing was done and major demonstrations began again on 21 August. 122/

This account will not detail the political events that occurred from 21 August on. However, to keep our American concern with programs in Vietnam in context it is necessary to keep in mind the general sequence of political events during the turmoil of the next several weeks. On 21 August the first serious student demonstration following the proclamation of the 16 August charter occurred. Khanh met with the students, but did not satisfy their demands. The same day Thich Tam Chau, President of the Buddhist Institute for Secular Affairs, demanded that Khanh take action against the Diemist Can Lao Party, whom the Buddhists alleged to be their oppressors. Both Buddhists and Viet Cong began to infiltrate the fringes of the student demonstrations about this time. A confused, many-sided contest developed with Catholics, Viet Cong and Buddhists seeking to manipulate or exploit the student demonstrations. On 23 August the Buddhists in Hue formed a new Movement for the Salvation of Buddhism in Danger (similar to the organization against Diem). Bombs were set off

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around town (very possibly by the Viet Cong), and demonstrations spread to other cities.

On the night of 24 August another coup rumor spread. It was later suspected that Dai Viet generals had indeed been ready to move that night, but that Khiem, who had been wavering between Khanh and the Dai Viet, told them to wait. That same night Khanh asked three top bonzes to come to Cap St. Jacques for consultation. They refused, and Khanh for his part rushed back to Saigon. He met with them and they demanded, first, abolition of the 16 August charter, second establishment of government councils to assure full freedom of religion and expression, and third, free elections by 1 November 1965. Khanh made the mistake of telling them he wanted to consult with the Americans. At 1:00 a.m. on 25 August, Ambassador Taylor and Deputy Ambassador Johnson met with Khanh and they "unofficially" advised him to accept the Buddhist demands in principle, but otherwise to be tough and not to knuckle under to any minority. The conference lasted until about 3:00 a.m.

At 5:00 a.m. of 25 August, Khanh issued a communique promising to revise the new constitution, reduce press censorship, rectify local abuses by arranging special courts, and permit continued demonstrations, with the proviso that those responsible for actions of disorder be punished.

But these concessions again were not enough to satisfy the students. Later that morning a crowd of 25,000 gathered in front of Khanh's office. Khanh appeared before them and denied that he wanted to be a dictator, but refused to make further concessions. He did not, however, have the crowd dispersed. Instead, he withdrew and then, without warning, issued an announcement from his military headquarters that the 16 August charter would be withdrawn and that he, Khanh, was quitting. Further, he announced that the MRC would meet the next day, 26 August, to choose a new Chief of State. 123/

The MRC met on 26 and 27 August. Khanh brought in the three generals he had accused of participating in the pro-French neutralist plot, as a ploy to forestall a power bid by Minh. But the Council refused to seat them and they were returned to their protective custody at Dalat. While these maneuvers were going on street demonstrations continued. Within the MRC Khiem failed in an attempt to name himself Chief of State and Minh Prime Minister. Next Khanh was named Prime Minister, but refused to accept either Khiem or Minh as President. Finally, when he refused to be installed alone, the triumvirate of Khanh, Minh and Kiem was chosen.

Anarchy in the streets of Saigon intensified. Khanh again nominally Prime Minister, was by this time back in Dalat in a state of exhaustion. The troika of Khanh, Minh and Khiem never met, and Nguyen Xuan Oanh was made acting Prime Minister. Rumors of coups continued--one supposedly by the Dai Viet, another by the so-called "colonels' Group." 124/

On 29 August 1964 Vietnamese paratroopers with bayonets were used

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to restore order in Saigon. At this time Khanh was in Dalat. On 1 September General Westmoreland went to see Khanh in Dalat to urge him to keep ARVN on the offensive against the Viet Cong and to press on with HOP TAC and the other pacification programs. As a quid pro quo for this, Westmoreland revised his previous position, and promised that U.S. advisors throughout MACV would alert Khanh to unusual troop movements (movements which might be an indication of a coup). 125/

Meanwhile, because of this turmoil, Ambassador Taylor's trip to Washington had been postponed until the end of the first week of September. There was further excitement on the night of 2 September, when dissident troops, mostly aligned with Dai Viet leaders, began to converge on the city. But some of the Colonels' Group got wind of the movement and stopped the advance before midnight, stringing along with Khanh for the time being. Meanwhile, a new group had been formed in Hue called the People's Revolutionary Committee, which, according to Shaplen, had "distinct tones of separatism," and was verbally attacking the temporary government. On 4 September Khanh returned to Saigon from his Dalat retreat, and announced a tentative formula for new administrative machinery to take over for the next two months, after which a new government of civilians would replace the government of the military. Khanh was welcomed, and produced a letter, signed by both Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau, pledging support and unity. Reportedly this had been paid for by a sum equalling \$230,000. Deals of this kind were by no means unknown in Vietnam. Khanh at this time finally got rid of Dr. Hoan, who had been plotting against him for a long time, by forcing his resignation and exile to Japan. 126/ Following this there was enough of a lull to permit the Ambassador to return to Washington. He would not complete the round trip, however, before turmoil erupted again in Saigon.

2. Policies in the Period of Turmoil

On the eve of his 6 September departure for Washington, Ambassdaor Taylor cabled a review of the Vietnamese situation

...At best the emerging governmental structure might be capable of maintaining a holding operation against the Viet Cong. This level of effort could, with luck and strenuous efforts, be expanded to produce certain limited pacification successes, for example, in the territory covered by the HOP TAC Plan. But the willingness and ability of such a government to exert itself or to attempt to execute an allout pacification plan would be marginal. It would probably be incapable of galvanizing the people to the heightened levels of unity and sacrifice necessary to carry forward the counterinsurgency program to final success. Instead, it would look increasingly to the United States to take the major responsibility for prying the VC and the North Vietnamese off the backs of the South Vietnamese population...In the cold light of recently acquired

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facts, we need 2 to 3 months to get any sort of government going which has any chance of being able to maintain order in the cities and to continue the pacification efforts of past levels. There is no present urge to march north...the leadership is exhausted and frustrated...and not anxious to take on any new problems or obligations. Hence, there is no need to hasten our plans to satisfy an impatience to close with the enemy... 127/

On 4 September the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Peter Solbert, forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a memorandum including a set of summary recommendations for a program of overall social development called "stability for the GVN." Copies of this memorandum were seen by both Vance and McNamara, but there is no documentary evidence that it was given serious consideration. The program was based on a longer RAND study by C. J. Zwick, and it proposed a series of measures to broaden popular support of the Government of Vietnam. The measures were divided into an Urban Program and a Rural Program. Summarily, under the Urban Program, there were six major areas of development:

1. a reduction of consumer prices for selected commodities;
2. an increase in government salaries;
3. mass low cost public housing;
4. urban public works;
5. expanded educational programs; and
6. an improved business climate to foster private business.

Under the proposed Rural Program there were four items:

1. an elimination of corvée labor and provision for paid public works;
2. subsidized credit to peasants under GVN control;
3. an increase in military pay and benefits; and
4. educational assistance to rural youths.

This memorandum further suggested that involving in the program the leaders of the various political factions in Vietnam who were currently causing trouble would indirectly enlist them in what amounted to stabilizing efforts, and the current plague of factionalism might be reduced. 128/

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The policy consensus reached in the high level discussions of 7 September was formalized in NSAM-314. These decisions were approved:

1. Resumption of U.S. Naval patrols (DESOTO) in the Gulf of Tonkin, following the return to Saigon of the Ambassador.
2. 34A operations by the GVN to be resumed after completion of the first DESOTO patrol.
3. Discussions with the government of Laos of plans for a limited GVN air-ground operation in the Laos corridor areas.
4. Preparation to respond against the DRV to any attack on U.S. units or any spectacular DRV/VC acts against South Vietnam.

Following the statement of these specific action decisions, NSAM-314 re-emphasized the importance of economic and political actions having immediate impact on South Vietnam such as pay raises to civilian personnel and spot projects in cities and selected rural areas. The emphasis on immediate impact should be noted. Finally, it was emphasized that all decisions were "governed by a prevailing judgment that the first order of business at present is to strengthen the fabric of the Government of South Vietnam..." 129/

In the period immediately after the August crisis, Minh, acting, in effect, as Chief of State, although he did not actually hold the title, appointed a new High National Council to represent all elements of the population and prepare a new constitution for the return of civilian government.

But there was no real stability. On 13 September, while Ambassador Taylor was on his way back to Saigon from his visit to Washington, a bloodless coup was staged in Saigon by General Lam Van Phat (who had been scheduled to be removed as Commander of IV Corps). Soon after the coup began the U.S. announced its support for the "duly constituted" troika regime of Khanh, Minh and Khiem. This plus a counter-coup by a group of younger officers including Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Chanh Thi, put Khanh back in power. One result of the Phat coup attempt, however, was that it established the power of the younger general officers headed by Ky and Thi. Nguyen Van Thieu, who was close to the Dai Viet party, was reported to be a major behind-the-scenes manipulator of the coup, mainly by neutralizing his immediate boss, General Khiem. 130/

The next several weeks amounted to a period of suspended animation for the GVN (but not for the VC) while the new constitution was being prepared. Except for some debatable progress in HOP TAC, little was accomplished in pacification. Moreover, infusing an interim government with an efficiency that neither it nor any predecessor had had was too much to expect. In Saigon, much attention was given to establishing a policy coordination center

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for covert military operations -- i.e., 34A, Cross-Border, Yankee Team, Lucky Dragon, etc. These operations, and the political problems of the central government, appear to have been the principal immediate concerns of the Embassy during this period.

In October, Washington queried the Embassy as to whether greater progress in pacification might result from further decentralization of the program, even raising the question of whether aid might not bypass the GVN in Saigon and go directly to the provinces. In reply, the Mission conceded that a good deal of decentralization was already in effect and that in some provinces local initiative was paying off. Progress was continuing despite the turmoil in Saigon. Nevertheless, recent U.S. advisor reports showed that the number of provinces where pacification was not going satisfactorily had doubled since July -- from 7 to 14. This in part was due to concentration of most of the pacification efforts on HOP TAC, and in part to the political turmoil in Saigon. However, the Mission did not believe that further decentralization was either feasible or advisable. The central problem in administering pacification, in the considered view of the Mission, was to establish justified requirements at the provincial level and then fill pipelines to meet these provincial needs. This required overall coordination. 131/

Two weeks after the 13 September coup, the High National Council, composed of 17 elderly professional men, was inaugurated. Despite the continuing air of crisis, the Council fulfilled its promise to deliver a new constitution by the end of October and selected Phan Khac Suu (an older, non-aligned politician) as the new Chief of Staff. Suu immediately chose a civilian, Tran Van Huong, as new Premier. Huong almost immediately came under fire from several factions and it soon became apparent that Khanh was still the real power behind the throne. Khanh got rid of Khiem, sending him to Washington, and Minh went abroad on a "goodwill tour." 132/

As the year moved toward a close it came time again for the Ambassador to return to Washington for policy consultations. Progress in the program within South Vietnam had been spotty at best, and in many areas retrogression could not be denied. The efforts to develop efficient administration within the GVN had made no progress at all -- the game of musical chairs at the top made this impossible. It was generally conceded that pacification had fallen back, at best marking time in some areas. As for the HOP TAC area immediately surrounding Saigon, opinions were divided. The official view reflected in the statistical analysis was that slow but steady progress was being made. Most of the informal and local judgments, however, were less sanguine. Some increases in RVNAF recruitment had been registered, but this did not mean that action against the VC had improved, that capabilities had increased, that lost ground was being retaken, or that control of the rural population was being wrested from the Viet Cong.

3. The Period of Increasing Pressures on NVN

In anticipation of the Ambassador's forthcoming visit to Washington, General Westmoreland provided an assessment of the military situation.

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On 24 November General Westmoreland observed that in September the Mission had been preoccupied with the problem of keeping RVNAF intact in the face of internal dissention and political and religious purges but by late November he was pleased at the way the RVNAF had weathered the political storm and encouraged by increased RVNAF strength because of volunteers and enlistments. RVNAF strength of 31 October was compared to figures for 30 April: 230,474 RVNAF, up from 207,41; 92,265 Regional Forces, up from 85,660; 159,392 Popular Forces, up from 96,263. During September and October, RVNAF and Regional Forces officers and NCOs to the rank of first corporal had received a 10% increase in basic pay; the lowest three enlisted grades in these forces -- plus all Popular Force personnel -- had received 300 more piastres per month. Cost of living increases to NCOs matched those given to officers. Subsector U.S. advisory teams (two officers, three enlisted men) were operating in some 75 districts. General Westmoreland reported HOP TAC was progressing slowly. Civil-military-political planners were working together; the Saigon-level coordinating group, the HOP TAC Council, was operating.

General Westmoreland summarized the key issues as he viewed them at the time. First, there was a need to establish concrete but attainable short-range goals to give momentum; second, more effective means of asserting U.S. policy and plans for the pacification program at the Saigon level was needed; third, the U.S. should take a positive position against external support of the insurgency. 133/

Also on 24 November, Westmoreland recommended an increase in RVNAF force structure and requested its early approval to permit official negotiations with the GVN, to facilitate MAP planning. This recommendation followed a joint U.S./GVN survey and a COMUSMACV staff study. Two alternative levels of increase were proposed:

	Already Authorized	Increase		New Total	
		Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 1	Alt 2
RVNAF	243,599	30,309	47,556	273,908	291,155
Para Mil		No alt. for Para. Mil.		322,187	
		212,246		109,941	

The increase in U.S. advisors for the two alternative programs would be 446 and 606, respectively. The first (the lower) alternative was supported by the JCS on 17 December 1964 and approved by Secretary McNamara on 13 January 1965. This January decision raised the total U.S. military personnel in Vietnam from 22,309 to 22,755. 134/

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Both the tenor of the thinking and the policies that emerged from the meetings of early December are reflected in the draft instructions from the President to Ambassador Taylor possibly written by Taylor himself. These were first drawn up on 30 November 1964, revised on 2 December and used at the meeting of the principals on 3 December.

During the recent review in Washington of the situation in South Vietnam, it was clearly established that the unsatisfactory progress being made in the pacification of the VC 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 of these factors.

It is clear however that these factors are not of equal importance. There must be a stable, effective government to conduct a campaign against the VC even if the aid of North Vietnam for the VC should end. While the elimination of North Vietnamese intervention will raise morale on our side and make it easier for the government to function, it will not in itself end the war against the VC. It is rather an important contributory factor to the creation of conditions favoring a successful campaign against the VC within South Vietnam. Since action against North Vietnam is contributory, not central, we should not incur the risks which are inherent in 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.

It is this consideration which has borne heavily on the recent deliberations in Washington and has conditioned the conclusions reached. There have been many expressions of admiration for the courage being shown by the Huong government which has the complete support of the U.S. government in its resistance to the minority pressures which are attempting to drag it down. However, the difficulties which it is facing raise inevitable questions as to its capacity and readiness to discharge the responsibilities which it would incur if some of the new measures under consideration were taken.

There are certain minimum criteria of performance in South Vietnam which must be met before any new measures against North Vietnam would be either justified or practicable. At a minimum the government should be able to speak for and to its people who will need guidance and leadership throughout the coming critical period. It should be capable of maintaining law and order in its principal

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centers of population, make plans for the conduct of operations and assure their efficient execution by military and police forces completely responsive to its authority. It must have the means to cope with the enemy reactions which must be expected to result from any change in the pattern of our operations.

I (the President) particularly request that you and your colleagues in the American Country Team develop and execute a concerted effort to bring home to all groups in South Vietnam the paramount importance of national unity against the Communist enemy at this critical time. It is a matter of the greatest difficulty for the U.S. government to require great sacrifice of American citizens when reports from Saigon reportedly give evidence of heedless self-interest and shortsightedness among nearly all major groups in South Vietnam...

While effectiveness is largely a subjective judgement, progress in certain specific areas such as those listed below provide some tangible measure. The U.S. mission should urge upon the GVN particular efforts in these fields....

- (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 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 progress was being made toward these goals, the U.S. would be willing to strike harder at infiltration routes in Laos and at sea and, in conjunction with the Lao Government, add U.S. air power to operations to

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restrict the use of Laotian territory for infiltration into South Vietnam. The U.S. would also favor intensification of MAROPS (covert activities against the DRV). In the meantime, GVN and U.S. armed forces should be ready to execute prompt reprisals for any unusual hostile action. When these conditions were met (and after the GVN had demonstrated its firm control) the U.S. would be prepared to consider a program of direct military pressure on the DRV. These second phase operations would consist of a series of air attacks on the DRV progressively mounting in scope and intensity for the purpose of convincing DRV leaders that it was in their interest to cease aid to the VC, to respect the independence and security of the South. The prospective participants in such attacks were the Air Forces of the U.S., South Vietnam and Laos. The U.S. Mission was to be authorized to initiate planning with the GVN for such operations immediately, with the understanding that the U.S. had not committed itself to them. 135/

Immediately after the Ambassador's return to Saigon the U.S. began to increase its covert operations against infiltration from the North. On 14 December U.S. aircraft began Operation BARREL ROLL (armed reconnaissance against infiltration routes in Laos). This and other signs of increased American commitment against North Vietnam's involvement in the South showed no results in terms of increasing GVN stability. Jockeying among generals behind the scenes continued. The younger generals who had saved Khanh in the 13 September coup demanded the High National Council fire nine generals and 30 other officers, notably Generals Minh, Don, Xuan and Kim, who had been in the original post-Diem junta. The Council refused and the young generals began a life and death struggle against the Huong regime. On 20 December Generals Thi and Ky led their group in a purge -- or virtual coup -- of the Council. This was followed immediately by formation of an Armed Forces Council (AFC). Nominally headed by Khanh, the young generals aimed to curb his powers through the new council. AFC offered to mediate conflicts between Buddhist dissidents and the Huong government. These actions exacerbated already unhappy relations between Khanh and politically-motivated young generals and the American Ambassador who was striving to foster a representative civilian government and discourage coups by small-time military dictators. The struggle (described in detail in other papers) was intensified at this time and continued for several weeks. 136/

Throughout January and February 1965 the weekly Vietnam Sitreps published by the Intelligence and Reporting Subcommittee of the Inter-agency Vietnam Coordinating Committee warned generally and repeatedly that progress concerning pacification was "slow" or that there was a "slow down" or said there was "little progress to report." The Vietnamese commander of the HOP TAC area generally continued to report "a favorable situation" -- but this was accompanied frequently by a statement of increased Viet Cong activity in these favorable areas.

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After BARREL ROLL, U.S. pressure upon North Vietnam was notably increased by the FLAMING DART attacks of 7-12 February following the Pleiku incident. The McGeorge Bundy group (MacNaughton, Cooper, Unger and Bundy) were in Saigon at the time. On the return trip to Washington shortly after Pleiku, the group drafted a memorandum for the President. Intended to reflect the consensus of policy discussions with the Mission, the memorandum really reflects Bundy's point of view, particularly in presentation of a rationale for ROLLING THUNDER operations - soon to begin. Analysis of this memo and the ROLLING THUNDER annex is part of another report in this series. For present purposes it is sufficient to note that the memo reported the situation in Vietnam was deteriorating and said defeat was inevitable unless the United States intervened militarily by bombing the North to persuade Hanoi to cease and desist. South Vietnam was to be rescued not by measures in South Vietnam but by pressures against the North.

The idea that victory could be achieved quickly was explicitly dismissed: perhaps "the next year or so" would be enough to turn the tide. And this, hopefully, could be accomplished by the persuasive power of aerial bombardment.

ROLLING THUNDER was to be a program of sustained, continuous, increasing reprisal beginning at a low level and becoming increasingly violent. The level of violence would vary according to the North Vietnamese response: if they persisted in infiltration, violence would continuously increase; if they reduced their meddling, we would respond in kind and degree.

This subject had been discussed at considerable length in Saigon. The Bundy memorandum was followed by a cable from Taylor which presented generally similar recommendations under the heading of "graduated reprisals." CINCPAC commented on the Taylor proposals, urging that the levels of attack should be forceful enough to be militarily effective, not merely politically persuasive. On 8 February, McNamara requested the JCS to develop a program; shortly thereafter they produced their "Eight-week-Program" of bombing.

In Saigon, the FLAMING DART bombings of 7-12 February -- the first reprisal bombings since August 1964 -- were promptly followed by the Armed Forces Council selection on 16 February of a new cabinet; headed by Dr. Pham Huy Quat, the cabinet was installed on 18 February. Another coup was attempted on 19 February but thwarted by the AFC. And General Khanh (whose actions against Huong in January had lost him Taylor's confidence) was removed on the 20th. Four days later, 24 February, Khanh left for foreign parts and ROLLING THUNDER began. Any positive correlation between U.S. pressure on North Vietnam and the stability of the GVN remained to be established.

During these first two months of 1965 almost no progress was made toward increasing RVNAF strength. Goals were raised but actual force

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levels were not. MACV data on RVNAF strength were later provided the Secretary: 137/

RVNAF IN THOUSANDS					
	Jan 65	Feb 65	Mar 65	Apr 65	May 65
Objective	-----	252.1	259.5	266.9	274.3
Actual	244.7	245.5	248.5	252.3	256.9
Shortfall	-----	(6.6)	(11.0)	(14.6)	(17.4)
KIA	.35	.32	.27	.27	.42
Desertions	2.4	2.5	5.0	3.6	3.1

Although the conditions stipulated in December had not been met, although the program continued to fall further behind, we were fully committed to pressure on the North by this time. On 1 March 1965, in a memorandum to all Service Secretaries, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Chief of Naval Operations, Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff and Commandant of the Marine Corps, the Secretary of Defense pledged unlimited funds to the support of the Vietnam effort.

Over the past two or three years I have emphasized the importance of providing all necessary military assistance to South Vietnam, whether it be through MAP or through application of U.S. forces and their associated equipment.

Occasionally instances come to my attention indicating that some in the Department feel restraints are imposed by limitations of funds.

I want it clearly understood that there is an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam. Under no circumstances is a lack of money to stand in the way of aid to that nation.

signed/Robert S. McNamara

Early in March the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson, evaluated the need for added supporting actions in Vietnam.

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On 5 March his party was briefed by the Ambassador. Taylor saw the basic unresolved problem as the provision of adequate security for the population. Without it, other programs were either impossible or of marginal effectiveness at best. Given security and reasonable time, however, these other programs would fall into place. The three primary causes of insecurity were (1) lack of satisfactory progress in destroying the VC, (2) the continuing capability of the VC to replace losses and increase their strength, and (3) our inability to establish and maintain an effective government.

Inability to suppress the insurgency was considered largely the consequence of insufficient trained paramilitary and police manpower. A numerical superiority in excess of five to one over the VC had never been obtained; historical example suggested a 10-to-1 or 20-to-1 ratio was prerequisite to effective operations against guerrilla forces. It was therefore essential to raise new forces and improve those already in being.

Why was the pacification program of such limited effectiveness? In many provinces the reason was poor -- or non-existent -- civil action after military clearing operations. The Ministries of Interior, Health, Agriculture, Public Works and Rural Affairs were responsible for civilian "follow-up" but these departments had been impotent throughout 1964, largely because of general government instability. Programs lacked continuity; personnel were constantly rotating. Occasional military successes achieved in clearing operations too frequently went unexploited. Areas were cleared but not held. Other areas were cleared and held -- but were not developed; the VC infra-structure remained in place, ready to emerge when the troops moved on.

Counterinsurgency was plagued by popular apathy and dwindling morale, some the consequences of a long and seemingly endless war. There was no sense of dedication to the GVN comparable to that instilled in the VC.

Secondly, South Vietnam's open frontiers could not be sealed against infiltration. Continued DRV support to the VC, the heart of the infiltration problem, could not be eliminated by closing the frontiers from inside South Vietnam so the only way to stop infiltration was to make Hanoi order it stopped. Such was the fundamental justification for BARREL ROLL and ROLLING THUNDER operations. These, plus 34A, constituted the principal hope for ending infiltration.

It was conceded that even without its support from the North the VC could continue to recruit in the South, especially in areas lacking security and commitment to Saigon. However, it was hoped that pressure on Hanoi would help to change many conditions unfavorable to the GVN. For example, offensive action against NVN would raise national morale in South Vietnam and might provide at least a partial antidote against the willingness of country boys to join the VC.

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There were many causes of the failure to establish and maintain an effective government. South Vietnam had never been a nation in spirit; a government which the people could call their own was new to them. Even now their instinct said any government was intrinsically their enemy. The people had long been divided by racial and religious differences which over the centuries their alien rulers had sought to perpetuate. No cement was present to bind together the heterogeneous elements of this society. Since the fall of Diem and the sudden removal of the restraints imposed by his dictatorial regime, the natural tendency to disunity and factionalism had been given free play; demonstrations, bonze immolations and military coups had been rife. These had produced the political turbulence of the last fifteen months.

The Ambassador closed his briefing by suggesting the possibility of increased activities in several areas:

- a. improvement in training and mobility of existing forces;
- b. establishment of priorities in the use of existing forces;
- c. expansion of the capacity of the training establishment;
- d. means to give greater attractiveness to military service;
- e. use of U.S. manpower to offset the present shortage in the Vietnamese armed forces;
- f. use of U.S. Navy resources to strengthen surveillance of coastal and inland waterways;
- g. increased tempo for BARREL ROLL and ROLLING THUNDER;
- h. expanded use of peoples action teams;
- i. increased U.S. aid in combatting economic ills;
- j. preparations to cope with the mounting refugee problem in central Vietnam;
- k. improved procedures and equipment for resource control;
- l. vitalization of public information programs, provision of a 250-kilowatt transmitter for Saigon; and
- m. prompt response to all personnel requests supporting the U.S. mission. 138/

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General Johnson returned on 12 March, submitted his report on the 14th. The guts of the report, a series of 21 recommendations plus an indication of marginal comments Secretary McNamara scribbled on his copy follow (the Secretary's comments are in parentheses):

1. Provide increased mobility for existing forces by introducing more Army helicopter companies. (OK)
2. Deploy more O-1 type aircraft to give saturation surveillance capability to improve intelligence. (OK)
3. Establish Joint U.S.-RVNAF Target Research and Analysis Center to utilize increased info effectively. (OK)
4. Evaluate effects of COMUSMACV's unrestricted employment of U.S. fighter-bombers within SVN. (?)
5. Increase scope and tempo of U.S. air strikes against NVN. (Discuss with Chiefs.)
6. Remove self imposed restrictions on conduct of U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam. (Some already removed. Views of Chiefs.)
7. Increase tempo and scope of special operations activities against North Vietnam. (Ask Max for plan.)
8. Increase Naval and air RECCIE and harassing operations against North Vietnam. (Ask Max for plan.)
9. Re-orient BARREL ROLL to increase effectiveness. (OK)
10. Commit elements of 7th Fleet to air/surface patrol of coastal areas. (OK, ask Max for plan.)
11. Program of cash awards for capture of DRV junks. (OK, ask Max for plan.)
12. Streamline procedure to give MACV quick authority and funds for construction projects in VN. (See 13)
13. Establish stockpile of construction materials and equipment within 3 to 4 sailing days of VN controlled by MACV. (Applicable to both 12 and 13 - John to work with Paul and Charlie.) /ASD/ISA, SecNav and SecArmy respectively/

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14. Get Australian/New Zealand agreement to take responsibility for establishing regional forces training center. (Ask State to try.)
15. Integrated U.S./GVN psychological warfare operations organization. (USIA job, - DOD will help.)
16. Accelerate positioning of remaining sub-sector advisory teams. (OK - ask Max his requirements.)
17. Provide cash contingency fund to each sub-sector advisory group. (OK - ask Max for his plan.)
18. Establish procedure for sub-sector advisory groups to draw on USOM food stuffs and building materials. (OK - ask Max for his plan.)
19. Initiate dredging projects at Danang, Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. (OK - ask Max for his requirements.)
20. Provide 4 LSTs and 6 LSVs for logistic support along east-west supply axis. (OK - ask Max for his requirements.)
21. Accelerate program for jet applicable airfield. (What is the program? - John will follow.)

To the measures the Secretary added one of his own: "extend tours." It was incorporated into later versions of the list.

In addition to the above the Johnson report suggested two alternative deployments of a tailored division force to assist Vietnamese units in offensive action in II Corps. One was to deploy U.S. combat units to assume responsibility for security of the Bien Hoa-Tan Son Nhut air base complex, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon and Pleiku. The second was to deploy U.S. combat units to assume responsibility for defense of Kontum, Pleiku and Darlac provinces in II Corps. On the first alternative the Secretary noted: "Johnson does not recommend this;" he suggested that JCS should study, and "Max's and Westy's views" toward the second alternative should be sought. 139/

On 8 March, when Johnson was in Vietnam, the first two Marine battalions landed at Danang. Almost all of the intelligence reports during that month indicated our programs in Vietnam were either stalemated or failing. Not only was RVNAF strength considerably below the goals set and agreed upon, it was in considerable danger of actually decreasing. The situation on this score was indicated by the following table included in the March MACV report. 140/

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	Authorized Strength	28 Feb 65 Audited Strength	31 Mar 65 Estimates	
Regular Force	274,163	245,453	246,500	
Regional Force	137,187	99,143	100,000	
Popular Force	185,000	162,642	160,000	
Coastal Force	4,640	4,137	4,150	
CIDG	20,100	19,152	19,500	
National Police	51,500	33,599	34,500	
Armed Combat Youth	----	44,244	44,500	<u>140/</u>

Although some HOP TAC progress was occasionally reported the pacification situation otherwise was quite gloomy. The Vietnam Sitreps of 3 March 1965 reported the nationwide pacification effort remained stalled. The HOP TAC program "continues but personnel changes, past and future, may retard the future success of this effort." The 10 March Sitrep called the national pacification effort "stagnated" and objectives in some areas "regressing." In the I and II Corps pacification has "all but ceased." Only a few widely scattered places in the rest of the country could report any achievement. In the HOP TAC area the anticipated slow-down in pacification had arrived -- the result of shifting military commanders and province and district chiefs. On 17 March, pacification was virtually stalled, refugee problems were mounting in I and II Corps. Only in the HOP TAC area were there "modest gains... in spite of increased VC area activity." By 24 March the word used for pacification efforts generally was "stalled," and the effort had now become increasingly devoted to refugee centers and relief. However, the Sitrep said 356 hamlets in the HOP TAC area had been reported -- by Vietnamese authorities -- as meeting agreed criteria and 927,000 persons were living in zones that had been declared clear. 141/

At the time of the Johnson Mission, concern over the evident failures of the pacification program was such that proposals to change the framework within which it was conducted -- proposals to put the USOM, USIS and CIA pacification operations all under MACV -- were examined at length. Ambassadors Taylor and Alexis Johnson as well as General Westmoreland were opposed to sweeping changes of this sort. All apparently conceded the need for better coordination of the different kinds of programs, military and civil, which went into pacification but senior mission officials strongly opposed any major revision of the non-military effort.

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IV. NSAM-328

Near the end of March Ambassador Taylor returned again to Washington for policy conferences. Four sets of proposals had been specifically developed for consideration at the 1 April meeting. One of these was General Johnson's report which has already been described in detail. Another was a suggested program of 12 covert actions submitted by the Director of Central Intelligence. A third was an information program developed by USIS. The fourth was a proposed program of 41 non-military measures initially suggested, by Ambassador Taylor, then worked on by State during the third week of March, and finally incorporated in a memorandum to the President dated 31 March.

The 41 possible non-military actions proposed for consideration by Ambassador Taylor were arranged in 9 groups. The first group was entitled "Decentralization In The GVN and The Rural Program." This group included measures to urge the GVN to increase the power and responsibility of individual province chiefs, and to persuade the peasants they had a stake in the GVN by giving rural pacification a positive label, "new rural life hamlet program," and complexion.

The second group of non-military actions concerned "Youth, Religion, and Other Special Groups." Within this group were a series of actions to expand the support of the GVN Ministry of Youth and Sports, to reduce the draft age from 20 to 18 or 17, to persuade the GVN to meet Montagnard grievances, and to increase aid to the Vietnamese labor movement.

Under the heading "Economic and Social Measures," there were specific proposals to support a better coastal water transportation system and to urge the GVN to promulgate and put into effect an equitable land reform program. By sending U.S. and possibly nationalist Chinese experts it was hoped the GVN could be assisted in combating the growing VC capability to extract financial and material support from GVN resources. Measures were also urged to expand and accelerate slum clearance and low cost housing in troublesome urban areas and to improve the water supply.

Specific measures advocated under the heading "Education" included a general increase in U.S. assistance, expansion of the program to translate American textbooks into Vietnamese and to establish secondary schools on American principles for Vietnamese students.

Among the five specific measures under the rubric "Security and Intelligence," one urged promulgation of an effective arrest and detention law, another asked for a great increase in intelligence funds, a third called for a system of rewards for information leading to the capture or death of VC leaders, and the last was a suggestion for a national counterespionage organization.

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The "Psychological Operations" proposed were mainly additions to proposals already made in the USIS report of Mr. Rowan.

The specific measures under "GVN Personnel" (and its systems of recruiting and training officials for the rural program) were to urge the GVN to establish rewards for outstanding performance, and give double or triple pay to rural school teachers and officials.

There were two measures to aid "Refugees in Emergency Situations:" one to provide additional U.S. support for the refugee program, and the other to establish a joint U.S./GVN reaction team for quick survey and immediate action in war disaster situations.

The last group of proposals was a revision of the old idea of encadrement of U.S. officers at key spots within the GVN. The administrative measures to increase U.S. effectiveness included such suggestions as allowing U.S. officers to work directly with special interest groups including Buddhists, Catholics, the sects, Montagnards, students, labor, etc.; and assigning other U.S. officers to work directly within the GVN, including the Prime Minister's office and key ministries. Another suggestion was for the establishment of a U.S. inter-agency group on pacification to be directed by a senior Mission officer reporting directly to the Ambassador. (This suggestion was evidently directed at the same problem as the suggestion for establishing all U.S. pacification effort under MACV that had arisen during the visit of General Johnson.)

A feature of this proposed program that should be noted is that many if not most of the suggestions began with such phrases as "urge the GVN" or "persuade the GVN." This was of course not the first time that our assistance took this form. This had been going on for a long time. But the difference between merely supplying aid and also trying to supply initiative is significant. 142/

In preparation for the important 1 April meeting a White House paper entitled "Key Elements For Discussion, Thursday, April 1, at 5:30 P.M." was circulated to participants. In summarizing the situation the paper said that morale had improved in South Vietnam and that, although the government had not really settled down, it seemed "hopeful both in its capacity and its sense of political forces." The South Vietnamese armed forces were in reasonably good shape although its top leadership was not really effective and the ratio of ARVN to VC (whose members were increasing) was not good enough. The situation in many parts of the countryside continued to go in favor of the VC although there was, at that writing, what was believed to be a temporary lull. Turning to the matter of the bombing this statement said that:

Hanoi has shown no signs of give, and Peiping has stiffened its position within the last week. We still believe that

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attacks near Hanoi might substantially raise the odds of Peiping coming in with air.

Hanoi was expected to continue stepping up its infiltration both by land through Laos and by sea. There were clear indications of different viewpoints in Hanoi, Peiping, and Moscow with respect to "so-called wars of liberation," as well as continued friction between Moscow and Peiping.

However, neither such frictions nor the pressure of our present slowly ascending pace of air attacks on North Vietnam can be expected to produce a real change in Hanoi's position for some time, probably two to three months at best.

The argument then proceeded to the key question of whether or not Hanoi would continue to make real headway in the South. If it continued to make such headway, even a major step-up in our air attacks would probably not make them much more reasonable. On the other hand if the situation in South Vietnam began to move against the VC and the going became increasingly tough, then the "situation might begin to move on a political track - but again not in less than two to three months, in our present judgment." This was a significant departure from the theory for ROLLING THUNDER propounded when that bombing pressure was inaugurated.

Following some considerations on immediate international moves and more general political posture, the memo turned to "actions within South Vietnam." Employing every useful resource to improve the efforts in the South was defined as crucial. The paper indicated that the 41-point program of non-military measures developed mainly by Ambassador Taylor included promising elements and that the mission as well as agencies in Washington should develop additional points. McCone's suggestions for largely covert actions were recommended for further study. Both the Rowan (USIS) and the 21-point program of General Johnson were viewed favorably, as well as an increase in U.S. military support forces in Vietnam from 18,000 to 20,000 men. An increase in GVN manpower was also approved with increased pay scales to be used as an inducement regardless of the monetary costs. On one copy of this document that went to OSD, there was a handwritten additional point that was, "change mission of Marine force." This significant addition was later adopted in NSAM-328.

The remainder of the paper was devoted, first, to U.S. and third country combat forces in South Vietnam, and second, to actions against North Vietnam and in Laos. These are of interest here only in the extent to which they distracted from or supplanted counterinsurgency actions within South Vietnam. So far as U.S. combat forces within South Vietnam were concerned, there was cautious consideration of a small and gradual buildup. But it was emphasized that because the reaction of the GVN and

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of the South Vietnamese people to any major U.S. combat deployment was uncertain, and because the net effectiveness of U.S. combat forces in the Vietnamese environment was also uncertain, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense had recommended that action of this sort be limited. Only the deployment of two additional Marine battalions, one Marine air squadron and certain logistical forces over the ensuing sixty-day period was approved. Continuation of ROLLING THUNDER operations on a slowly ascending scale was assumed. It was also assumed that preparations would be made for additional strikes and for a response to any higher level of VC operations, as well as, correspondingly, to slow the pace in the unlikely event that VC actions slacked off sharply. 143/

In the NSC meeting of 1 April 1965, the President gave his formal approval, "subject to modifications in the light of experience," to the 41-point program of non-military actions submitted by Ambassador Taylor and described above. He gave general approval to the USIS recommendations, except that no additional funds were to be supplied for this work -- the program was to be funded and supported by other agencies. The President further approved the urgent exploration of the covert actions proposed by the Director of Central Intelligence. Finally, he repeated his previous approval of the 21-point program of military actions recommended by General Johnson. On the exclusively military side the President authorized the 18,000 to 20,000-man increase in U.S. military support forces, the deployment of two additional Marine battalions, and the change of mission for all Marine battalions to permit their use in active combat under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State. However, because this last decision was contingent upon future agreements between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense its full significance was not immediately apparent. It was left to the Ambassador to seek South Vietnamese government approval and coordination for all of these measures. 144/

NSAM-328 did not last long as a full and current statement of U.S. policy. There were some responsible officials who had misgivings about increasing our involvement in South Vietnam or about increasing it more rapidly than might be necessary. There were others who apparently felt that NSAM-328 risked falling between two stools. One such was John A. McCone, Director of CIA (who was perhaps also unhappy about the increasing involvement per se). The day after the 1 April meeting he addressed a memorandum expressing second thoughts to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Ambassador Taylor. The change in the U.S. role from merely giving advice and static defense, to active combat operations against Viet Cong guerrillas, appeared to bother him. He felt our ground force operations would very possibly have only limited effectiveness against guerrillas, and above all, he felt the conduct of active combat operations in

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South Vietnam should be accompanied by air strikes against the North sufficiently heavy and damaging to really hurt the North. If the U.S. were to combine combat operations in the South with air strikes of any kind in the North, the attacks on the North should be heavy and do great damage. Without expressly saying so, his point seems to have been that the air war against the North should not be an attempt to persuade, but an effort to compel. He said that he had already reported that:

The strikes to date have not caused a change in the North Vietnamese policy of directing Viet Cong insurgency, infiltrating cadres and supplying materials. If anything, the strikes to date have hardened their attitude.

Although the memo as a whole conveys Mr. McCone's serious doubt that the ground operations in the South would in any event serve their purpose, he clearly advocated bombing more heavily if we decided to engage in ground operations. Unless they were supported by really strong actions against North Vietnam, he felt such ground operations would be doomed to failure:

I believe our proposed track offers great danger of simply encouraging Chinese Communists and Soviet support of the DRV and VC cause if for no other reason than the risk for both will be minimum. I envision that the reaction of the NVN and the Chinese Communists will be to deliberately, carefully, and probably gradually, build up the Viet Cong capabilities by covert infiltration of North Vietnamese and, possibly, Chinese cadres and thus bring an ever increasing pressure on our forces. In effect, we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves.

McCone argued that if we were going to change the mission of the U.S. ground forces we also needed to change the ground rules of the strikes against North Vietnam, and he concluded:

If we are unwilling to take this kind of a decision now, we must not take the actions concerning the mission of our ground forces for the reasons I have mentioned above. 145/

McCone's views notwithstanding, U.S. policy was promptly and sharply reoriented in the direction of greater military involvement with a proportionate de-emphasis of the direct counterinsurgency efforts. It is not fully clear to this writer exactly how and why this rapid re-orientation occurred. On 7 April the President made his famous Johns Hopkins speech in which he publicly committed the United States more than ever before to the defense of South Vietnam, but also committed himself to engage in

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unconditional discussions. The following day, Pham Van Dong published his Four Points in what seemed a defiant, and unyielding response. This sharp DRV rebuff of the President's initiative may well have accelerated the re-orientation. The re-orientation of policy itself, however, was expressed not in an explicit restatement of formal policy, but in a series of action decisions over the following fortnight that caught the Saigon Mission very much by surprise.

The Ambassador's nodis to the President on 13 April had a comparatively optimistic tone. It began, "We have just completed another quite favorable week in terms of losses inflicted upon the Viet Cong...." The critical conditions in Bien Dinh Province had been considerably relieved and the province, it was believed, was about back to normal. Although a large part of the province remained under Viet Cong control, many areas had been restored to government control and the fear of the loss of major towns seemed past. There had been aggressive action by a new division commander, and there seemed to be improved morale attributable to the air actions against North Vietnam. There was a possibility that the Viet Cong were regrouping and they would probably soon engage in some new kind or phase of offensive action. But, then as now, there were what some interpreted as indications that the Viet Cong morale might be dropping. Furthermore, estimates -- not audited figures -- indicated that the government military and paramilitary forces had been increased by some 10,000 during the month of March as against the target of 8,000 per month. Prime Minister Quat was continuing his program of visiting the provinces, and in addition to making himself and the Saigon government known to the hinterlands, he had expressed particular interest in such projects as rural electrification, agricultural development, water supply and school construction. Quat's principal worry continued to be the unruly generals and there was continued evidence of disunity within the senior officers corps. 146/

Within two days, however, messages went out from Washington indicating that decisions had been made at the highest level to go beyond the measures specified in NSAM-328. On 15 April, McGeorge Bundy sent a personal nodis to Ambassador Taylor saying that the President had just approved important future military deployments and that some personal explanation might be helpful.

The President has repeatedly emphasized his personal desire for a strong experiment in the encadrement of U.S. troops with the Vietnamese. He is also very eager to see prompt experiments in use of energetic teams of U.S. officials in support of provisional governments under unified U.S. leadership. These desires are the source of corresponding paragraphs in our message.

On further troop deployments, the President's belief is that current situation requires use of all practical means of strengthening position in South Vietnam and that additional U.S. troops

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are important if not decisive reinforcements. He has not seen evidence of negative result of deployments to date, and does not wish to wait any longer than is essential for genuine GVN agreement.

President always intended these plans be reviewed with you and approved by Quat before final execution, and we regret any contrary impression given by our messages in recent days.

147/

The message stated that "highest authority" believed that, in addition to the actions against the North, something new had to be added in the South, to achieve victory.

1. Experimental encadrement by U.S. forces of South Vietnamese ground troops both to stiffen and increase their effectiveness and also to add to their fire power. Two approaches were to be carried out concurrently, one involving integration of a substantial number of U.S. combat personnel in each of several ARVN battalions, the other involving the combined operation of approximately three additional Army/Marine battalions with three or more South Vietnamese battalions for use in combat operations.

2. Introduction of a brigade force into the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau area to act both as a security force for installations and to participate in counterinsurgency combat operations.

3. Introduction of a battalion or multi-battalion forces into three additional locations along the coast, such as Qui Nhon. The purpose here would be to experiment further with using U.S. forces in counterinsurgency role in addition to providing security for the base.

In addition to these three steps, which were intended basically to increase the military effectiveness of the counter guerrilla campaign, a series of other steps was proposed. One was a substantial expansion of the Vietnamese recruiting campaign using U.S. recruiting experts, techniques and procedures. A second was an experimental program to provide expanded medical services to the countryside utilizing mobile dispensaries.

The next one -- and the one that caused considerable subsequent discussion -- was the experimental introduction into the provincial government structure of a team of U.S. Army civil affairs personnel to assist in the establishment of stable provincial administration and to initiate and direct the necessary political, economic and security programs. It

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was proposed that teams be introduced first into only one or two provinces. General Peers was being sent to work with COMUSMACV in developing detailed plans.

The last non-military measure was an experimental plan for distributing food directly to regular and paramilitary personnel and their families. 148/

Hot on the heels of this message came another on 16 April explaining in some further detail the proposition to experiment with U.S. civil affairs officers in the pacification program. Major General W. R. Peers' party was scheduled to arrive in Saigon on 19 April. According to the proposal COMUSMACV was to designate a senior officer to direct the overall U.S. Army Civil Affairs effort in the one or two test provinces. Within these, the responsibility for all U.S. activities would be vested in the senior U.S. Army sector advisor. 149/

This last message was, for Taylor, the straw that broke the camel's back. Immediately upon receiving it the Ambassador dispatched a NODIS to McGeorge Bundy:

....Contrary to the firm understanding which I received in Washington, I was not asked to concur in this massive visitation. For your information, I do not concur.

Based on the little I know of the proposed civil affairs experiment, I am opposed to beginning any extensive planning exercise which, because of its controversial and divisive concept, is going to shake this mission and divert senior members from their important daily tasks. If GVN gets word of these plans to impose U.S. military government framework on their country (as this new concept seems to imply), it will have a very serious impact on our relations here.

We are rocking the boat at a time when we have it almost on an even keel. I recommend that we suspend action on this project until we have time to talk over its merits and decide how to proceed with order. 160/

Shortly after dispatching this telegram, the Ambassador sent another to McGeorge Bundy, this one dealing more generally with the defense message of 15 April which had laid out the new program of added measures decided upon by the President.

I am greatly troubled by DoD 152339Z April 15. First, it shows no consideration for the fact that, as a result of decisions taken in Washington during my visit, this mission is

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charged with securing implementation by the two-month old Quat government of a 21-point military program, a 41-point non-military program, a 16-point Rowan USIS program and a 12-point CIA program. Now this new cable opens up new vistas of further points as if we can win here somehow on a point score. We are going to stall the machine of government if we do not declare a moratorium on new programs for at least six months. Next, it shows a far greater willingness to get into the ground war than I had discerned in Washington during my recent trip...

My greatest concern arises over para 6 reftel [the civil affairs experiment proposal] which frankly bewilders me. What do the authors of this cable think the mission has been doing over the months and years? We have presumably the best qualified people the Washington agencies (State, AID, DoD, USIA and CIA) can find working in the provinces seven days a week at precisely the task described in paragraph 6. Is it proposed to withdraw these people and replace them by Army civil affairs types operating on the pattern of military occupation? If this is the thought, I would regard such a change in policy which would gain wide publicity, as disastrous in its likely efforts upon pacification in general and on US/GVN relations in particular.

Mac, can't we be better protected from our friends? I know that everyone wants to help, but there is such a thing as killing with kindness. In particular, we want to stay alive here because we think we're winning -- and will continue to win unless helped to death. 151/

Shortly after sending this cable, the Ambassador sent still a third message, this one suggesting certain steps that might be taken in Washington to facilitate his implementation of the many and rapidly changing policies and programs that had been decided upon in Washington since his visit. The problem was winning not only the acquiescence, but the support and active cooperation of the South Vietnamese government. He suggested the kind of instruction that Washington should provide him to present to the GVN -- the new policy of third country participation in ground combat. Taylor's proposed instructions are quoted in full here because they provide, for better or worse, an internally consistent rationale for the shifting policies of that month:

The USG has completed a thorough review of the situation in South Vietnam both in its national and international aspects and has reached certain important conclusions. It feels that in recent weeks there has been a somewhat favorable change in the overall situation as the result of the air attacks on the DRV,

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the relatively small but numerous successes in the field against the VC and the encouraging progress of the Quat government. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that, in all probability, the primary objective of the GVN and the USG of changing the will of the DRV to support the VC insurgency cannot be attained in an acceptable time frame by the methods presently employed. The air campaign in the North must be supplemented by signal successes against the VC in the South before we can hope to create that frame of mind in Hanoi which will lead to the decisions we seek.

The JCS have reviewed the military resources which will be available in SVN by the end of 1965 and have concluded that even with an attainment of the highest feasible mobilization goals, ARVN will have insufficient forces to carry out the kind of successful campaign against the VC which is considered essential for the purposes discussed above. If the ground war is not to drag into 1966 and even beyond, they consider it necessary to reinforce GVN ground forces with about twenty battalion equivalents in addition to the forces now being recruited in SVN. Since these reinforcements cannot be raised by the GVN they must inevitably come from third country sources.

The USG accepts the validity of this reasoning of the JCS and offers its assistance to the GVN to raise these additional forces for the purpose of bringing the VC insurgency to an end in the shortest possible time. We are prepared to bring in additional U.S. ground forces provided we can get a reasonable degree of participation from other third countries. If the GVN will make urgent representations to them, we believe it will be entirely possible to obtain the following contributions: Korea, one regimental combat team; Australia, one Infantry battalion; New Zealand, one battery and one company of tanks; Philippine Islands, one battalion. If the forces of the foregoing magnitude are forthcoming, the USG is prepared to provide the remainder of the combat reinforcements as well as the necessary logistic personnel to support the third country contingents. Also, it will use its good offices as desired in assisting the GVN approach to these governments.

You (the Ambassador), will seek the concurrence of the GVN to the foregoing program, recognizing that a large number of questions such as command relationships, concepts of employment and disposition of forces must be worked out subsequently.

The message concluded that, armed with an instruction of this kind, he, Taylor, would be adequately equipped to initiate what might be a

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sharp debate within the GVN. Something of this sort was needed before taking up the matter of troop arrangements with Quat. 152/

Later the same day, Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson sent Washington his personal observations on the recent decision to introduce third country troops. He had just returned from one day at Pleiku with Premier Quat, and two days in the Danang-Hue area, where he had had "extended visits and informal conversations with all of the senior Marine officers ashore."

I fully appreciate considerations both internal and external to SVN which impel move on our part to bring this war to successful conclusion as quickly as possible...However, I gravely question whether this result can be achieved at this time by massive input of non-Vietnamese military forces. As we have learned, we are dealing with volatile and hyper-sensitive people with strong xenophobic characteristics never far below the surface. We have thus far deployed our Marine battalions to minimize direct contact with local population. This not only from our choice but that of GVN, especially General Thi. On this I think Thi is right. Hasty and ill conceived deployment of non-Vietnamese in combat roles where they are substantially involved with local population could badly backfire on U.S. and give rise to cries by Buddhists...and others to 'throw out foreigners' and 'return Vietnam to the Vietnamese...'

The message went on to say that in the next few weeks the Marines at Danang would have a chance to test their success as a reaction force in support of ARVN initiated contact with the enemy, and in patrolling thinly populated areas. The Deputy Ambassador recommended that we await the outcome of this testing before engaging any more forces. 153/

A hastily arranged meeting in Honolulu on 20 April was evidently called to soothe Taylor's temper over the hasty decisions to deploy third country troops, and to get agreement to them by the senior U.S. policy officials concerned -- not to reverse or alter those policies or to shift the direction of our commitments. By that point we were inexorably committed to a military resolution of the insurgency. The problem seemed no longer soluble by any other means.

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FOOTNOTES

1. White House Statement to the Press, 2 October 1963
2. National Security Action Memorandum 273, 26 November 1963 (TS)
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Secretary Robert S. McNamara Memorandum for the President, "Report of the McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, 2 October 1963 (TS)
7. Ibid.
8. Chairman, JCS Maxwell Taylor Letter to President Ngo Dinh Diem, 30 September 1963
9. Ibid.
10. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Testimony Regarding the Situation in South Vietnam Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Executive Session), not subsequently published, 8 October 1963 (S)
11. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Testimony on Authorization Bill for Fiscal 1965 Before the House Committee on Armed Services (Executive Session), 27 and 29 January 1964 (S)
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p. 502
15. "Critical Analysis of Halberstam Article," in Secretary of Defense Briefing Book, 16 (?) August 1963 (S)
16. "History of War In Vietnam, 1961-63," in Secretary of Defense Briefing Book (September 1963)
17. Ibid.
18. "Second Informal Appreciation of the Strategic Hamlet Program," 1 September 1963 (S)

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19. McNamara-Taylor Trip Report, op. cit.
20. "Summary of Special Meeting on the Republic of Vietnam, CINCPAC Headquarters," 20 November 1963 (TS)
21. Secretary of Defense Memorandum for the President, Subject: "Meeting with Ambassador Lodge," 23 November 1963 (TS)
22. Draft Memorandum to the President on Status of Actions Under NSAM-273, attached to memorandum from Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, to Secretary of State, Director CIA, and Secretary of Defense, and Administrator AID; to serve as a basis of discussion at a meeting at 3:00 p.m., 6 December 1963 (TS)
23. Embassy Saigon message 1122, to Secretary of State, 7 December 1963 (S-LIMDIS)
24. Assistant Secretary of Defense/ISA Memorandum to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Subject: "Situation in Vietnam," No. I-29135/63, 17 December 1963, signed by Admiral Blouin (S)
25. Back-Up Book for Secretary of Defense Saigon Trip, 18-20 December 1963 (TS)
26. OSD message DEF.949322 to CINCPAC, 21 December 1963 (TS)
27. Secretary of Defense Memorandum for the President, Subject: "Trip to South Vietnam," 21 December 1963 (TS)
28. Remarks of the Secretary of Defense at the White House, 21 December 1963
29. CIA Director John McCone Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 23 December 1963 (TS)
30. CIA Director John McCone Letter to the Secretary of Defense, 7 January 1964 (TS)
31. CIA Director John McCone Letter to the Secretary of Defense, 9 January 1964 (TS)
32. Secretary of Defense Letter to CIA Director John McCone, 16 January 1964 (TS)
33. William E. Colby, Deputy Director/Plans, CIA Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, et.al., Subject: "Initial Report of CAS Group Findings in South Vietnam," 10 February 1964 (S)

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34. MACV message 665, to Taylor, 21 February 1964 (TS)
35. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee (Executive Session), 27 January 1964
36. Embassy Saigon message 1345, 20 January 1964, 8:00 p.m. (C)
37. Embassy Saigon message 1408, 23 January 1964 (U)
38. CAS, Saigon message, 28 January 1964 (no message number available)
39. Embassy Saigon message 1431, 29 January 1964, 8:00 p.m. (TS-NODIS)
40. Embassy Saigon message 1445, 30 January 1964, 3:15 a.m. (TS); see also messages 1408, 1431, and 1432, op. cit.
41. Embassy Saigon message 1456, 1 February 1964 (S)
42. Embassy Saigon Airgram 455, 2 February 1964 (S)
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Embassy Saigon message 1523, 9 February 1964 (S)
47. Walter Elder, Executive Assistant to Director CIA Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "Appraisal of the Conduct of the War in Vietnam," 10 February 1964 (S); de Silva/Kirkpatrick evaluation attached.
48. Ibid.
49. SNIE 50-64, "Short-Term Prospects in Southeast Asia," 12 February 1964 (TS)
50. Assistant Secretary of State/Far East, Roger Hilsman Memorandum for the Secretary of State, 14 March 1964 (TS)
51. Chairman, JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, JCSM-146-64, 18 February 1964 (TS-SENSITIVE)
52. JCS, SACSA Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: "Appraisal of the Situation in SVN," 3 March 1964, in Secretary of Defense Trip Book (TS)
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.

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55. Joint State/Defense message, State's 1307 to Embassy Saigon, 25 February 1964, 8:35 p.m. (S)
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Embassy Saigon message 1744, 13 March 1964 (S)
59. NSAM 273, op. cit.
60. National Security Action Memorandum 288, 17 March 1964 (TS)
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. White House Statement to the Press, 17 March 1964
66. State Department message 1462 to Saigon and Others, 18 March 1964 (TS-LIMDIS)
67. Chairman, JCS Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, JCSM-222-64, 14 March 1964 (TS)
68. State Department message 1490 to Saigon, 20 March 1964 (S)
69. Embassy Saigon message 1880, 1 April 1964 (S)
70. These and other data concerning the progress or lack thereof on the NSAM-288 measures during this period are taken from compilations included in "Mid-May Saigon Briefing Book."
71. Embassy Saigon message 2091, 30 April 1964 (S)
72. Mid-May Saigon Briefing Book, op. cit.
73. Embassy Saigon messages 1889, 2 April 1964; 1899, 3 April 1964; 2089, 30 April 1964; and 2112, 4 May 1964
74. Mid-May Saigon Briefing Book, op. cit.
75. Joint State-Defense-AID message 1505, 23 May 1964
76. JCS message to MACV 6073, 29 April 1964

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77. MACV msg to JCS DIG 070725May64
78. Mid-May Saigon briefing book, op. cit.
79. Ibid.
80. Saigon Mid-May briefing book; Report of General Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff, USA on visit to the Republic of Vietnam representing the SecDef and the JCS, 15-20 April 1964 (TS).
81. W. P. Bundy, Memo for the Record, Subject: "Discussion of Possible Extended Action in Relation to Vietnam," 27 April 1964 (TS).
82. Mid-May Saigon briefing book.
83. Embassy Saigon msg 2108, 4 May 1964 (TS).
84. Department of State msg 1838, from the Secretary 5 May 1964, Flash (TS); Embassy Saigon msg 2108, 4 May 1964 (TS).
85. See the Task Force Paper IV.C.5. "Evolution of the War, Military Pressures Against North Vietnam: Action and Debate, February to June 1964," (TS/Sensitive).
86. OSD msg Def 966914 4 May 1964 (S).
87. Mid-May Saigon briefing book.
88. Memo for the Record, Subject: "U.S. Embassy Briefing, Saigon 12 May 1964," by LCol [Sidney B.] Berry, [Jr.] USA (S).
89. Memo for the Record, Subject: "SecDef-COMUSMACV Meeting, 1430-1745, 12 May 1964," by Col. Charles Mount, USA (S).
90. Memo for the Record, Subject: "SecDef-COMUSMACV Conference, 0900-1300, 13 May 1964," by Col. Charles Mount, USA (S).
91. Ibid.
92. Second SecDef-MACV Conference Report, MAC J01-3849, 14 May 1964 (TS).
93. Memo for the Record, Subject: "SecDef Decisions, Saigon, 13 May 1964," by Sidney B. Berry, Jr., LCol, USA (S).
94. Embassy Saigon msg 2203, 14 May 1964 (S).
95. State Department msg 2087, 26 May 1964 (TS-NODIS).
96. State Department msg 2095, 27 May 1964, 6:14 p.m. (TS).

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97. Backup book for Honolulu Conference on 30 May 1964 (TS).
98. JCS msg 2625-64, Taylor to Felt and Harkins, 28 May 1964 (TS).
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100. "Proposed Actions in Political Problem Areas in Vietnam," in Briefing Book for Honolulu Conference, 30 May 1964 (TS).
101. Department of State msg 2184, 5 June 1964 (S).
102. McGeorge Bundy Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, 15 June 1964, with six enclosures (TS).
103. Ibid, enclosure 1.
104. Ibid, enclosure 2.
105. Embassy Saigon msg DTG 071010ZJul64 (C); unnumbered Embassy Saigon msg, 8 July 1964, SEA Cable Files - June-July 1964.
106. State Department msg 108, for the Ambassador from the President, 10 July 1964, 8:20 p.m. (S).
107. Embassy Saigon msgs 109 and 108, 15 July 1964 (S).
108. See Task Force Paper IV.C. pp. 32-33.
109. CIA Saigon msg 35014, 24 July 1964 (S).
110. Embassy Saigon msg 203, 24 July 1964 (S).
111. Embassy Saigon msgs 215, 24 July 1964 (TS); and 232, 27 July 1964 (TS).
112. Embassy Saigon msg 213, 25 July 1964 (TS).
113. Embassy Saigon msg 377, to State for the President, DTG 101407ZAug64 (S EXDIS).
114. COMUSMACV msg to DIA 8542, DTG 221105ZAug64 (S).
115. Shaplen, Robert, The Lost Revolution, (New York, 1965), pp. 268-270.
116. Shaplen, op.cit., pp. 268-270.
117. Saigon msg 393, 120735ZAug64 (S).
118. Shaplen, op.cit., p. 271.
119. State Department msg 439, 14 Aug 1964 (TS).
120. Embassy Saigon msg 465, 18 Aug 1964 (TS).

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121. State Department msg 481, 20 Aug 1964, 4:02 p.m. (S).
122. Shaplen, op.cit., pp. 271-272.
123. Ibid., pp. 272-275.
124. Ibid., pp. 275-278.
125. IV.C. p. 41.
126. Shaplen, op.cit.
127. Embassy Saigon msg 768, 6 Sep 1964 (TS-NODIS).
128. Memo from AASD/ISA Peter Solbert to SecDef I-13, 343/62; Subject: "RAND Study on South Vietnam".
129. NSAM 314, 10 Sep 1964 (TS).
130. Shaplen, op.cit., pp. 286-289.
131. Embassy Saigon msg 1035, 6 Oct 1964 (TS-EXDIS).
132. Shaplen, op.cit., pp. 291-292.
133. COMUSMACV Memorandum for Ambassador Taylor; Subject: "Assessment of the Military Situation," 24 Nov 1964, MACV J01 (S).
134. Secretary of Defense Memorandum to the Chairman, JCS, 13 Jan 1965
ASD/ISA Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, 11 Jan 1965;
JCSM 1047-64, 17 Dec 1964 (S).
135. JCS 2343/499, 3 Dec 1964 (TS); "Note by the Secretary of the JCS on Ambassador Taylor's Visit, Enclosing Draft Instructions, etc."
136. Shaplen, op.cit., pp. 290-296.
137. DJSM-744-65, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 26 June 1965 (S).
138. Saigon msg of 7 Mar 1965, "Ambassador Taylor's Analysis of the Overall Situation in Vietnam", included in General Johnsons' "Report on Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam", Tab A. (S).
139. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, CJCS, CNO, CS/USAF, Commandant, USMC from General H. K. Johnson, CS/USA; "Report on Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam," 14 Mar 1965 (S).
140. HQUSMACV, Monthly Evaluation Report, March 1965 (S).
141. Deptel 2065 Immediate to Saigon, 24 Mar 1965 (S/LIMDIS).

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142. Ibid. Although this message predates the Taylor memo of 31 March, it is believed to be, if not identical, substantially the same, because the available copy of it indicates that extra copies for information were sent out to other officials as late as 14 April.
143. Unsigned White House memo - Subject: "Key Elements for Discussion Thursday, April 1 at 5:30 p.m.", April 1, 1965 (TS). Probably prepared by McGeorge Bundy.
144. NSAM 328, 6 April 1965 (TS).
145. Memorandum for the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, 2 April 1965, from the Director of CIA, John A. McCone.
146. Embassy Saigon msg 3359 to SecState for the President priority 13 Apr 1965 (TS-NODIS).
147. Deptel 2332, 15 Apr 1965, 3:46 p.m., (TS-NODIS).
148. Joint State-Defense msg 009164, DTG 152339ZApril65 (TS-LIMDIS).
149. Department of the Army msg to COMUSMACV (info for Embassy Saigon), DTG 161459ZApr65 (TS).
150. Embassy Saigon msg 3419, Ambassador Taylor to McGeorge Bundy, 17 April 1965 (TS-NODIS).
151. Embassy Saigon msg 3421 to State for McGeorge Bundy, 17 Apr 1965 (TS-NODIS).
152. Embassy Saigon msg 3423 to SecState (in two sections) 17 Apr 1965 immediate (TS-EXDIS).
153. Embassy Saigon msg 3432, 17 Apr 1965 (TS).