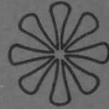


IV.C Evolution of the War (26 Vols.)

Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968
(16 Vols.)

2. Military Pressures Against NVN (3 Vols.)
 - c. November – December 1964

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS
1945 - 1967



VIETNAM TASK FORCE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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IV. C. 2. (c)

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1964

PART III

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MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NVN: NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1964

SUMMARY and ANALYSIS

In the late fall of 1964, President Johnson made a tentative decision in favor of limited military pressures against North Vietnam. He acted on the consensus recommendation of his principal advisors, a consensus achieved by a process of compromising alternatives into a lowest-common-denominator proposal at the sub-cabinet and cabinet level, thereby precluding any real Presidential choice among viable options. The choices he was given all included greater pressures against North Vietnam. The Presidential decision itself was for a limited and tightly controlled two-step build-up of pressures. The first phase involved an intensification of existing harassment activities with reprisals; the second, which was approved in principle only, was to be a sustained, slowly escalating air campaign against the North. The spectrum of choice could have run from (a) a judgment that the situation in the South was irretrievable and, hence, a decision to begin the withdrawal of U.S. forces; to (b) a judgment that the maintenance of a non-communist South Vietnam was indispensable to U.S. strategic interests and, therefore, required a massive U.S. intensification of the war both in the North and in the South. The extreme withdrawal option was rejected almost without surfacing for consideration since it was in direct conflict with the independent, non-communist SVN commitments of NSAM 288. The opposite option of massive involvement, which was essentially the JCS recommendation at an early point in these deliberations, was shunted aside because both its risks and costs were too high.

Short of those extremes, however, were two other alternatives that were briefly considered by the Working Group as fallback positions but rejected before they were fully explored. While both came into some conflict with the commitments to South Vietnam of NSAM 288, they could have been justified as flowing from another long-standing U.S. conviction, namely that ultimately the war would have to be won in the South by the South Vietnamese. These fallback positions were outlined in the following manner:

- "1. To hold the situation together as long as possible so that we have time to strengthen other areas of Asia.
- "2. To take forceful enough measures in the situation so that we emerge from it, even in the worst case, with our standing as the principal helper against Communist expansion as little impaired as possible.
- "3. To make clear...to nations, in Asia particularly, that failure in South Vietnam, if it comes, was due to special local factors that do not apply to other nations we are committed to defend...."

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In operational terms the first would have meant holding the line--placing an immediate, low ceiling on the number of U.S. personnel in SVN, and taking vigorous efforts to build on a stronger base elsewhere, possibly Thailand. The second alternative would have been to undertake some spectacular, highly visible supporting action like a limited-duration selective bombing campaign as a last effort to save the South; to have accompanied it with a propaganda campaign about the unwinnability of the war given the GVN's ineptness and; then, to have sought negotiations through compromise and neutralization when the bombing failed. Neither of these options was ever developed.

The recommendation of the Principals to the President left a gap between the maximum objective of NSAM 288 and the marginal pressures against the North being proposed to achieve that objective. There are two by no means contradictory explanations of this gap.

One explanation is the way in which pressures and the controlled use of force were viewed by the Principals. There is some reason to believe that the Principals thought that carefully calculated doses of force could bring about predictable and desirable responses from Hanoi. The threat implicit in minimum but increasing amounts of force ("slow squeeze") would, it was hoped by some, ultimately bring Hanoi to the table on terms favorable to the U.S. Underlying this optimistic view was a significant underestimate of the level of the DRV commitment to victory in the South, and an overestimate of the effectiveness of U.S. pressures in weakening that resolve. The assumption was that the threat value of limited pressures coupled with declarations of firm resolve on our part would be sufficient to force the DRV into major concessions. Therefore, the U.S. negotiating posture could be a tough one. Another factor which, no doubt, commended the proposal to the Administration was the relatively low-cost--in political terms--of such action. Furthermore, these limited measures would give the GVN a temporary breathing spell, it was thought, in which to regroup itself, both politically and militarily should stronger action involving a direct confrontation between the two Vietnams be required at some future date. And lastly, it was the widely shared belief that the recommendation was a moderate solution that did not foreclose future options for the President if the measures did not fully achieve their intended results. The JCS differed from this view on the grounds that if we were really interested in affecting Hanoi's will, we would have to hit hard at its capabilities.

A second explanation of the gap between ends and means is a more simple one. In a phrase, we had run out of alternatives other than pressures. The GVN was not reforming, ARVN was being hit hard, further U.S. aid and advice did not seem to do the trick, and something was needed to keep the GVN afloat until we were ready to decide on further actions at a later date. Bombing the North would fit that bill, and make it look like we tried.

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The President was cautious and equivocal in approaching the decision. Indicative of his reluctance to widen the U.S. commitment and of his desire to hedge his bets was the decision to make phase II of the new policy contingent on GVN reform and improvement. Ambassador Taylor was sent back to Saigon in December after the White House meetings with the understanding that the U.S. Government did not believe:

"that we should incur the risks which are inherent in any expansion of hostilities without first assuring that 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...."

As with the discussions of the preceding six months, the decisions at the end of 1964 marked another step in the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The following is a summary of the November - December, 1964 and January, 1965 deliberations.

On the eve of the November election, and after the decision not to retaliate against the North for the VC attack on the Bien Hoa airbase on November 1, the President appointed an inter-agency working group and asked it to conduct a thorough re-examination of our Vietnam policy and to present him with alternatives and recommendations as to our future course of action. That such a review should have been undertaken so soon after the policy deliberations and decisions of September is at first glance surprising. The President, however, was now being elected in his own right with an overwhelming mandate and all the sense of opportunity and freedom to reconsider past policy and current trends that such a victory invariably brings. In retrospect, there appears to have been, in fact, remarkably little latitude for reopening the basic questions about U.S. involvement in the Vietnam struggle. NSAM 288 did not seem open to question. In Vietnam, our now substantial efforts and our public affirmation of resolve to see the war through to success had failed to reverse either the adverse trend of the war or the continuing deterioration of South Vietnamese political life. The September deliberations had produced only a decision against precipitate action and had done nothing to redress the situation. Significantly, however, they had revealed the existence of an Administration consensus that military pressures against the North would be required at some proximate future date for a variety of reasons. Now, in November, with a new electoral mandate and the abundant evidence of the inadequacy of current measures, the President was once again looking for new ideas and proposals--a low-cost option with prospects for speedy, positive results.

The Working Group's first job had been to examine U.S. interests and objectives in South Vietnam. This subject stirred some of the most heated debate of the entire Working Group project. At the outset, the maximum statement of U.S. interests and objectives in South Vietnam was accompanied by two fallback positions--the first a compromise, the second merely rationalizations for withdrawal. The JCS representative took testy exception to

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including the fallback positions in the Group's paper and cited JCS Memoranda on the critical importance of South Vietnam to the U.S. position in Asia. His forceful objections were effective and they were downgraded in the final paper which, while also pointedly rejecting the "domino theory" as over-simplified, nevertheless, went on to describe the effect of the fall of South Vietnam in much the same terms. Specifically pointing up the danger to the other Southeast Asian countries and to Asia in general, the paper concluded:

"There is a great deal we could still do to reassure these countries, but the picture of a defense line clearly breached could have serious effects and could easily, over time, tend to unravel the whole Pacific and South Asian defense structures."

In spite of these concessions, the JCS refused to associate itself with the final formulation of interests and objectives, holding that the domino theory was perfectly appropriate to the South Vietnamese situation.

One of the other important tasks assigned to the Working Group was the intelligence assessment of the effectiveness of measures against the North in improving the situation in the South. The initial appraisal of the intelligence community was that "the basic elements of Communist strength in South Vietnam remain indigenous," and that "even if severely damaged" the DRV could continue to support a reduced level of VC activity. While bombing might reduce somewhat the level of support for the VC and give the GVN a respite, there was very little likelihood that it would break the will of Hanoi. The estimate was that Hanoi was confident of greater staying power than the U.S. in a contest of attrition. These views were challenged by the JCS member who stressed that the military damage of air strikes would appreciably degrade DRV and VC capabilities. In deference to this view, the final Working Group estimate gave greater emphasis to the military effectiveness of strikes, although it was pessimistic about the extent of damage the DRV leaders would be willing to incur before reconsidering their objectives. It concluded with the assessment that there was very little likelihood of either Chinese or Soviet intervention on behalf of the DRV if pressures were adopted by the U.S.

As the Working Group toiled through November in its effort to develop options, it focused on three alternative courses of action. Option A was essentially a continuation of military and naval actions currently underway or authorized in the September decisions, including prompt reprisals against the North for attacks on U.S. forces and VC "spectaculars". It also included a resistance to negotiations until the North had agreed in advance to our conditions. Option B augmented current policies with systematic, sustained military pressures against the North and a resistance to negotiations unless we could carry them on while continuing the bombing. Option C proposed only a modest campaign against the North as compared with option B

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and was designed to bring the DRV to the negotiating table. If that occurred the pressures were to be suspended--although with the threat of resumption should negotiations break down.

In the course of the month, these options converged and the distinctions between them blurred. In particular, option A was expanded to include some low-level pressures against the North; the negotiations element of option B was, in effect, dropped and the pressures were to be applied at a faster, less flexible pace; and option C was stiffened to resemble the first incarnation of option B--the pressures would be stronger and the negotiating position tougher. Thus, by the end of the month when the Working Group's proposals were presented to the NSC Principals for consideration before a recommendation was made to the President, all options included pressures against the North, and, in effect, excluded negotiations in the short-run, since the terms and pre-conditions proposed in all three options were entirely unrealistic. The policy climate in Washington simply was not receptive to any suggestion that U.S. goals might have to be compromised. And, in proposing pressures against the North, the Working Group was conscious of the danger that they might generate compelling world-wide pressure on the U.S. for negotiations. How large a role the specific perception of the President's views, validated or unvalidated, may have played in the Working Group's narrowing of the options is not clear. It seems likely, however, that some guidance from the White House was being received.

During the last week in November, the NSC Principals met to consider the Working Group's proposals. They were joined on November 27 by Ambassador Taylor. Taylor's report on conditions in South Vietnam was extremely bleak. To improve South Vietnamese morale and confidence, and to "drive the DRV out of its reinforcing role and obtain its cooperation in bringing an end to the Viet Cong insurgency," he urged that military pressures against the North be adopted. His report had a considerable impact on the Principals and later on the President. As the discussions continued through the several meetings of that week, opinion began to converge in favor of some combination of an "extended option A" and the first measures against the North of option C.

In the end, the Principals decided on a two-phase recommendation to the President. Phase I would be merely an extension of current actions with some increased air activity by the U.S. in Laos and tit-for-tat reprisals for VC attacks on U.S. forces or other major incidents. During this period, the GVN would be informed of our desires for its reform and when these were well underway, phase II, a campaign of gradually escalating air strikes against the North, would begin. This proposal was presented to the President on December 1. He approved phase I and gave assent, at least in principle, to phase II. In approving these measures, the President appears to have been reluctant to grant final authorization for phase II until he felt it was absolutely necessary.

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If a consensus was reached within the Administration in favor of military pressures against the North, it certainly reflected no commonly held rationale for such action. Generally speaking the military (MACV, CINCPAC, JCS) favored a strong campaign against the North to interdict the infiltration routes, to destroy the overall capacity of the North to support the insurgency, and to destroy the DRV's will to continue support of the Viet Cong. The State Department (with the exception of George Ball) and the civilian advisors to Secretary McNamara favored a gradually mounting series of pressures that would place the North in a slow squeeze and act as both carrot and stick to settling the war on our terms. As would be expected, State was also concerned with the international political implications of such steps. Bombing the North would demonstrate our resolve, not only to the South Vietnamese but also to the other Southeast Asian countries and to China, whose containment was one of the important justifications of the entire American involvement. Walt Rostow, the Chairman of State's Policy Planning Council, took a slightly different view, emphasizing the importance of pressures as a clear signal to the North and to China of U.S. determination and resolve and its willingness to engage the tremendous power at its disposal in support of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva agreements. Ambassador Taylor supported strikes against the North as a means of reducing infiltration and as a way of bolstering South Vietnamese morale.

As is readily apparent, there was no dearth of reasons for striking North. Indeed, one almost has the impression that there were more reasons than were required. But in the end, the decision to go ahead with the strikes seems to have resulted as much from the lack of alternative proposals as from any compelling logic advanced in their favor. By January, for example, William Bundy, while still supporting the pressures, could only offer the following in their favor:

"on balance we believe that such action would have some faint hope of really improving the Vietnamese situation, and, above all, would put us in a much stronger position to hold the next line of defense, namely Thailand." / "And it would put us in a better position in our Asian relations / "since we would have appeared to Asians to have done a lot more about it."

It is interesting to note that during the deliberations of September one of the preconditions to such strikes had been generally acknowledged as a unity of domestic American opinion in support of such Presidentially authorized action. During the November debates, this is no longer an important factor. Indeed, it is openly conceded that such action is likely to evoke opposition in both domestic and international public opinion. Another interesting aspect of this policy debate was that the question of Constitutional authority for open acts of war against a sovereign nation was never seriously raised.

Phase I of the newly approved program went into effect in mid-December. The BARREL ROLL "armed recce" by U.S. aircraft in the Laotian panhandle began on a limited scale on December 14. It had been foreseen that the

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number of sorties would slowly increase with each succeeding week. However, once the first week's level of two missions of four aircraft each was determined by Secretary McNamara, it became the guideline for the remainder of December and January. Covert GVN operations along the North Vietnamese coast were continued at about the level of the previous months and JCS proposals for direct U.S. air and naval support were rejected. Furthermore, the public disclosure of information on DRV infiltration into the South was deferred at the request of Secretary McNamara. On December 24, the Viet Cong bombed a U.S. officers billet in Saigon killing two Americans. MACV, CINCPAC, the JCS, and Ambassador Taylor all called immediately for a reprisal strike against the North of the kind authorized under phase I. For reasons still not clear, the Administration decided against such a reprisal. Thus, in purely military terms, the phase I period turned out to be little more than a continuation of measures already underway. (The BARREL ROLL activity apparently was not differentiated by the DRV from RIAF strikes until well into January.)

One of the explanations for this failure to fully implement the December 1 decisions was the political crisis that erupted in South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor had returned to South Vietnam on December 7 and immediately set about getting the GVN to undertake the reforms we desired, making clear to both the civilian and military leaders that the implementation of phase II was contingent on their efforts to revive the flagging war effort and morale in the South. For his efforts, he was rewarded with a military purge of the civilian government in late December and rumored threats that he would be declared persona non grata. The political crisis boiled on into January with no apparent solution in sight in spite of our heavy pressure on the military to return to a civilian regime. And, while Taylor struggled with the South Vietnamese generals, the war effort continued to decline.

At the same time that Taylor had been dispatched to Saigon a vigorous U.S. diplomatic effort had been undertaken with our Asian and NATO allies to inform them of the forthcoming U.S. intensification of the war, with the expected eventual strikes against the North. The fact that our allies now came to expect this action may have been a contributing reason in the February decision to proceed with phase II in spite of the failure of the South Vietnamese to have complied with our requirements. In any case, it added to the already considerable momentum behind the policy of striking the North. By the end of January 1965, William Bundy, McNaughton, Taylor and others had come to believe that we had to proceed with phase II irrespective of what the South Vietnamese did.

Clear indication that the Administration was considering some kind of escalation came on January 25. Ambassador Taylor was asked to comment on a proposal to withdraw U.S. dependents from Saigon so as to "clear the decks." Previously, this action, which was now approved by the JCS, was always associated with pressures against the North. While there is no indication of any decision at this point to move into phase II, it is clear that the preparations were already underway.

CHRONOLOGY

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MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM: NOV 1964 - JAN 1965

IV.C.

CHRONOLOGY

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16 Oct 64	Embassy Saigon Message, JPS 303, Taylor to the President	Ambassador Taylor reports greatly increased infiltration from the North, including North Vietnamese regulars, and a steadily worsening situation in the South.
21 Oct 64	JCSM 893-64	The JCS urge Secretary McNamara to back military measures to seize control of the border areas of South Vietnam and to cut off the supply and direction of the Viet Cong by direct measures against North Vietnam.
27 Oct 64	JCSM 902-64	On the basis of the new intelligence on infiltration levels, the JCS again recommend direct military pressures against the North.
1 Nov 64	Viet Cong Attack Bien Hoa Airbase	In a daring strike, the Viet Cong staged a mortar attack on the large U.S. airbase at Bien Hoa, killing four Americans, destroying five B-57s, and damaging eight others.
	White House Decides Not to Retaliate	Concerned about possible further North Vietnamese escalation and the uncertainty of the Red Chinese response, the White House decides, against the advice of Ambassador Taylor, not to retaliate in the tit-for-tat fashion envisaged by NSAM 314. As a result of the attack, however, an interagency Working Group of the NSC is established to study future courses of U.S. action under the Chairmanship of William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs.
3 Nov 63	Civilian Named Premier	Tran Van Huong is named Premier in SVN.
	First Meeting of NSC Working Group	The NSC Working Group held its first meeting. Other members are Michael Forrestal and Marshall Green from

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		State, John McNaughton from ISA, Harold Ford for CIA, and Admiral Lloyd Mustin from JCS. Work continues for three weeks.
3 Nov 64	President Re-elected	In a landslide victory, President Johnson is re-elected with a new Vice President, Hubert Humphrey.
4 Nov 64	JCSM 933-64	The JCS place in writing their request for reprisal action against North Vietnam in retaliation for the Bien Hoa attack. Failure to act may be misinterpreted by the North Vietnamese as a lack of will and determination in Vietnam.
14 Nov 64	CGCS Memorandum to SecDef, CM 258-64; and JCSM 955-64	In separate memos to the Secretary, the JCS recommend covert GVN air strikes against North Vietnam and additional U.S. deployments to South East Asia to make possible implementation of U.S. strikes should these be approved.
17 Nov 64	Working Group Circulates Draft "Options" for Comment	The Working Group circulates its draft paper on the "Options" available to the U.S. in South Vietnam. They are three: (A) continuation of present policies in the hope of an improvement in the South but strong U.S. resistance to negotiations; (B) strong U.S. pressures against the North and resistance of negotiations until the DRV was ready to comply with our demands; and (C) limited pressures against the North coupled with vigorous efforts to get negotiations started and recognition that we would have to compromise our objectives. Option B is favored by the Working Group.
18 Nov 64	JCSM 967-64	The JCS renews its recommendation for strikes against the North tempering it slightly in terms of "a controlled program of systematically increased military pressures."

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21 Nov 64	Revised Working Group Draft	Having received comments from the different agencies, the Working Group revises its draft slightly, takes note of different viewpoints and submits its work to the NSC Principals for the consideration.
23 Nov 64	Rostow Memo to Sec State	Taking a somewhat different tack, the then Director of State's Policy Planning Staff, W. W. Rostow, proposes military pressures against the North as a method of clearly signaling U.S. determination and commitment to the North.
24 Nov 64	NSC Principals Meeting	No consensus is reached, but Option A is generally rejected as promising only eventual defeat. Option B is favored by the JCS and CIA, while State and OSD favor Option C. No firm conclusion is reached on the issue of sending ground troops to South Vietnam.
27 Nov 64	Taylor Meets with Principals	Having returned for consultations, Ambassador Taylor meets with the NSC Principals and after giving a gloomy report of the situation in South Vietnam, recommends that to shore up the GVN and improve morale we take limited actions against the North but resist negotiations until the GVN is improved and the DRV is hurting. He proposed an extended Option A with the first stages of Option C. This proposal was adopted by the Principals as the recommendation to be made to the President.
28 Nov 64	NSC Principals Meeting	In a follow-up meeting, the Principals decide to propose a two phase program to the President. The first phase would be a thirty-day

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		period of slightly increased pressure such as the resumption of the DE SOTO patrols and U.S. armed recce on the Laotian corridor while we tried to get reforms in South Vietnam. The second phase would involve direct air strikes against the North as in Option C. William Bundy was charged with preparing a draft NSAM to this effect and an infiltration study was commissioned.
30 Nov 64	NSC Principals Meeting	Meeting to review the draft prepared by Bundy, the Principals decided not to call it a NSAM. Its provisions are those recommended on 28 Nov. Phase II would be a graduated and mounting set of primarily air pressures against the North coupled with efforts to sound out the DRV on readiness to negotiate on U.S. terms. A recommendation on linking U.S. actions to DRV infiltration is deleted.
1 Dec 64	White House Meeting	While the exact decisions made at this meeting of the Principals with the President are not available, it is clear that he approved in general terms the concept outlined in the Bundy paper. He gave his approval for implementation of only Phase I, however. The President stressed the need for Taylor to get improvement from the GVN and the need to brief our allies on our new course of action, and to get more assistance from them in the conflict.
3 Dec 64	Taylor Meets President	The President meets privately with Taylor and gives him instructions that he is to explain the new program to the GVN, indicate to its leaders that the Phase II U.S.

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		strikes against the North are contingent on improvement in the South, and explain that these will be cooperative efforts.
4 Dec 64	Cooper Report on Infiltration	A thorough study on North Vietnamese infiltration as commissioned by the Principals is submitted to the NSC and later forwarded to Saigon. Decisions on its release are continually deferred.
7 Dec 64	Taylor Meets with Premier Huong	The day after his return to Saigon, Taylor meets with Premier Huong and with General Khanh and outlines the new U.S. policy and states the requirements this places on the GVN.
7 - 9 Dec 64	Prime Minister Wilson briefed	In Washington on a state visit, British Prime Minister Wilson is thoroughly briefed on the forthcoming U.S. actions. On 4 Dec., William Bundy had gone to New Zealand and Australia to present the new policy and seek support. Other envoys were meeting with the remaining Asian allies.
9 Dec 64	Second Taylor-Huong-Khanh Meeting	At a second meeting with Huong and Khanh, Taylor presents a detailed set of actions he desires the GVN to take to improve the situation and receives agreement from the two leaders.
10 Dec 64	Souvanna Phouma Approves U.S. Laos Strikes	The U.S. proposal for armed air recon over the Laotian corridor is presented to Souvanna Phouma who gives his assent.
11 Dec 64	GVN Announces Greater Efforts	Complying with Taylor's request, the GVN announces stepped-up efforts to improve the campaign against the VC and to reform the government.

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12 Dec 64	SecDef Approves JCS Proposal for Naval Actions	The Secretary approves a JCS proposal for shore bombardment, naval patrols and offshore aerial recce for the first thirty days. A decision on the Phase II was deferred.
	NSC Principals Approve Armed recce in Laos	As planned, the NSC approved armed air recce over the Laotian corridor with the exact number and frequency of the patrols to be controlled by SecDef.
14 Dec 64	BARREL ROLL Begins	The first sorties of U.S. aircraft in the "armed recce" of the Laotian corridor, known as BARREL ROLL, take place. They mark the beginning of the thirty-day Phase I of the limited pressures.
18 Dec 64	Level of Laotian Missions Set	Secretary McNamara sets two missions of four aircraft each as the weekly level of BARREL ROLL activity.
19 Dec 64	NSC Principals Meeting	The NSC Principals approve McNamara's recommendation that BARRELL ROLL missions be held at constant levels through Phase I. It is revealed that adverse sea conditions have brought maritime operations against the DRV to a virtual halt. At McNamara's insistence it is agreed that the infiltration study will not be made public.
	Khanh Purges Civilian Government	Late in the evening, the military high command, led by Khanh, moved to remove all power from the civilian regime of Premier Huong by dissolving the High National Council. Khanh assumes power.
20 Dec 64	Taylor Meets With ARVN Leaders	In a meeting with the leading South Vietnamese military officers, Taylor once again outlined the actions.

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		required from the GVN by the U.S. before Phase II could be started.
22 Dec 64	Khanh Publicly Repudiates Taylor	After having given initial appearances of understanding the difficulty that the military purge placed the U.S. in, Khanh on Dec. 22 holds a news conference and states that the military is resolved not to carry out the policy of any foreign power.
24 Dec 64	Rumors of Taylor's Expulsion	Rumors are received by the Embassy that Khanh intends to have Taylor declared <u>persona non grata</u> . Vigorous U.S. efforts to dissuade him and the use of Phase II as leverage cause Khanh to reconsider.
	U.S. BOQ Bombed; Embassy Saigon Message 1939; CINCPAC Message to JCS, 262251Z Dec; JCSM 1076-64	In a terror attack this Christmas Eve, the VC bomb a U.S. BOQ in Saigon. Two U.S. officers are killed, 58 injured. Taylor urges reprisals against the North. He is supported by CINCPAC and the JCS.
29 Dec 64	NSC Principals Meeting	At the meeting of the NSC Principals, a decision against reprisals for the barracks bombing is taken in spite of the strong recommendations above. At the same meeting, ISA reported the readiness of the Phillipines, ROK, and GRC to send military assistance to South Vietnam.
31 Dec 64	Embassy Saigon Message 2010	Taylor proposes going forward with the Phase II U.S. strikes against the North in spite of the political crisis in the South and under any conceivable U.S. relations with the GVN short of complete abandonment.
	CJCS Memo to DepSecDef, CM 347-64	The JCS recommend the addition of several air missions to already approved operations, including two air strikes by unmarked VNAF aircraft

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		against the North, and U.S. air escort for returning GVN naval craft.
3 Jan 65	Rusk TV Interview	Secretary Rusk appears on a Sunday TV interview program and defends U.S. policy, ruling out either a U.S. withdrawal or a major expansion of the war. The public and Congressional debate on the war had heated up considerably since the Army take-over in South Vietnam in December. The debate continues through January with Senator Morse the most vocal and sharpest critic of the Administration.
4 Jan 65	Soviets call for new Conference on Laos	Renewing their earlier efforts, the Soviets call again for a conference on the Laotian problem.
5 Jan 65	NSC Principals Meet	The Principals disapprove the JCS recommendation for VNAF strikes with unmarked aircraft against the North. The JCS voice concern at the failure to begin planning for Phase II of the pressures program. But no decision to go ahead is taken.
6 Jan 65	William Bundy Memo to Rusk	In view of the continued deterioration of the situation in the South and the prevailing view that the U.S. was going to seek a way out, Bundy recommended some limited measures, short of Phase II (i.e. recce, a reprisal, evacuation of U.S. dependents, etc.), to strengthen our hand. There were risks in this course but it would improve our position with respect to the other SEA nations if things got rapidly worse in SVN and we had to contemplate a withdrawal.

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8 Jan 65	First Korean Troops Go to South Vietnam	The first contingent of 2,000 South Korean troops leave for South Vietnam.
9 Jan 65	Generals Announce Return to Civilian Government	Under U.S. pressure, the South Vietnamese generals announce that matters of state will be left in the future in the hands of a civilian government. The joint Huong-Khanh communique promises to convene a constituent assembly.
11 Jan 65	US-GVN Aid Discussions Resume	With the return to civilian government, the U.S. resumes its discussions with the GVN on aid and measures to improve the military situation.
14 Jan 65	U.S. Laotian Operations Revealed	A UPI story reveals the U.S. BARREL ROLL armed recon missions in Laos and tells the story of the YANKEE TEAM armed escort for the RLAF.
17 Jan 65	Buddhist Riots	Shortly after the GVN announcement of increased draft calls, Buddhist protest riots break out in several cities against the allegedly anti-Buddhist military leaders. Disturbances continue through the month.
22 Jan 65	Soviets Affirm Support of DRV	In letters to Hanoi and Peking, Gromyko affirms Soviet support for the DRV struggle against American imperialism.
23 Jan 65	USIS Library Burned in Hue	Rioting Buddhists burn the USIS library in Hue.
27 Jan 65	McNaughton paper, "Observations re South Vietnam After Khanh's 'Re-Coup'"	The U.S. stakes in South Vietnam were defined as holding buffer land for Thailand and Malaysia and maintaining our national honor. They required continued perseverance in a

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OF DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		bad situation, taking some risks such as reprisals. It was important to remember that our objective was the containment of China not necessarily the salvation of South Vietnam. In this effort, however, we should soon begin reprisal strikes against the North. They would not help the GVN much but would have a positive overall effect on our policy in SEA.
	Generals Withdraw Support from Huong	The generals under Khanh's leadership act once again to eliminate the civilian government. This time they succeed in their coup and the U.S. only protests.
28 Jan 65	General Oanh Named Premier	General Nguyen Xuan Oanh is named acting Premier by General Khanh.

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MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM

NOVEMBER 1964 - JANUARY 1965

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I.

IV.C.2.

POLICY DEBATE IN NOVEMBER

In their Southeast Asia policy discussions of August-October 1964, Administration officials had accepted the view that overt military pressures against North Vietnam probably would be required. Barring some critical developments, however, it was generally conceded that these should not begin until after the new year. Preparations for applying such pressures were made in earnest during November.

1. Immediate Antecedents

In Administration policy discussions, the two developments most often cited as perhaps warranting implementation of overt military pressures before 1965 were: (1) increased levels of infiltration of guerrillas into South Vietnam and (2) serious deterioration of the GVN. Evidence of both was reported to Washington during October.

National intelligence estimates gave the GVN little hope of surviving the apathy and discouragement with which it was plagued. They reported, "Government ministries in Saigon are close to a standstill, with only the most routine operations going on." U.S./GVN planning was not being followed by GVN action. A coup by disgruntled South Vietnamese military figures was believed imminent (one had been attempted unsuccessfully on 13 September). Moreover, the civilian government which General Khanh had promised for the end of October was seen as unlikely to bring about any real improvement. 1/

A threat of GVN capitulation to the NLF, in the form of accepting a coalition government, was also seen as a real possibility. Citing "numerous signs that Viet Cong agents have played a role in helping sustain the level of civil disorder...in the cities," intelligence reports estimated that it was the Communist intention to seek victory through a "neutralist coalition" rather than by force of arms. Perhaps straining a bit, an estimate stated, "The principal GVN leaders have not to our knowledge been in recent contact with the Communists, but there has been at least one instance of informal contact between a lesser governmental official and members of the NLF." 2/ Another estimate portrayed the DRV and Chinese as regarding South Vietnam as a "developing political vacuum," soon to be filled "with a neutralist coalition government dominated by pro-Communist elements." 3/

Reports of increasing infiltration began arriving in mid-October. Ambassador Taylor cabled on the 14th that he had received indications of a "definite step-up in infiltration from North Vietnam, particularly in the northern provinces...." He went on to report:

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"A recent analysis suggests that if the present rate of infiltration is maintained the annual figure for 1964 will be of the order of 10,000. Furthermore...we are finding more and more 'bona fide' North Vietnamese soldiers among the infiltrates. I feel sure that we must soon adopt new and drastic methods to reduce and eventually end such infiltration if we are ever to succeed in South Vietnam." 4/

A similar report was cabled directly to the White House on 16 October. In it, Ambassador Taylor repeated his comments on infiltration and advised the President of the steadily worsening situation in South Vietnam. The Ambassador reported the infiltration of northern-born conscripts and relayed GVN claims that they were coming in organized units. He pointed out that with the advent of the dry season, the problem would assume even greater magnitude and urged that it be given immediate attention. 5/

The Taylor estimates of end-year infiltration totals probably were quite alarming. If accurate they indicated that the rate had risen sharply during September and early October: The total number of infiltrates for 1964 as of 1 September was then estimated as 4,700. 6/ Of particular concern, no doubt, was the apparent emphasis on reinforcing Communist units in the Central Highlands and in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. These warnings came hard on the heels of widespread press reports of badly weakened GVN control in three portions of the country. 7/

The JCS seized on these fresh reports and resubmitted their proposals for taking prompt measures against North Vietnam. On 21 October, they argued:

"Application of the principle of isolating the guerrilla force from its reinforcement and support and then to fragment and defeat the forces has not been successful in VietnamThe principle must be applied by control of the national boundaries or by eliminating or cutting off the source of supply and direction." 8/

On the 27th they submitted a major proposal for "strong military actions" to counteract the trends cited in the national intelligence estimates and in the Taylor cables. In language identical to that used in two August memoranda and at the September strategy meeting, they stated that such actions were "required now in order to prevent the collapse of the U.S. position in Southeast Asia." They then recommended a program of actions to support the following strategy:

a. Depriving the Viet Cong of out of country assistance by applying military pressures on the...DRV to the extent necessary to cause the DRV to cease support and direction of the insurgency.

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b. Depriving the VC of assistance within SVN by expanding the counterinsurgency effort -- military, economic, and political -- within SVN.

c. Continuing to seek a viable effective government in SVN based on the broadest possible consensus.

d. Maintaining a military readiness posture in Southeast Asia that:

(1) Demonstrates the U.S. will and capability to escalate the action if required.

(2) Deters a major Communist aggression in the area. 9/

The program recommended by the JCS included a list of actions to be taken within South Vietnam and a separate list of actions outside. The Chiefs had listed them in order of increasing intensity, and they requested authority "to implement now" the first six actions within the country and the first eight outside. The latter included air strikes by GVN/FARMGATE aircraft against Communist LOC's in Laos and in the southern portion of North Vietnam. 10/

In the context of the reported worsening situation in South Vietnam, the JCS proposal was given serious consideration in OSD. Since Ambassador Taylor had expressed concern over initiating overt pressures against North Vietnam "before we have a responsible set of authorities to work with in South Vietnam," a copy of the JCS paper was forwarded to him for review and comment. The OSD's stated intention was to consider the Ambassador's views before developing a proposal to present to President Johnson. 11/

While this proposal was still under consideration (1 November 1964), Viet Cong forces attacked U.S. facilities at the Bien Hoa airbase with 81mm mortar fire. Four American servicemen were killed, and five B-57 tactical bombers were destroyed, and major damage was inflicted on eight others. 12/

Administration attention was focused immediately on the question of what the United States should do in response to the Bien Hoa provocation. It will be recalled that such an eventuality had been discussed at the September strategy meeting. The Presidential directive which resulted from it stated: "We should be prepared to respond as appropriate against the DRV in the event of any attack on U.S. units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN." 13/ As of the end of October (in anticipation of resumed DE SOTO Patrols), elements of our Pacific forces were reported as "poised and ready" to execute reprisals for any DRV attacks on our naval vessels. Thus, there was a rather large expectancy among Administration officials that the United States would do something in retaliation.

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Apparently, the decision was made to do nothing -- at least not of a retaliatory nature. At a White House meeting to discuss possible courses of action, on 1 November, "concern was expressed that proposed U.S. retaliatory punitive actions could trigger North Vietnamese/CHICOM air and ground retaliatory acts." Questions were raised about "increased security measures and precautionary moves of U.S. air and ground units to protect U.S. dependents, units and installations against such retaliation. 14/ Following the meeting, a White House news release announced that the President had ordered the destroyed and badly damaged aircraft replaced. Administration officials stated that "the mortar attack must be viewed in the light of the Vietnamese war and of the whole Southeast Asian situation. If the United States is to retaliate against North Vietnam in the future," they reportedly said, "it must be for broader reasons than the strike against the Bien Hoa base." Moreover, they drew a contrast between this incident and the Tonkin Gulf attacks where our destroyers were "on United States business." 15/

Source documents available do not indicate that any further decisions were made on the Bien Hoa matter. A second meeting to discuss possible U.S. actions was "tentatively scheduled" for 2 November, but the available materials contain no evidence that it was held. 16/ President Johnson was scheduled to appear in Houston that afternoon, for his final pre-election address, and it may be that the second White House meeting was called off. In any event, unofficial reports from Saigon, two days later, stated that most of the B-57s had been withdrawn from the Bien Hoa base. While acknowledging that "some" had been removed to Clark Air Base, in the Philippines, official spokesmen in Saigon refused to comment on whether or not a wholesale withdrawal had taken place. 17/ One thing is certain; there were no retaliatory strikes authorized following the attack on the U.S. bomber base.

However, retaliatory measures were proposed. On 1 November, the JCS suggested orally to Secretary McNamara that air strikes be authorized on key Communist targets in both Laos and North Vietnam. According to the JCS plan, those in Laos would be hit within 24-36 hours after approval, with forces already in place, and these attacks would divert attention from the preparation necessary for the stronger actions to follow. The latter would include a B-52 night attack on Phuc Yen airfield (outside Hanoi), to be followed by a dawn strike by USAF and Navy tactical aircraft against other airfields and POL storage in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. 18/

Ambassador Taylor immediately cabled a Saigon Embassy-MACV recommendation for "retaliatory bombing attacks on selected DRV targets by combined U.S./VNAF air forces and for a policy statement that we will act similarly in like cases in the future." 19/ In a later cable he made specific reference to "the retaliatory principle confirmed in NSAM 314," stating that if his initial recommendation was not accepted at least a lesser alternative should be adopted. This he described as

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"intensifying 34-A operations and initiating air operations against selected targets as an interim substitute for more positive measures." 20/

On 4 November, the JCS repeated in writing their recommendations of the 1st, adding some explanatory comment and taking issue with certain aspects of the Taylor recommendations. They explained that they considered the VC attack on Bien Hoa airfield "a deliberate act of escalation and a change of the ground rules under which the VC have operated up to now." They cautioned against "undue delay or restraint" in making a response, since it "could be misinterpreted by our allies in Southeast Asia, as well as by the DRV and Communist China" and "could encourage the enemy to conduct additional attacks...." Referring to Ambassador Taylor's recommendation to announce a policy of reprisal bombing, the JCS denounced a "tit-for-tat" policy as "unduly restrictive" and tending to "pass to the DRV substantial initiatives with respect to the nature and timing of further U.S. actions." 21/ They concluded:

"Early U.S. military action against the DRV would lessen the possibility of misinterpretation by the DRV and Communist China of U.S. determination and intent and thus serve to deter further VC attacks such as that at Bien Hoa."

In the meantime, there had been created what may have been the only concrete result from the high-level policy deliberations following the Bien Hoa incident. An interagency task force, known as the NSC Working Group, had begun an intensive study of future U.S. courses of action. Recommendations from the JCS and others were passed on to that group for incorporation in their work. 22/

2. Formation of the NSC Working Group

The "NSC Working Group on SVN/SEA" held its first meeting at 0930 hours, 3 November, thus placing the decision to organize such a group at sometime earlier -- probably on 2 November or perhaps even at the high-level meeting on 1 November. Its charter was to study "immediately and intensively" the future courses of action and alternatives open to the United States in Southeast Asia and to report as appropriate to a "Principals Group" of NSC members. In turn, this group of senior officials would then recommend specific courses of action to the President. Initially, the working group was given approximately one week to ten days to complete its work. 23/ Actually, it developed and recast its reports over a period of three weeks or more.

Four agencies were represented in the formal membership of the group. The Department of State contingent included Assistant Secretary Bundy (Chairman), Marshall Green, Michael Forrestal (both of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs), and Robert Johnson (of the Policy Planning Council). Assistant Secretary (ISA) McNaughton represented OSD. Vice Admiral Lloyd Mustin was the JCS member. The CIA was represented by Harold Ford. Other staff members from these agencies assisted in work on specific topics. 24/

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The Working Group's efforts were apportioned among seven tasks, the initial input for each being accomplished by a particular member or subcommittee, as follows: 25/

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
Assessment of the current situation in South Vietnam, including policy direction of interested powers.	Intelligence community
U.S. objectives and stakes in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia.	William Bundy
Broad options (3) available to the United States.	Bundy and ISA
Alternative forms of possible negotiation.	State/Policy Planning Council
Analyses of different options <u>vis-a-vis</u> U.S. objectives and interests.	JCS to propose specific actions; Policy Planning Council to examine political impacts of the most violent option first.
Immediate actions in the period prior to Presidential decision on options.	State/Far East Bureau

Most inputs were made in the form of either (1) draft papers treating fully a topic intended for inclusion in the Working Group's final submission or (2) memoranda commenting on an initial draft paper and suggesting alterations. Because of the unique responsibilities and advisory processes of the JCS, their member apparently chose to make initial inputs largely through references to or excerpts from regular JCS documents; he also contributed to the redrafting of the option analyses. 26/ The initial papers on each of the topics were circulated among the Working Group members, reviewed in consultation with their parent organizations and modified. Some positions passed through as many as three drafts before being submitted to the Principals.

3. Working Group Assessments of the Utility of Pressures

The NSC Working Group approached its work with the general assessment that increased pressures against North Vietnam would be both useful and necessary. However, this assessment embraced a wide range of considerations stemming from the developing situation in South Vietnam and a variety of viewpoints concerning what kinds of pressures would be most effective.

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a. Sense of Urgency. As the Working Group began its deliberations, an awareness that another Bien Hoa could occur at any time was prominent in both the official and the public mind. The tenuous security of U.S. bases in South Vietnam had received wide publicity. 27/ Moreover, the news services were reporting the threat of civil protest against the new Saigon government, and the increased level of guerrilla infiltration from the North was being publicly aired. 28/ These developments lent an added sense of urgency to the Group's work. The Chairman of the Working Group was sensitive to these developments and to related attitudes within the Administration. For example, he indicated that the intelligence agencies were "on the verge of...agreement that infiltration has in fact mounted," and that the Saigon mission was "urging that we surface this by the end of this week or early next week." He stressed that "the President is clearly thinking in terms of maximum use of a Gulf of Tonkin [reprisal] rationale." The nature of such a decision was expected to be:

either for an action that would show toughness and hold the line till we can decide the big issue, or as a basis for starting a clear course of action under...broad options.

He implied that our intention to stand firm in South Vietnam was being communicated to the USSR ("Secretary Rusk is talking today to Dobrynin") and indicated the desirability of President Johnson signalling something similar rather soon through the public media. This was seen as particularly important "to counter any SVN fears of a softening in our policy," presumably in view of our not responding to the Bien Hoa attack. 29/

Chairman Bundy was aware also of the significance attached by some observers to the first U.S. actions after the Presidential election. As was pointed out to him, "all Vietnamese and other interested observers" would be watching carefully to "see what posture the newly mandated Johnson Administration will assume." For this reason, William H. Sullivan, head of the interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee (and soon to be appointed the new U.S. Ambassador to Laos), urged "that our first action be...one which gives the appearance of a determination to take risks if necessary to maintain our position in Southeast Asia." An immediate retaliation for any repetition of the Bien Hoa attack and armed reconnaissance missions in the Laotian Panhandle were cited as specific examples. He went on to recommend to Mr. Bundy:

"I feel that it is important...that the Administration go on record fairly soon placing our policy in Viet Nam within the larger perspective of our policies in the Western Pacific, especially as they involve confrontation with Communist China." 30/

A sense of urgency for the Working Group's efforts was also derived from assessments of the trends within South Vietnam. For example, the intelligence panel composed of CIA, DIA, and State/INR members saw

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little prospect for an effective GVN despite an acknowledged slowing of "adverse political trends." In their view the political situation was "extremely fragile," with the Saigon administration "plagued by confusion, apathy and poor morale" and the new leadership hampered by the older factionalism. The security situation in the countryside was assessed as having continued to deteriorate, with "Viet Cong control ...spreading over areas heretofore controlled by the government." Although indicating "better than even" chances that the GVN could "hang on for the near future and thus afford a platform upon which...^{to} prosecute the war and attempt to turn the tide," the panel painted a grim picture of its prospects. 31/ This assessment was probably instrumental in prompting Assistant Secretary McNaughton's cryptic observation that "Progress inside SVN is important, but it is unlikely despite our best ideas and efforts." Besides, he observed, if it came at all it would take "at least several months." In his view, the efforts of the Working Group, could in some measure compensate for this slow progress inside South Vietnam:

"Action against North Vietnam is to some extent a substitute for strengthening the government in South Vietnam. That is, a less active VC (on orders from DRV) can be handled by a less efficient GVN (which we expect to have)." 32/

b. Views of DRV Susceptibility. The extent to which "action against North Vietnam" might affect that nation's support of the conflicts in South Vietnam and Laos was a matter on which members of the Working Group did not fully agree. The intelligence panel members tended toward a pessimistic view. They pointed out that "the basic elements of Communist strength in South Vietnam remain indigenous," and that "even if severely damaged" the DRV could continue to support the insurrection at a lessened level. Therefore, they stressed that the U.S. ability to compel a halt to the DRV support depended on eroding Hanoi's will and persuading the DRV:

that the price of mounting the insurrection in the South at a high level would be too great and that it would be preferable to reduce its aid...and direct at least a temporary reduction of V.C. activity.

As the panel members saw it, this respite would then provide an opportunity to stabilize and improve the GVN. But, in their words, "Even so, lasting success would depend upon a substantial improvement in the energy and effectiveness of the RVN government and pacification machinery." 33/

However, the intelligence panel did not concede very strong chances for breaking the will of Hanoi. They thought it quite likely that the DRV was willing to suffer damage "in the course of a test of wills with the United States over the course of events in South Vietnam." To support this view, they cited Hanoi's belief that international

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pressure would develop against deliberate U.S. expansion of the war. Further, that given present trends in South Vietnam, both Hanoi and Peking had good reason to expect success without having to initiate actions carrying the risk of the kind of war which would expose them to "the great weight of superior U.S. weaponry." The panel also viewed Hanoi as estimating that the U.S. will to maintain resistance in South-east Asia could in time be eroded -- that the recent U.S. election would provide the Johnson Administration with "greater policy flexibility" than it previously felt it had. 34/

This view was challenged by the Working Group's JCS member as being too "negative." Interpreting the panel's non-specific reference to "policy flexibility" in an extreme sense, he wrote:

"If this means that Hanoi thinks we are now in position to accept world-wide humiliation with respect to our formerly stated objectives in Vietnam, this is another reason why it is desirable that we take early measures to disabuse their thinking."

Moreover, he indicated the JCS view that the slightly improved hopes for government stability (acknowledged by the panel) were good reason why "early and positive actions" should be taken. This point was reinforced by his judgment that (in contrast with its impact on esprit and political effectiveness) the GVN's "principal task is to afford the platform upon which the RVN armed forces, with U.S. assistance, prosecute the war." 35/

In criticism of the intelligence panel's emphasis on the need to influence DRV will, Admiral Mustin indicated that enemy capabilities represented a more appropriate target. He stated the JCS assessment that:

"a. The actual U.S. requirement with respect to the DRV is reduction of the rate of delivery of support to the VC, to levels below their minimum necessary sustaining level...

"b. In the present unstable situation something far less than total destruction may be all that is required to accomplish the above. A very modest change in the government's GVN favor...may be enough to turn the tide and lead to a successful solution. Of course it is not possible to predict in advance...the precise level of measures which will be required to achieve the above. This is the reason for designing a program of progressively increasing squeeze."

One of the factors encouraging JCS optimism, he pointed out, was the assessment accepted by the panel that both Hanoi and Peking wanted to avoid direct conflict with the United States. This would act as a deterrent to Communist persistence, particularly if by a program of

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military pressures we were able to revise their assessment that they could win "without much risk of having to feel the weight of U.S. response." 36/

Apparently as a result of these criticisms and their influence on other Working Group members, the Group's final assessment of DRV susceptibility to military pressures was somewhat modified. While continuing to emphasize that affecting Hanoi's will was important, the criticality of it was obscured by concessions to the possible impact of damage to DRV capabilities and by greater reliance on conditional phrasing. For example:

"the nature of the war in Vietnam is such that U.S. ability to compel the DRV to end or reduce the VC insurrection rests essentially upon the effect of the U.S. sanctions on the will of DRV leadership to sustain and enlarge that insurrection, and to a lesser extent upon the effect of sanctions on the capabilities of the DRV to do so."

Although giving explicit recognition to "a rising rate of infiltration," and continuing to acknowledge limits to U.S. abilities to prevent the DRV's material support for the VC, the assessment stated that "U.S.-inflicted destruction in North Vietnam and Laos would reduce these supporting increments and damage DRV/VC morale." It qualified this statement, however, by pointing out that the degree to which such damage would provide the GVN with a breathing spell would depend largely on "whether any DRV 'removal' of its direction and support of the VC were superficial or whole." If superficial or "limited to gestures...that removed only the more visible evidences of the DRV increment," the report continued, "it would probably not be possible to develop a viable and free government in South Vietnam." 37/

In general, the final assessment of DRV susceptibility to pressures was less discouraging than the intelligence panel's initial submission, although it could not be considered particularly encouraging either. The reference to U.S. "policy flexibility," to which the JCS took such violent objection, was removed, and the following non-committing statement was used instead: "Hanoi's immediate estimate is probably that the passing of the U.S. election gives Washington the opportunity to take new military actions against the DRV and/or new diplomatic initiatives." If new military pressures were applied, the report indicated that Hanoi's leaders would be faced with a basic question: "Is the U.S. determined to continue escalating its pressures to achieve its announced objectives ...or is the U.S. escalation essentially a limited attempt to improve the U.S. negotiating position?" It continued:

"Their decision...would be affected by the U.S. military posture in the area, by the extent and nature of the U.S. escalation, the character of the U.S. communication of its intentions, and their reading of domestic U.S. and international reactions to the inauguration of U.S. attacks on the North."

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The report made no attempt to predict how the DRV might answer the "basic question" given alternative assessments of the variables in the quoted paragraph. However, it did offer the caveat that "comprehension of the other's intentions would almost certainly be difficult on both sides, and especially so as the scale of hostilities mounted." 38/

In assessing Hanoi's ability and willingness to sustain U.S. attacks in order to pursue its goals, the report continued its balanced but slightly pessimistic approach:

"We have many indications that the Hanoi leadership is acutely and nervously aware of the extent to which North Vietnam's transportation system and industrial plan is vulnerable to attack. On the other hand, North Vietnam's economy is overwhelmingly agriculture and, to a large extent, decentralized....Interdiction of imports and extensive destruction of transportation facilities and industrial plants would cripple DRV industry. These actions would also seriously restrict DRV military capabilities, and would degrade, though to a lesser extent, Hanoi's capabilities to support guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam and Laos....We do not believe that attacks on industrial targets would so greatly exacerbate current economic difficulties as to create unmanageable control problems....DRV leaders...would probably be willing to suffer some damage to the country in the course of a test of wills with the U.S. over the course of events in South Vietnam." 39/

The assessment concluded with estimates of likely Chinese Communist and Soviet efforts to offset pressures directed toward North Vietnam. The Working Group recorded its belief "that close cooperation exists between Hanoi and Peiping and that Hanoi consults Peiping on major decisions regarding South Vietnam." Because the VC insurrection served "Peiping's interests in undermining the U.S. position in Asia" and because of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the group thought it likely that the Chinese would "feel compelled to demonstrate their readiness to support" Hanoi in maintaining pressure on South Vietnam. However, it was noted that "Chinese Communist capabilities to augment DRV offensive and defensive capabilities are slight," being limited largely to modest quantities of air defense equipment, additional jet fighters and naval patrol craft. On the other hand, the group believed "Moscow's role in Vietnam is likely to remain a relatively minor one." Khrushchev's successors were believed unwilling to run substantial risks to undermine the GVN. Citing Hanoi's desire for continuing Soviet military and economic aid, the report stated an ironic judgment concerning the less-militant of the large Communist powers:

"Moscow's ability to influence decisions in Hanoi tends consequently to be proportional to the North Vietnamese regime's fears of American action against it, rising in

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moments of crisis and diminishing in quieter periods. Moscow's willingness to give overt backing to Hanoi, however, seems to be in inverse proportion to the level of threat to North Vietnam." 40/ (Underlining added)

4. Perceptions and Development of U.S. Pressure Options

The NSC Working Group began its deliberations with a variety of U.S. actions in mind and with an apparently flexible approach to the objectives that the Administration might reasonably seek to achieve. As ideas were exchanged and debated, however, objectives became somewhat less flexible and options seemed to narrow. Such a process could have resulted from either: (1) preconceptions on the part of particularly influential members; (2) a bureaucratic tendency to compromise; or (3) simply the limited availability of practical alternatives. A combination of these factors may even have been at work in the case of the Working Group. An assessment of this nature is beyond the scope of this primarily documentary research effort. Still, the question is an important one to reflect on in tracing the development of Working Group recommendations.

a. Perception of U.S. Objectives and Interests. National objectives in Southeast Asia were regarded in two categories: existing (sometimes called "initial") policy objectives and those comprising a possible fallback position. The former did not change and did not undergo any reinterpretation during the course of the Working Group's study. These were seen as (1) "helping a government of South Vietnam defend its independence," and (2) "working to preserve in Laos an international neutralized settlement." Three basic "factors" were recognized as "standing behind" these policy objectives:

"a. The general principle of helping countries that try to defend their own freedom against communist subversion and attack.

"b. The specific consequences of communist control of South Viet-Nam and Laos for the security of, successively, Cambodia, Thailand (most seriously), Malaysia, and the Philippines -- and resulting increases in the threat to India and -- more in the realm of morale effects in the short term -- the threat to other nations in Asia.

"c. South Viet-Nam, and to a lesser extent, Laos, as test cases of communist "wars of national liberation" world-wide." 41/

Current U.S. objectives in South Vietnam and Laos were seen as an integral part of the "overall policy of resisting Communist expansion world-wide," and particularly a part of the "policy of resisting the expansion of Communist China and its allies, North Viet-Nam and North

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Korea." Thus, for South Vietnam to come under Communist control, "in any form," was seen as

"a major blow to our basic policies. U.S. prestige is heavily committed to the maintenance of a non-Communist South Viet-Nam, and only less heavily so to a neutralized Laos." 42/

Unlike the current objectives, those comprising a fall-back position dealt only with South Vietnam. Moreover, they were modified during the course of the Working Group's efforts. The modifications occurred in the way the objectives were presented -- in the context of the presentation -- rather than in their specific phrasing. The words remained the same throughout:

"1. To hold the situation together as long as possible so that we have time to strengthen other areas of Asia.

"2. To take forceful enough measures in the situation so that we emerge from it, even in the worst case, with our standing as the principal helper against Communist expansion as little impaired as possible.

"3. To make clear...to nations in Asia particularly, that failure in South Viet-Nam, if it comes, was due to special local factors that do not apply to other nations we are committed to defend -- that, in short, our will and ability to help those nations defend themselves is not impaired." 43/

At first, these fall-back objectives for South Vietnam were presented as possible alternatives -- to be considered in conjunction with a reassessment of the costs and risks associated with currently acknowledged objectives. Following its recognition of the extent to which U.S. prestige had been committed, even the second draft (8 November) stated:

"Yet...we cannot guarantee to maintain a non-Communist South Viet-Nam short of committing ourselves to whatever degree of military action would be required to defeat North Viet-Nam and probably Communist China militarily. Such a commitment would involve high risks of a major conflict in Asia, which could not be confined to air and naval action but would almost inevitably involve a Korean-scale ground action and possibly even the use of nuclear weapons at some point."

Despite all this, it was acknowledged, South Vietnam "might still come apart," leaving the United States deeply committed but with much of its initial justification disintegrated. "Hence," the evaluation continued,

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"...we must consider realistically what our over-all objectives and stakes are, and just what degree of risk and loss we should be prepared to make to hold South Vietnam, or alternatively, to gain time and secure our further lines of defense in the world and specifically in Asia." 44/

Significant, in shedding light on the subtle changes that occurred in this rationale during the ensuing three or four weeks, was its treatment of the third fall-back objective. Observing that "most of the world had written off" both South Vietnam and Laos in 1954, an early draft acknowledged that neither had acquired the international standing of such former targets of Communist aggression as Greece, Iran and South Korea. It went on to point out several historical characteristics of South Vietnam and Laos that made them such unique cases, including: (1) "a bad colonial heritage" and inadequate preparation for self-government; (2) a "colonialist war fought in half-baked fashion and lost"; and (3) "a nationalist movement taken over by Communists ruling in the other half of an ethnically and historically united country...." It then added:

"The basic point, of course, is that we have never thought we could defend a government or a people that had ceased to care strongly about defending themselves, or that were unable to maintain the fundamentals of government. And the overwhelming world impression is that these are lacking elements in South Viet-Nam...."

Moreover, the commentary noted that there was widespread expectancy that if South Vietnam were lost it would be due to its lack of these elements. 45/

Subsequent to circulation of the initial draft of the "objectives and national interest" Section, a number of critical or related comments were directed toward Group Chairman Bundy. On 4 November, Michael Forrestal suggested that "an important flavor" was lacking in the original analysis -- namely, "the role of China" and her need for "ideological successes abroad." In his view, given Chinese policy, "the effect of our withdrawal from a situation in which the people we were trying to help seemed unable to help themselves" would be more politically pervasive in Asia than if China did not exist. He thought the U.S. object should be to "contain" Chinese political and ideological influence "for the longest possible period," thus providing time to create "at the very least, Titoist regimes on the periphery of China...." 46/ On 6 November, William Sullivan also urged placing U.S. policy in Viet-Nam in the "larger perspective" of the political confrontation with Communist China. In an attached, longer exposition of policy rationale for the Western Pacific, he presented conceptions of the U.S. problem quite similar to those advocated by Forrestal. The political future of the peoples of East Asia was portrayed as depending largely on a struggle between Washington

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and Peking. Chinese political and ideological aggressiveness was viewed as a threat to the ability of these peoples to determine their own futures, and hence to develop along ways compatible with U.S. interests. The U.S. commitment to defeat North Vietnamese aggression, even at the risk of "direct military confrontation" with Communist China, was perceived as part of the longer-term policy of establishing conditions which permit the independent nations of the region to develop the ability and confidence "to cope with the emerging and expanding power of China."^{47/} These comments may have influenced that part of the 8 November version which referred to current U.S. objectives as part of the broader policy of "resisting the expansion of Communist China and its allies...."

The JCS member also stressed the importance of not falling back from current policy aims. He stated that "in the eyes of the world" the United States was committed to its initial objectives "as matters of national prestige, credibility, and honor." Further, that U.S. retention of "a measure of free-world leadership" required "successful defense" in South Vietnam against the wars of national liberation strategy. Admiral Mustin criticized the Bundy draft for overstating "the degree of difficulty associated with success for our objectives in SVN." He asserted:

"Our first objective is to cause the DRV to terminate support of the SEA insurgencies....To achieve this objective does not necessarily require that we 'defeat North Viet-Nam,' and it almost certainly does not require that we defeat Communist China. Hence our commitment to SVN does not involve a high probability, let alone 'high risks,' of a major conflict in Southeast Asia."

He characterized the draft's expression of concern over risks and costs as an inference "as though the harder we try the more we stand to risk and to lose. On the contrary, he stated, the "best hope for minimizing risks, costs, and losses in achieving our objectives" could be attained though "a resolute course of action."^{48/}

Admiral Mustin also attacked the implication that there was "some alternative to our holding South Viet-Nam. There is none," he stated, adding: "We have no further fall-back position in Southeast Asia in the stated view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff." Specifically, he warned that to attempt to strengthen other areas of Asia, "in the context of our having been pushed out of SVN, would be a thoroughly non-productive effort militarily...." Moreover, characterizing the draft's concessions to the unique difficulties in Laos and South Vietnam as "sour grapes," he attacked its assumptions that we could convince other nations that failure in South Vietnam was due to strictly local factors. He warned that other nations would regard any such explanation on our part as "completely transparent." Concerning any lack of GVN will to defend itself, he commented, "A resolute United States would ensure...that this lack were cured, as the alternative to accepting the loss." The JCS member portrayed a U.S. failure in South Vietnam as an "abject humiliation,"

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that would be disastrous in shaking the faith and resolve of the non-Communist nations who rely on the United States for major help against Communist aggression. In that event, he saw little possibility for effective U.S. reassurances. 49/

The impact of these criticisms can be seen in the Working Group's final assessment of U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. In explaining the need to consider a fall-back position, the statement stressed the need merely to assess "the drawbacks" associated with it. Lending to this judgment were admissions that "there is some chance that South Vietnam might come apart under us whatever course of action we pursue" and "strong military action necessarily involves some risks of an enlarged and even conceivably major conflict in Asia." Then followed the statement:

"These problems force us to weight in our analysis the drawbacks and possibilities of success of various options, including the drawbacks of accepting only the fall-back objectives set forth below. (Underlining added)

Missing was the earlier draft's reference to potential costs and risks involved in pursuing current objectives. Missing also was any suggestion that the Administration might find some advantage in seeking an alternative to these objectives. 50/

The Working Group went on to assess, in terms almost identical to those in the initial draft, the likely consequence of Communist control of South Vietnam for different world areas of interest to the United States. The group saw important distinctions between the likely impact on U.S. interests in Asia and those in the world at large. For the latter, the most significant variable was seen as the degree to which adverse developments in Southeast Asia might produce domestic public revulsion against all U.S. commitments overseas:

"Within NATO (except for Greece and Turkey to some degree), the loss of South Vietnam probably would not shake the faith and resolve to face the threat of Communist aggression or confidence in us for major help. This is so provided we carried out any military actions in Southeast Asia without taking forces from NATO and without generating a wave of "isolationism" in the U.S. In other areas of the world, either the nature of the Communist threat or the degree of U.S. commitment or both are so radically different than in Southeast Asia that it is difficult to assess the impact. The question would be whether the U.S. was in fact able to go on with its present policies." 51/

For Asia, other than Southeast Asia, the Working Group's assessment went as follows:

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"The effects in Asia generally would depend heavily on the circumstances in which South Vietnam was lost and on whether the loss did in fact greatly weaken or lead to the early loss of other areas in Southeast Asia. National China..., South Korea, and the Philippines would need maximum reassurance. While Japan's faith in our military posture and determination might not be shaken, the growing feeling that Communist China must somehow be lived with might well be accentuated. India and Iran appear to be the Asian problem cases outside the Far East. A U.S. defeat could lead to serious repercussions in these countries. There is a great deal we could still do to reassure these countries, but the picture of a defense line clearly breached could have serious effects and could easily, over time, tend to unravel the whole Pacific and South Asian defense structures." 52/

The consequences for Southeast Asia of Communist control in South Vietnam were seen as highly differentiated and by no means automatic. The "domino theory" was viewed as "over-simplified." The Working Group felt that it might apply "if, but only if, Communist China...entered Southeast Asia in force and/or the United States was forced out of South Vietnam, in circumstances of military defeat." Nevertheless the group judged that "almost immediately," Laos would become extremely hard to hold and Cambodia would be "bending sharply to the Communist side." These developments were seen as placing great pressure on Thailand and encouraging Indonesia to increase its pressure on Malaysia. Thailand, it was noted, had "an historic tendency to make 'peace' with the side that seems to be winning," and Malaysia's "already serious Malay-Chinese problem" was cited. The Working Group concluded:

"We could do more in Thailand and with the British in Malaysia to reinforce the defense of these countries, the initial shock wave would be great..."

This assessment was quite close to that made in the 8 November draft in which Bundy had gone on to point out that even if we succeeded in overcoming the shock wave in Thailand and Malaysia, "the struggle would be uphill for a long time to come." But in neither case was much credence placed in the domino theory. 53/

It should be noted that Admiral Mustin and the JCS did not agree with this assessment. The Admiral commented that the JCS believed the so-called domino theory "to be the most realistic estimate for Cambodia and Thailand, probably Burma, possibly Malaysia." In the context of late 1964, these nations were expected to collapse "plainly and simply as the corollary to our withdrawal." 54/ Accordingly, a specific notation of the differing viewpoint of the JCS was placed in the Working Group's final report. 55/

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In summarizing its assessment of the consequences of Communist control in South Vietnam, the Working Group stated:

"There are enough 'ifs' in the above analysis so that it cannot be concluded that the loss of South Vietnam would soon have the totally crippling effect in Southeast Asia and Asia generally that the loss of Berlin would have in Europe; but it could be that bad, driving us to the progressive loss of other areas or to taking a stand at some point [so that] there would almost certainly be a major conflict and perhaps the great risk of nuclear war." 56/

b. Evolution of Options. The alternative courses of action perceived by the Working Group went through a fairly rapid evolution. As conceived by Chairman Bundy and John McNaughton, who apparently collaborated in their initial formulation, the options would offer a wide range of military actions and diplomatic postures. As the views of other members and interested officials were expressed, and as it became more apparent how little flexibility was perceived with respect to national objectives, subtle changes occurred. The effect was to narrow somewhat the range of effects which the different options might achieve and to tend to blur the distinctions between them. However, the process occurred so early in the life of the Working Group that it is difficult to pin-point the changes and somewhat presumptuous, relying only on documentary evidence, to explain them.

The perceived options were three in number, labeled A, B, and C. Option A essentially was a continuation of military and naval actions currently underway or previously authorized, to include prompt reprisals for attacks on U.S. facilities or other VC "spectaculars" in South Vietnam. These were to be accompanied by continued resistance to a negotiated settlement unless stringent preconditions, amounting to agreement to abide by U.S. interpretations of the Geneva Accords, were met. Option B consisted of current policies plus a systematic program of progressively heavy military pressures against North Vietnam, to be continued until current objectives were met. Negotiations were to be resisted, as in "A," although to be entered ultimately, but they were to be carried on in conjunction with continued bombing attacks. Option C combined current policies with (1) additional -- but somewhat milder -- military pressures against North Vietnam and (2) a declared willingness to negotiate. Once negotiations were begun, the military pressures were to stop, although the threat to resume was to be kept alive.

In a general sense, these distinctions remained constant throughout the Working Group's effort. However, subtle changes occurred. In the initial conception of "B," it was perceived as "meshing at some point with negotiations," based on an underlying assumption that negotiations would probably be unavoidable. 57/ The full analysis of this earliest form of "B" (discussed more fully later) makes it clear that some kind of international discussions would probably begin fairly early and continue as the intensity of our military pressures mounted. 58/ Moreover,

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it is evident that these pressures would be applied deliberately to permit evaluation of results at each step. Yet, the initial form of "B" was intended to embrace high intensity options -- in McNaughton's terminology, a "full squeeze." It will be recalled from the discussions earlier in the fall, that this term was applied to graduated operations that included mining harbors, bombing bridges and LOC targets and eventually attacking industries. 59/ As Option B developed, however, it became associated with prolonged resistance to a negotiated settlement. 60/ Moreover, although the intensity of the military operations it embraced remained about the same, they were perceived as being applied at a faster, less flexible pace. For example, in a comment about this option on 14 November, Admiral Mustin wrote:

"...while the Joint Chiefs of Staff offer the capability for pursuing Option "B" as defined, they have not explicitly recommended that the operations be conducted on a basis necessarily that inflexible. All implementing plans...would permit suspension whenever desired by national authority." 61/

Perceptions of Option C became more like "B." Initially, the additional pressures in "C" were conceived as "additional forceful measures and military moves." 62/ They included such operations as extension of the current armed escort of reconnaissance flights in Laos to full-fledged armed route reconnaissance -- gradually leading to similar attacks against infiltration routes in the southern border regions of North Vietnam. The initial Option C also provided for authorization of the already planned for cross-border ground operations in Laos and possibly in Cambodia. By 8 November, however, the pressure portion of this option was perceived as (1) including eventual attacks against other-than-infiltration targets in North Vietnam and (2) giving "the impression of a steady deliberate approach," the pace of which could be quickened if necessary. Moreover, in this later development of "C," the U.S. negotiating position would be to insist from the outset on full acceptance of the current U.S. objectives. Initially this position would incorporate certain additional bargaining elements that could drop out in the course of discussion. 63/

This modification of the pressure and negotiation aspects of "C" led other members of the Working Group to express reservations. Robert Johnson stated that this "proposed stiffer version" was little different from "B." He argued that the only real differences now were (1) a declared willingness to negotiate and (2) our unwillingness under "C" to carry the action through to its ultimate conclusions." He cautioned that the new version was unlikely to produce the hoped for advantages of "pure C" and that it could convince the Communists that our negotiatory spirit was not sincere. 64/ Enclosed with his comments were the views of the CIA member, who also believed there would be confusion between "B" and the new "C" -- particularly as observed by the DRV. Other reservations were expressed by Assistant Secretary McNaughton, who urged that the proposed pace of the new "C" be slowed down. This would be accomplished by dividing the additional pressure operations into distinct phases, with

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only the armed reconnaissance in Laos as part of the first phase. The OSD representative also urged not yielding to pressures to participate in a Geneva conference until after several military actions had been taken against the DRV. 65/ Of all the reservations stated above, only the last (delaying Geneva participation) was reflected in subsequent descriptions of Option C.

Even Option A was altered to some extent. The main emphasis for "A" continued to be the currently adopted policies. At some time prior to 8 November (when the final analysis was drafted), interest was shown in an "extended A." This version retained the policy of resisting negotiations in hope that the situation would improve, but it incorporated low-level pressure actions akin to the early stages of "C." The type and intensity of the actions "would vary in direct proportion to our success in convincing the world and our own public of the truth about Hanoi's support, direction and control of the VC." It might begin with armed reconnaissance in Laos, include greater naval activity along the coast, and gradually phase into strikes against LOC targets in North Vietnam. In terms of military actions alone, extended "A" resembled closely the initial version of "C." However, it was conceded that even an extended Option A did not offer a very promising means for moving toward negotiations. 66/

Why did these changes take place? The available documentary materials do not make this entirely clear. One factor which may have influenced the modifications in all three of the options was recognition of the problem of conflicting signals that could result from reprisal actions. If reprisals were designed to be forceful and punitive and intended to match the seriousness of VC provocations, they might be so strong as to interfere with the messages to Hanoi which it was originally intended would be conveyed by the graduated pressures. Indeed, it was pointed out that operations orders already developed by CINCPAC for retaliations in response to attacks on DE SOTO Patrols (should they be resumed) were "of magnitude which would not be politically viable" except under extremely serious provocations. 67/ Moreover, it was feared that improperly orchestrated reprisals might create undue international pressures for negotiations that could upset the negotiating strategy appropriate for the selected option. 68/

Both "A" and "B" may have been altered as a result of changes made in "C." The objections raised to the new "C" may have encouraged Chairman Bundy to include an extended "A" that was closer in the military sense to his and McNaughton's original concept of graduated pressures. Moreover, it had been pointed out that the same negotiating situations seen as appropriate for "C" (to include discussions of Laos and/or Cambodia as well as South Vietnam) could also apply to eventual negotiations arrived at through "A." 69/ Besides, with the stiffening of the "C" negotiating formula, the distinctions between the respective bargaining positions for "A" and "C" had become somewhat blurred. Option B's

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faster pace in its later versions may have been an attempt to make a clear distinction between it and the new "C." Use of the term "fast/full squeeze" in reference to Option B began concurrently with descriptions of the stiffer version of Option C. 70/

In addition, it is possible that the emphasis on a fast-paced "B," with its harsher measures, was motivated in part by a desire to make this option unattractive to higher authority. This may explain the rather perplexed tone of the previously cited Mustin comment comparing the JCS and Working Group approaches. Other than the JCS member, most of the Working Group members appear to have favored less intensive pressures than those being advocated by the military. Despite a sense of high stakes in Southeast Asia, which was shared by several members and other interested officials, many of these persons did not want the United States to plunge ahead with deeply committing actions as long as there was some doubt about the GVN's durability and commitment. 71/

Not incompatible with the foregoing argument is a possible additional explanation for the stiffening of Option C. As U.S. objectives came to be viewed somewhat less flexibly, it is possible that dominant elements in the Working Group thought it advisable to make "C" into a tougher position. There is little question that Option C was the natural heir of the concept of graduated pressures coupled with a negotiated settlement advocated at several points earlier in the year. Several of the Working Group members had been instrumental in shaping those proposals and were quite naturally attached to them conceptually. Now, advocates of the graduated approach were confronted with: (1) greater pressures from the JCS and their like-thinkers in the Congress; (2) recognition of little flexibility among Administration officials regarding interpretations of national interest and objectives; and (3) an increasingly critical situation in South Vietnam. It is likely that that these individuals viewed it necessary to stiffen their preferred approach in order to improve its compatibility with the current policy climate.

Whatever the reasons, the options for review and discussions were somewhat more closely alike than the original conceptions had been. Option A provided for intensified efforts to improve the situation in South Vietnam and for somewhat intensified military actions in line with current policy. Inside South Vietnam it provided for improvements in the GVN administrative performance and for strengthening different elements of the pacification program. These internal actions were stressed as necessary regardless of whatever other measures were decided on. Option A's provisions for measures outside the country included: (1) continuing and increasing the GVN's covert maritime harassment program; (2) resuming the DE SOTO Patrol operations; (3) increasing the scope of Laotian T-28 attacks on infiltration targets in Laos and (4) when feasible, undertaking small-scale cross-border GVN ground and air operations into

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the Laotian Panhandle. The option also included individual U.S. reprisal actions "not only against such incidents as the Gulf of Tonkin attacks but also against any recurrence of VC 'spectaculars' such as Bien Hoa." The aim of these actions would be to deter repetitions of and to punish for such actions in South Vietnam, "but not to a degree that would create strong international negotiating pressures."

Basic to Option A was its provision for "continued rejection of negotiation in the hope that the situation will improve." However, it included recognition that "the GVN itself, or individual South Vietnamese in potentially powerful positions" might initiate "discussions with Hanoi or the Liberation Front." If a coalition government were thus arranged, the Working Group believed, the odds were that it would eventually "be taken over by the Communist element." In the event of such discussions, the U.S. response under Option A might be either (1) "stand aside," thus disassociating the United States from such a settlement, or (2) "seek to cover a retreat by accepting negotiations" through something like a Geneva conference, which might buy additional time. 72/

Option B provided for everything included in "A" plus a program of U.S. military pressures against North Vietnam. These were to continue "at a fairly rapid pace and without interruption" until the DRV agreed to stop supporting and directing the war in South Vietnam and Laos. The pressures were to begin with attacks on infiltration targets and increase in intensity; however, the option included provision that an early attack on Phuc Yen airfield and certain key bridges in the northern part of North Vietnam might be required "to reduce the chances of DRV interference with the spectrum of actions" that were contemplated.

Although our public position on negotiations would be "totally inflexible" under Option B, it provided for recognition of the need to negotiate eventually. Under B, this would occur simultaneously with a continuation and escalation of the pressures and would be based on "inflexible insistence on our present objectives." Nevertheless, "B" acknowledged the need "to deal with channels of [international] communication, the UN, and perhaps -- despite our strong opposition -- a reconvened Geneva Conference of some sort" even before we agreed to enter into settlement talks. Moreover, while resisting negotiations, the option provided for (1) making "the strongest possible public case of the importance, increase, and present intolerable level of DRV infiltration" and (2) "strengthening the picture of a military situation in South Vietnam requiring the application of systematic military force." 73/

Option C provided for every military action included in "A" plus "graduated military moves against infiltration targets, first in Laos and then in the DRV, and then against other targets in North Vietnam." The air strikes on infiltration routes within North Vietnam were to be preceded by low-level reconnaissance flights over the same general area. Advantage was seen in initiating such measures "following either additional

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VC 'spectaculars' or at least strong additional evidence of major infiltration." Moreover, Option C made provision for the possibility of making a "significant ground deployment to the northern part of South Vietnam, either in the form of a U.S. combat force or a SEATO-members force" as an additional bargaining counter. In any event, "C" was intended to "give the impression of a steady deliberate approach" and "designed to give the U.S. the option at any time to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not."

In "C," military pressures were to be accompanied by "communications with Hanoi and/or Peiping" indicating in essence "a willingness to negotiate in an affirmative sense." From the outset "we would be... accepting the possibility that we might not achieve our full objectives." Accordingly, the concept for "C" included provision for an initial negotiating position that added "certain bargaining elements" to the basic U.S. objectives. Once negotiations started the military pressures would cease. As in "B," these would be preceded by a vigorous program of public information efforts and political consultations with Congressional leaders and foreign allies, surfacing information on DRV infiltration and explaining our rationale for action. The latter would be "that documented DRV illegal infiltration of armed and trained insurgents, and over-all DRV direction and control of VC insurgency, had now reached an intolerable level and that it was now necessary to hit at the infiltration...and to bring pressure on Hanoi to cease this infiltration and direction." 74/

c. Significance of Negotiations. One of the most significant aspects of the NSC Working Group's analyses was its emphasis on a negotiated settlement as the final outcome of contemplated U.S. actions. Regardless of the option selected or the pressure actions employed, international negotiations in some form were perceived as the means by which the situation in Southeast Asia would ultimately be relieved. Even in the event of a unilateral GVN or a South Vietnamese splinter negotiation with the NLF, under circumstances of a relatively shallow U.S. commitment (Option A), negotiation under a Geneva format was regarded as a preferable outcome. 75/ However, it is also clear that a parallel aim was to insure that pressures on behalf of such negotiations did not become compelling before the U.S. bargaining position could be improved.

Also significant is the fact that the kind of settlement which was seen as the purpose of negotiation was one which would end North Vietnam's participation in the conflicts in Southeast Asia -- and concurrently, also end the United States' direct participation (as it was in 1964) in those conflicts. In view of the prevalent Administration perception of North Vietnam as instigator and aggressor in the conflict within South Vietnam, it is ironic that the Working Group's considerations of a negotiated settlement did not include the problems of a political settlement in the South. In the available source materials, this subject was raised only once and even then was not dealt with further. The one instance was in the context of Robert Johnson's analysis of Option B. In it he pointed out that if a fully successful "B" negotiation

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resulted (one in which the DRV in fact complied with our demands to the extent that we ceased our pressure actions) "we would then have to consider...whether or not to make compromises -- such as, for example, accept less than perfection for international supervisory mechanism, agree to permit the NLF to become a legitimate political party in the South, or agree to political consultations between GVN and DRV." 76/
In other words, at the level of the Working Group's analysis, the political stakes for which the game in Vietnam was really being played and the very powerful and relevant cards held by the DRV and the VC were not really considered. To continue the analogy, the Working Group concerned itself only with the various opening bids the United States might make in order to achieve a position from which it could attempt a finesse.

The main problem apparently recognized by the Working Group was that, given its current objectives, the United States had few bargaining points with which to negotiate. In essence, it was primarily to fill this lack that many group members and Administration officials favored initiation of direct military pressures against North Vietnam. To some, bombing attacks were something that might then be removed as an inducement for the DRV to stop or to reduce its support of the military operations in South Vietnam and Laos. To others, such vigorous measures might at least serve as a demonstration of U.S. resolve to combat external aggression but also as a screen behind which to extract ourselves should the situation in South Vietnam deteriorate further.

Gaining maximum bargaining advantage from the military measures contemplated under each of the options was one of the major emphases in the Working Group's analyses. For example, under "A," emphasis was placed on obtaining maximum leverage from exploiting the threat of further escalation -- to be demonstrated primarily through reprisal actions and deployments. Under "B," a similar kind of psychological leverage was to be achieved through the clearly ascending nature of the actions, particularly if some time were permitted to assess results. Under "C," the effect was to be achieved by the combined effects of (1) maximizing the threat of impending escalation after each graduated and carefully paced step and (2) minimizing the Communist governments' problems of "face" as they moved toward negotiation. 77/

It was the recognized lack of strong bargaining points that led the Working Group to consider the introduction of ground forces into the northern provinces of South Vietnam. In advancing this proposal, the State Policy Planning Council member pointed out that "whatever the stated U.S. intentions," the Communists would probably expect to put an end to all air and naval attacks on North Vietnam merely by agreeing to enter negotiations. In that event, he pointed out, the United States could not use these pressures (or the promised relief from them) as a bargaining counter during negotiations. If ground forces were deployed prior to an obvious need to combat invading enemy troops, this disposition could be used as such a counter. Their deployment "would,

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moreover, carry with it the threat of subsequent air and naval attacks against North Vietnam. And," he continued, "threat may be as important as execution...in producing desired Communist reactions." 78/

Although initially advocated as a valuable bargaining piece for all the options, the concept of deploying ground forces for this purpose became associated with Options A or C. In the former case, it was urged with recognition that "A" offered little leverage for bargaining other than hoped for improvement in the GVN's internal administration and pacification efforts. For "C" it was perceived much in the sense in which it was originally proposed -- serving as an additional negotiating ploy before it might be needed as an operational military capacity. Such a force was seen as taking either of two forms: (1) a U.S. combat force, probably of division strength, or (2) a force composed of contingents from certain SEATO members (Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Thailand and the Philippines). Interesting, in view of subsequent events, is the fact that participation by South Korea and the Republic of China specifically was not to be sought. (This may also have been significant of the Administration's tendency at the time to view Communist China as co-instigator of the Vietnamese aggression.) The contemplated ground force deployment also was seen as serving some auxiliary functions: (1) to deter DRV ground force deployments into South Vietnam; (2) by taking blocking positions, to reduce the infiltration into the South through Laos; and (3) (in the case of the multi-national force) to improve the international picture of our actions in South Vietnam by virtue of visible international participation. 79/

As stated previously, the primary bargaining element in Option B was the application of clearly ascending military strikes against North Vietnam. These would be halted only in return for demonstrated DRV compliance with demands that it stop supporting and directing military operations in South Vietnam and Laos. It was pointed out that DRV compliance under pressure would be tantamount to surrender. Further, if we insisted that compliance include calling off all acts of VC terrorism and of resistance to pacification efforts in South Vietnam, it would mean "virtual unconditional surrender." 80/ To obtain such high stakes, the group recognized that intensive pressures would be required. However, it also recognized that the combination of extreme demands and harsh actions would be most likely to produce adverse international reaction and increased pressures for an early cease-fire and negotiations.

The basic political objective perceived for Option B was to "prevent international consideration...from interfering with our continuing pressures against the DRV until the DRV has taken the actions we desire of it." In view of the expected demands for an early cease-fire, it was believed advisable to present the U.S. case in the United Nations at the time "B" military operations were initiated. This, it was felt, would channel some of the international pressures into a controlled

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environment where the ensuing discussions would likely consume considerable time. Moreover, taking such initiatives would avoid the defensive posture that the United States would be placed in if our military actions were introduced for condemnatory purposes by another government. The Working Group stressed that under Option B, the United States should firmly resist a Geneva-type conference until it had obtained assurances of DRV compliance with its demands. Should the pressures for negotiation become too formidable to resist and discussions begin before a Communist agreement to comply, it was stressed that the United States should define its negotiating position "in a way which makes Communist acceptance unlikely." In this manner it would be made "very likely that the conference would break up rather rapidly," thus enabling our military pressures to be resumed. 81/

The only option that provided for bargaining in the usual sense of the word was Option C. The Working Group intended that with the initiation of this option and the U.S. declaration of willingness to negotiate, the Administration would have embarked on a bargaining course. In the group's view, we would stick to our full objectives at the outset "but we would have to accept the possibility that, as the whole situation developed, we might not achieve those full objectives unless we were prepared to take the greater risks envisaged under Option B." In such circumstances, it acknowledged, "it might become desirable to settle for less than complete assurances on our key objectives." 82/

Accepting in principle the possible need to compromise the initial U.S. position under Option C, the Working Group specified a somewhat hardened definition of that position. The initial negotiating objective ("the complete termination of DRV support to the insurgency...") was refined to specify that it incorporated three fundamentals: (a) that the DRV cease its assistance to and direction of the VC; (b) that an independent and secure GVN be reestablished; and (c) that there be adequate international supervising machinery." Specific areas of "give" for the bargaining process were identified as the question of free elections and the degree of verification we would require. The group further provided that during negotiations the intensity with which the United States would pursue its initial objectives would vary with the extent of improvement within the GVN. If the situation in South Vietnam got better the United States would press harder for acceptance of its initial position. If the situation grew worse, "we would have to decide whether to intensify our military actions, modify our negotiating positions, or both." 83/

Because of a declared willingness to negotiate from the outset, the approach to a negotiating situation under Option C was viewed by the Working Group as considerably different from that under Option B. Whereas, in the latter case it was believed that the UN would provide the most useful medium for discussions, the preferred approach under Option C was through a Geneva-type meeting. The channels, both direct and indirect, to Hanoi were not believed useful for negotiating purposes. Although potentially helpful in relaying impressions of current attitudes and negotiating positions in Hanoi and Peking, the Soviet government was not

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seen as a useful negotiating intermediary. The UN was viewed as presenting a special problem because of the approaching annual issue of Communist Chinese membership. For this reason the Working Group felt that it would not provide an effective negotiating forum until late February or March 1965, although it acknowledged the necessity of presenting the U.S. case before the Security Council. In view of these considerations the Working Group viewed it most desirable to yield to the expected pressures for a Geneva conference -- but only after conducting "a number of military actions against the DRV." 84/

d. Perceived Reactions to Options. The Working Group evaluated the relative advantages and disadvantages of the three options and concluded that Option C provided the most promising course of action. The evaluation was based on three general criteria: (1) likely reactions of allied and non-aligned foreign governments; (2) reactions within South Vietnam; and (3) effectiveness in bringing desired responses from the Communist government. With respect to the first, the group reported:

"Option A would cause no adverse reactions but if it failed it would leave a considerable after-taste of U.S. failure and ineptitude; Option B would run major risks of sharply expressed condemnation, which would be erased only if the course of action succeeded quite clearly and in reasonable time; Option C would probably be in between in both respects."

With respect to the remaining criteria, Option A seemed likely to achieve little more than buying some time, and in some respects it appeared counterproductive. While Option B was viewed as standing "a greater chance than either of the other two of attaining our objectives," it also was seen as running "considerably higher risks of major military conflict with Hanoi and possibly Communist China." On balance, Option C was considered "more controllable and less risky of major military action" than "B" and more likely "to achieve at least part of our objectives" than "A." 85/

The Working Group reported that Option A appeared to offer "little hope of getting Hanoi out or an independent South Vietnam re-established." It was recognized that the actions included in this option could not physically affect the extent of infiltration from the North and would not be likely to affect Hanoi's determination to continue its policies. At best, the group believed, "they might...keep the DRV from engaging in further spectaculars, and thus keep the scale of the conflict in the south within some limits." However, Option A was conceded little chance of contributing to an improved GVN, in the short period of additional time its effects might possibly make available. The group recognized sagging morale and doubts concerning U.S. intentions as the "most immediate problem" in South Vietnam. Several members felt that without further U.S. actions, political collapse was imminent -- that to add only reprisals for VC spectaculars might lift morale immediately thereafter, as in the case of

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the Tonkin Gulf reprisals, but would not have lasting effect. At best, under "A," it was believed that the gradual deterioration in the countryside of South Vietnam would continue. 86/

Although the Working Group viewed a decision to continue Option A indefinitely as ruling out either "B" or "C," it did suggest the possibility of extending "A" to its limits and gradually phasing into operations like those in Option C. It was suggested that this might, over time, generate "favorable, or at least not unfavorable," domestic and international reaction which along with the increasing cost of gradual disruption in North Vietnam might cause Hanoi to slow down its infiltration. However, the result of this process, at best, would be a gradual improvement of the U.S. position without advancement toward a meaningful settlement. 87/ Lacking a deliberate attempt to phase into something like "C," Option A was viewed as "an indefinite course of action." As such, its "sole advantages" were seen as:

"(a) defeat would be clearly due to GVN failure, and we ourselves would be less implicated than if we tried Option B or Option C, and failed;

"(b) the most likely result would be a Vietnamese-negotiated deal, under which an eventually unified Communist Vietnam would reassert its traditional hostility to Communist China and limit its own ambitions to Laos and Cambodia." 88/

The group's assessment went on to indicate that should this occur, Thailand would likely conclude that "we simply could not be counted on, and would accommodate somehow to Communist China even without any marked military move by Communist China." 89/

The Working Group reported that the actions in Option B offered a number of unique advantages relative to the other options:

"1. Option B probably stands a greater chance than either of the other two of attaining our objectives vis-a-vis Hanoi and a settlement in South Vietnam.

"2. Our display of real muscle in action would undoubtedly have a salutary effect on the morale of the rest of non-Communist Asia.

"3. The course of military events vis-a-vis Communist China might give us a defensible case to destroy the Chinese Communist nuclear production capability." 90/

However Option B was also seen to present some unique problems and to possibly lead to some undesirable results. For example, most of

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the group believed Option B would risk an impairment of the "U.S. standing in the NATO and European framework." The option was believed likely to produce a major conflict and these effects were seen as quite probable if it "produced anything less than an early and completely satisfactory outcome." 91/ Problems were also perceived at home. It was pointed out that any U.S.-initiated military pressures against North Vietnam should be consistent with the provisions of the Joint Congressional Resolution passed following the Tonkin Gulf incidents, but that Option B would be difficult to justify under the authorities cited in this resolution.

"Characterizing the use of force in the context of this alternative as a legitimate exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense in response to an "armed attack" from the North would be a major public relations effort."

Moreover, given the pace and likely intensity of escalation in this option, it was suggested that "the constitutional prerogatives of the Congress, for example, to declare war would become pertinent." 92/

As seen by the Working Group the most disturbing aspect of Option B was its almost irreversible commitment to a major military effort, the ultimate nature of which was difficult to predict. That Hanoi would yield to U.S. demands at an early stage of "B" was considered unlikely. The chances were considered "significantly greater" that the DRV would retaliate, either by air attacks on the South or a ground offensive either in Laos or into South Vietnam. It was considered most likely, however, that Hanoi would continue to hold firm, thus requiring the United States to "up the ante militarily." With further increases in our military pressure, the group argued, "the odds would necessarily start to increase that Hanoi...would either start to yield by some real actions to cut down, or would move itself to a more drastic military response." The Working Group then cautioned:

"We could find ourselves drawn into a situation where such military actions as an amphibious landing in the DRV -- proposed as one of our further actions -- moved us very far toward continuing occupation of DRV soil. Alternatively, the volume of international noise...could reach the point where, in the interest of our world-wide objectives, we would have to consider accepting a negotiation on terms that would relatively but not necessarily be wholly favorable to the attainment of our full objectives." 93/

Option C was particularly attractive to the Working Group because it was believed to be more controllable and, therefore, less deeply committing than "B." Moreover, in the event of a GVN collapse (recognized as a danger under all of the options), the group argued, "our having taken stronger measures would still leave us a good deal better off than under

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Option A with respect to the confidence and willingness to stand firm of the nations in the next line of defense in Asia." 94/

The reactions to "C" expected by the Working Group differed from "B" primarily as a result of the U.S. negotiating posture. The initial strikes against targets in North Vietnam were seen as a "first break-point," marking the beginning of major international pressures for negotiation. Communist reactions to the early pressures were regarded as little different from "B." Some chance of a military response was conceded, but it was thought more likely that the DRV would "hold firm while stimulating condemnation of [the United States] by world opinion, and, if in negotiations, take a tough position." Under "C," however, our response would not necessarily be an immediate increase in pressure. If the GVN situation had improved "we would try to capitalize on [it] ...by pressing harder for acceptance of our initial negotiating position." Barring success, the pressures would continue, and the Working Group recognized that the likely dragging out of the war at this point would probably lead to a resumption of deteriorating trends in South Vietnam. It stated: "In this case, we would have to decide whether to intensify our military actions, modify our negotiating positions or both." If U.S. military measures were increased at this point it was expected that "there would be a progressively increasing chance of major Communist military response," such as those considered under "B." If the U.S. negotiating position were modified at this point, the group perceived a "major problem, in that key nations on both sides would suspect that we were getting ready for a way out." Therefore, it suggested that additional military actions, possibly including greater deployments to Southeast Asia, would need to accompany the modifying moves. 95/

The major disadvantages of Option C acknowledged by the Working Group was its tendency to "stretch-out" the confrontation and expose the United States to an increasing variety of pressures and criticism. For example, the group acknowledged that GVN morale and effectiveness were likely to suffer at several points in the course of the options: (1) upon initial U.S. agreement to enter negotiations; (2) as it became clear that the war was dragging on; and (3) with modification of the U.S. negotiating position. It also recognized several measures that the Communists might take during a prolonged, indecisive period to reduce our initial advantage: (1) improving air defenses in North Vietnam; (2) deploying Chinese ground forces southward; and (3) hardening their propaganda. While increasing the enemy's public commitment to its current line of policy, these measures would not serve as clear acts of escalation. 96/

These difficulties and other uncertainties encompassed by Option C illustrate the intensity with which most members of the NSC Working Group wanted the United States to couple limited military commitments with a negotiated settlement to relieve our position in Vietnam. The fact that the group judged "C" as preferable to "A" or "B," despite its rather obvious inherent problems makes this evident. (One might also

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have viewed it as evidence that United States policy in Southeast Asia was fraught with real contradictions.) For example, the one feature that gave Option "C" its most distinctive character -- early willingness to negotiate without the concurrent effects of continually mounting military pressures -- was its most uncertain aspect. This particular part of the analysis was revised twice between the final drafting of the group's findings and their consideration by the Principals. Moreover, the Working Group had received at least one informed judgment to the effect that, given Hanoi's high stakes in South Vietnam and its perceived opportunity to deal the United States a major blow, the DRV would not be likely to negotiate in response to any of the options. 97/ On the eve of the initial meeting with the Principals, Chairman Bundy called early negotiations "the least satisfactory part of the present script." In particular it was recognized as difficult to "keep up our show of determination and at the same time listen for nibbles." 98/

In many respects Option C seems to have been favored primarily for what it incorporated -- for the means it employed -- rather than for what it might achieve. It certainly was not presented as an optimistic alternative. Under "C," the group perceived that "at best... the DRV might feign compliance and settle for an opportunity to subvert the South another day." This stood in marked contrast to what it perceived as the "at best" outcome of "B," namely that Hanoi "might be ready to sit down and work out a settlement in some form that would give a restoration of the 1954 agreements," hopefully with firmer guarantees. Moreover, with "C," the group believed that in between the best and worst outcomes, the United States "might be faced with no improvement in the internal South Vietnam situation and with the difficult decision whether to escalate on up to major conflict with China." 99/ This kind of outcome promised little more than the group perceived as available through "A" -- and without the additional commitment of national prestige and military force. But it was an outcome readily perceivable from a policy that clung tenaciously to rather major objectives but was reticent to accept major risks.

5. Views From Outside the NSC Working Group

While the NSC Working Group was preparing its findings for submission to the Principals, other sources of influential opinion were communicating their views to these individuals. In addition, it is important to consider that members of the Working Group were most likely communicating their respective impressions of group progress to the principal official in the agencies they represented. Thus, William Bundy no doubt shared ideas with Secretary Rusk; John McNaughton with Secretary McNamara; Harold Ford with CIA Director McCone; and Admiral Mustin with General Wheeler. Some of these Principals no doubt had injected particular ideas into the group's deliberations. Whatever the source, these high officials were exposed to a variety of suggestions and viewpoints before reacting directly to the Working Group's submissions.

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The following sections deal with two rather significant sources of ideas whose communications reached Secretary McNamara. However, their views were known to other members of the Principals Group as well, through the normal interdepartmental coordination procedures. These proposals are significant also because of their rather contending viewpoints on the subject of U.S. courses of action.

a. JCS Views. On four different occasions during the period of the Working Group's existence, the JCS submitted formal proposals for direct military strikes against North Vietnamese targets. On each occasion they took pains to remind the Secretary of Defense and other readers of their earlier recommendation for a preferred course of action, which involved a systematic pattern of air attacks on major targets.

On 14 November, two such recommendations were made. One was intended to bring about expansion of the GVN's covert operations, to include "air strikes by unmarked aircraft" of the VNAF. It specified that these were to be "separate and distinct from larger (more decisive) air strike actions recommended...on 1 November 1964." The JCS stated that such smaller attacks would be useful in: (1) continuing the pressure on the DRV; (2) encouraging GVN leaders; (3) providing useful air defense data; and (4) demonstrating patterns of DRV/Chinese reactions that could be helpful in planning larger operations. 100/ The other recommendations came in response to Secretary McNamara's request to examine possible DRV/CHICOM military reactions to U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam. In answer, they discussed various Communist military alternatives and U.S. means to counter them, and they described what they viewed as the most likely enemy reactions. These, they felt, would be primarily in the propaganda and diplomatic spheres because of what was perceived as China's general reluctance to become directly involved in conflict with the United States. In addition, the JCS repeated their recommendations of 4 November (with respect to the VC attacks on Bien Hoa) as retaliatory actions equally applicable to any other serious provocations. They went on to recommend deployments "to improve capabilities to conduct the program of air strikes" recommended on 4 November 1964. 101/

Four days later they submitted another proposal, in response to Secretary McNamara's interest in a possible program of graduated U.S. pressures against North Vietnam. This possibility was described as "a controlled program of systematically increased military pressures against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) applied in coordination with appropriate political pressures." (Interestingly, the Secretary's interest was expressed on the same day as McNaughton's reactions to the draft analysis of Option C.) The JCS referred to their statements of 4 and 14 November, describing their preferred course of action for causing the DRV "to cease supporting and directing the insurgencies" in South Vietnam and Laos. However, they also proposed an alternative series of specific actions, "should a controlled program of systematically increased pressures...be directed." Moreover, they recommended a set of operational objectives which they termed "appropriate" for such a graduated program, as follows:

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"a. Signal the willingness and determination of the United States to employ increasing force in support of...an independent and stable noncommunist government in RVN and a free and neutral Laos....

"b. Reduce, progressively, DRV support of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos to the extent necessary to tip the balance clearly in favor of the Governments of RVN and Laos by:

- "(1) Reduction of the amount of support available through destruction of men, material, and supporting facilities;
- "(2) ...[and] through diversion of DRV resources to increased homeland defenses and alerts; and
- "(3) Reduction of the rate of delivery of available support through destruction of bridges and other LOC choke points...and through interruption of movements....

"c. Punish the DRV for DRV-supported military actions by the Viet Cong/Pathet Lao....

"d. Terminate the conflict in Laos and RVN only under conditions which would result in the achievement of U.S. objectives." 102/

The final JCS proposal to be submitted relative to the "courses of action" debate in November 1964 came in direct response to the NSC Working Group's draft papers, circulated to interested agencies for comment on 17 November. 103/ Criticizing the group's assessment of U.S. stakes and interests, the JCS called Southeast Asia "an area of major strategic importance to the United States, the loss of which would lead to grave political and military consequences in the entire Western Pacific, and to serious political consequences world-wide." They reiterated their view that the best probability of success in attaining the currently recognized U.S. objectives in that region would be "by achieving the prerequisite objective of causing the cessation of DRV support and direction of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos." 104/

The JCS also criticized the three options described by the Working Group and outlined five alternatives to them, in an ascending order of intensity:

1. Terminate commitments in South Vietnam and Laos and withdraw as gracefully as possible. The JCS called this "implicit in the content of the NSC Working Group paper but...not clearly identified as a separate and distinct option."

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2. Continue actions contained within present policies, including reprisals for VC provocations. The JCS identified this as the group's Option A but stated that the added demands it placed on the DRV were "not commensurate with those imposed by DRV or RVN." In essence, they agreed with the Working Group's evaluation that this alternative would neither accomplish our objectives nor alleviate the critical situation in South Vietnam.

3. Undertake graduated military and political initiatives to apply additional pressures against the DRV,

without necessarily determining in advance to what degree we will commit ourselves to achieve our objectives, or at what point we might stop to negotiate, or what our negotiating objectives might be.

The JCS stated that this alternative corresponded to the NSC Working Group's Option C, which they criticized for its "uncertain pace" and because it did not include "a clear determination to see things through in full." They argued that such an "inconclusive" option "could permit and encourage enemy build-ups to counter our own," and thus "raise the risks and costs to us of each separate military undertaking."

4. Undertake a "controlled program" of graduated military and political pressures, based on an "advanced decision to continue military pressures, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward U.S. national objectives." The JCS called this "a variant and logical extension" of Option C and cited their proposal of 18 November as a detailed description of it.

5. Undertake a "controlled program of intense military pressures...designed to have major military and psychological impact from the outset, and accompanied by appropriate political pressures." The JCS offered this alternative in lieu of the Working Group's Option B which they stated "is not a valid formulation of any authoritative views known to the JCS." In particular, they specified that their intensive program would

be undertaken on the basis that it would be carried through, if necessary, to the full limit of what military actions can contribute toward national objectives; it would be designed, however, for suspension short of those limits if objectives were earlier achieved.

For a full description of this alternative, they referred to their proposal of 14 November. 105/

Of the five alternatives, the JCS stated their belief that only the last two offered "a probability of achieving [current U.S.] objectives."

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In addition to providing for stronger, more determined actions, these alternatives also provided for sizeable force build-ups that "should make miscalculation of U.S. resolve less likely." Option C was objectionable in their view because it did not permit "a clear set of agreed military objectives" and because it provided for "the contingency that as developments are analyzed, it may be thought expedient to settle for less than complete achievement of our objectives for RVN and Laos." It is important to note that in outlining the last two options, the JCS stressed that they called for "controlled" programs. 106/ In the mode of Admiral Mustin's memorandum, referred to earlier, they were apparently attempting to combat the Working Group's inferences that the more intensive actions which the JCS advocated were not controllable. It is fairly clear that group members favoring Option C had tagged the extreme Option B with a JCS label.

b. Rostow Views. Whereas the JCS emphasized damaging actions, designed to affect Hanoi's will be destroying a significant portion of their capability, Walt Rostow urged a different approach. In his view, emphasis should have been placed on signalling to Hanoi and Peking our commitment to use our vast resources to whatever extent required to reinstate effectively the provisions of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords.

With respect to military moves most useful for this purpose, Rostow communicated to Secretary McNamara his concern that "too much thought is being given to the actual damage we do in the North, not enough thought to the signal we wish to send." Outlining a concept similar to the earliest Option C, he urged that the initial use of additional force against North Vietnam "should be as limited and unsanguinary as possible" and that it

"should be designed merely to install the principle that the DRV will, from the present forward, be vulnerable to...attack...for continued violations of the 1954 and 1962 Accords. In other words, we would signal a shift from the principle involved in the Tonkin Gulf response." 107/

Even more important, in his view, would be the signals communicated by additional military moves in the Southeast Asia region. He urged deploying U.S. ground forces to South Vietnam and large-scale retaliatory forces into the Western Pacific. Besides their value as a bargaining counter, Rostow saw a ground force commitment as a clear signal that "we are prepared to face down any form of escalation North Vietnam might mount on the ground." He argued that such a move would rule out "the possibility of the Communists radically extending their position on the ground at the cost of air and naval damage alone." He stated that the increased retaliatory forces would signal:

"that we are putting in place a capacity subsequently to step up direct and naval pressure on the north,

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if that should be required; and that we are putting forces into place to exact retaliation directly against Communist China, if Peiping should join in an escalatory response from Hanoi." 108/

The broader context of Rostow's views on military actions was described for Secretary Rusk on the eve of the first meeting of the Principals to discuss the Working Group findings. Stating his agreement with those portions of the latest intelligence estimate which stressed the Asian Communist powers' desire not to become involved in a direct conflict with the United States, he framed the "most basic" U.S. problem as follows:

"...how to persuade the Communists that a continuation of their present policy will risk major destruction in North Viet Nam; that a preemptive move on the ground as a prelude to negotiation will be met by U.S. strength on the ground; and that Communist China will not be a sanctuary if it assists North Viet Nam in counter-escalation."

He then repeated his prescription of military moves earlier urged on Secretary McNamara. However, he stressed that these moves would not, "in themselves, constitute a decisive signal." More significant in Communist eyes, he felt, would be signals to answer the question.

"Is the President of the United States deeply committed to reinstalling the 1954-62 Accords; or is he putting on a demonstration of force that would save face for, essentially a U.S. political defeat at a diplomatic conference?"
109/

In Rostow's view, the Communists would not accept a setback until they were absolutely certain that the United States really meant business -- an assessment that could only come as a result of firm public commitments on the part of the President and appropriate follow-through actions. He stated:

"I have no doubt we have the capacity to achieve a reinstallation of the 1954-1962 Accords if we enter the exercise with the same determination and staying power that we entered the long test on Berlin and the short test on the Cuba missiles. But it will take that kind of Presidential commitment and staying power."

Acknowledging that the kind of conflict we faced lent itself to prolonged uncertainties and that the Communists could pretend to call off the guerrilla war, only to revive it again, he stressed the need to maintain pressure on them for some time. The installation of ground forces and a "non-sanguinary" naval blockade were suggested as particularly useful for

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this purpose. Rostow urged trying "to gear this whole operation with the best counterinsurgency effort we can mount with our Vietnamese friends...and not withdraw U.S. forces from Viet Nam until the war is truly under control." 110/

In closing, Rostow outlined a scenario of action that would follow from the kind of Presidential decision described above. This would include, in sequence:

- (1) Immediate movement of relevant forces to the Pacific.
- (2) Immediate direct communication to Hanoi...including a clear statement of the limits of our objectives but our absolute commitment to them.
- (3) Should this first communication fail (as is likely) installation of our ground forces and naval blockade, plus first attack in North, to be accompanied by publication [of a report on infiltration] and Presidential speech. 111/

Thus, in their communications to senior officials in the latter half of November, both Walt Rostow and the JCS stressed a similar point. Although advocating different solutions, they both emphasized that the Administration could not expect to dissuade Hanoi and Peking from continued pursuit of the DRV's important and strongly-held commitments without making correspondingly strong commitments to resist them. The JCS, for their own reasons, sought to avoid a commitment of ground forces to Vietnam and argued instead for punitive air and naval actions. Rostow felt that by forceful and meaningful demonstrations of national resolve, including the commitment of ground forces to South Vietnam, direct use of force against the Communist nations need be minimal.

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II.

POLICY DECISIONS

The efforts of the NSC Working Group were intended to be completed in preparation for a major policy review late in November 1964. Plans were made for Ambassador Taylor to return to Washington from Saigon to join in a series of strategy meetings. The expectations were that the meetings would result in a Presidential action order to supersede the one issued following the high-level conference in September (NSAM 314).

Meetings with the President were scheduled for the week following Thanksgiving, when he returned from his working holiday at the ranch. Preliminary meetings between Ambassador Taylor and the principal officials from agencies with national security interests in Southeast Asia were held during the preceding weekend, 27-29 November. The whole episode took place amid widespread speculation that a major policy change was imminent and rumors that Taylor had returned to insist on the bombing of infiltration targets in North Vietnam and Laos. Public and Congressional speculation ran so high on the eve of the meetings that the White House and State Department sought to dampen it with statements that Taylor's reported comments "were not policy" and that his return did not mean that "any great, horrendous decision" would result. 112/

1. Reactions of Principals to Working Group Analyses

Before their meetings with Taylor and the President, the Principals in Washington met to consider the Working Group's findings and to assess the major issues affecting future U.S. courses of action. Just prior to their initial gathering, on 24 November, William Bundy had forwarded a list of questions and comments pertaining to the Working Group's findings, and these served as a kind of agenda. Included were such issues as: (1) whether the relative advantages among the three options were actually as evident as the group had found; (2) whether or not the papers' assessment of U.S. stakes in Southeast Asia should be revised in the direction of JCS attitudes; (3) whether the actions associated with the various options could in fact be carried out to achieve the results expected; and (4) whether a deployment of ground forces to South Vietnam would in fact provide any advantages. 113/ (TAB A)

a. Consensus Among NSC Officials. As the Principals meeting opened, Secretary Rusk raised an issue that was high among Administration concerns -- namely that the American public was worried about the chaos in the GVN, and particularly with respect to its viability as an object of an increased U.S. commitment. Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler conceded the propriety of this concern but warned that the situation in the GVN would only get worse if additional steps were not taken to reverse present trends. Rusk then presented a question which seemed basic to the

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whole rationale for contemplated U.S. courses of action. He asked whether the situation in South Vietnam could be improved in time to save it if the DRV were now to withdraw its support. CIA Director McCone conceded that the VC would still have plenty of capability remaining but expressed the view that the situation could be coped with from the standpoint of internal security criteria. At this point Under Secretary of State George Ball asked if bombing North Vietnam could improve the situation in South Vietnam directly. McNamara replied that it could not unless the bombing actually cut down the infiltration into the South. After agreeing with a Rusk comment that the struggle would be a long one, even with the DRV out of it, the group reached consensus that South Vietnam could be made secure, provided the Saigon government could maintain itself. 114/ This was the first of several major policy judgments reached in the course of the meeting.

Other points of clear consensus (with no more than a single dissenting opinion) were as follows:

- (2) That the situation in South Vietnam would deteriorate further under Option A even with reprisals, but that there was a "significant chance" that the actions proposed under "B" or "C" would result in an improved GVN performance and "make possible" an improved security situation (George Ball indicated doubt).
- (3) That any negotiating outcome under Option A (with or without U.S. negotiating participation) probably would be clearly worse than under Option B or C.
- (4) That it was doubtful (contrary to the view expressed in the Working Group papers) that Option B would have the best chance of achieving the full U.S. objectives (General Wheeler expressed agreement with the Working Group statement).
- (5) That the requirement of Option C, "that we maintain a credible threat of major action while at the same time seeking to negotiate," could be carried out despite acknowledged public pressures.
- (6) That the Administration could safely assume that South Vietnam could "only come apart for morale reasons, and not in a military sense," as a result of intensified VC effort.
- (7) That early military actions against North Vietnam under Option C should be determined, but low in scale -- that at this stage, strong damaging actions

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should be limited to reprisals (General Wheeler dissented, stating that our losses might be higher in the long run with such an approach).

- (8) That the loss of South Vietnam would be more serious than stated in Section II of the Working Group's draft papers and that the Administration's assessment should be revised at least in the direction of the JCS viewpoint (George Ball argued against this judgment). 115/

The context of the Principals' discussion of this last point contained some significant expressions of opinion. Secretary Rusk stated the viewpoint that the confidence of other nations in the United States would be affected by the loss of South Vietnam despite their possible indifference to the political struggle in Southeast Asia. He added that if we did nothing to affect the course of events in Vietnam it would have the effect of giving more to de Gaulle. However, Rusk did not accept the Working Group's rationale that we would obtain international credit merely for trying. In his view, the harder we tried and then failed, the worse our situation would be. McGeorge Bundy disagreed with this last point, except to acknowledge that to attempt something like Option B and then quit would clearly be damaging. Secretary McNamara seemed to support the (McGeorge) Bundy view, stating that "B" followed by failure would clearly be worse than Option C followed by a compromise settlement. George Ball expressed strong agreement with the last Rusk point, saying that de Gaulle would portray us as being foolish and reiterating that the damage to U.S. prestige would be worse if we tried either "B" or "C" and failed. General Wheeler stated the opinion that to do little or nothing at this point would be an act of bad faith. Mr. McCone pointed out a perpetual dilemma if the Administration continued to act despite South Vietnamese deterioration; hence, he urged great care. 116/

It is interesting to note the views and associations of the two occasional dissenters in the series of consensus judgments rendered by the Principals. General Wheeler, Chairman of the JCS, expressed viewpoints consistent throughout with the recorded JCS views on future courses of action. On the other hand, George Ball, Under Secretary of State, had no obvious jurisdictional or institutional influences to affect his judgments. Nevertheless, known to Administration observers as "the devil's advocate," he had developed something of a reputation as an independent thinker. At about the time of the Working Group deliberations, for example, he developed a paper suggesting U.S. diplomatic strategy in the event of an imminent GVN collapse. In it, he advocated working through the U.K., who would in turn seek cooperation from the USSR, in arranging an international conference (of smaller proportions than those at Geneva) at which to work out a compromise political settlement for South Vietnam. 117/ In addition, Ball's prevalent occupation with European affairs may have influenced him to view Southeast Asia as of lesser importance to the U.S. national interest.

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b. Views Lacking Consensus. Also discussed at the 24 November Principals meeting were several issues on which consensus was not reached. Most of these related to immediate U.S. actions that would need to be taken irrespective of the option selected, or to problems faced in carrying out a particular option. Since earlier agreements had indicated little interest in Option A, only "B" and "C" were examined further.

Discussions of Option B dealt primarily with questions of the intensity of blows that might be struck at North Vietnam. With respect to whether DRV airfields should be struck early or as a part of a more gradual sequence, General Wheeler pointed out that early strikes on airfields were what made "B" operations so different. It was these strikes at potential DRV capabilities to interfere with U.S. attacks, or to retaliate, that made systematic, intensive air operations possible. In response to a specific question from the Working Group, the possibility of using nuclear weapons was also discussed. Secretary McNamara stated that he could not imagine a case where they would be considered. McGeorge Bundy observed that under certain circumstances there might be great pressure for their use both from the military and from certain political circles. General Wheeler stated that he would not normally vote for their use -- never, for example, in an interdiction role. However, he suggested that they might be considered in extremis -- for example, to hold off an enemy to save a force threatened with destruction, or to knock out a special target like a nuclear weapons facility. In response to Secretary Rusk's query as to their potential for cordoning off an area, both McNamara and Wheeler answered negatively. 118/

Discussions of Option C dealt with the problem of early negotiations and, at greater length, with that of deploying ground forces to South Vietnam. On the former, there was little interchange noted in the proceedings. Despite the Working Group's admitted frustration with this particular issue, only two Principals' comments were recorded. McGeorge Bundy stated the view that we should let negotiations come into play slowly. Secretary Rusk expressed concern that the GVN would be very sensitive on the issue of a negotiating conference. Earlier, however, he indicated his opinion that pressure for a conference would not be a serious problem as long as military actions continued. 119/

On the issue of sending ground forces to South Vietnam in the early stages of Option C, there was no firm conclusion. Secretary McNamara stated that there was no military requirement for ground forces and that he would prefer a massive air deployment. In response to General Wheeler's suggestion that some ground forces could be justified for air defense and base security purposes, he acknowledged that "we might do both." Mr. McCone stated the opinion that U.S. ground forces would help stabilize South Vietnam, similar to their effect on Lebanon in 1958. They might even provide a general security force in the South. McNamara disagreed. Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy suggested their utility in proving a "preemptive effect," presumably to deter North Vietnamese offensive moves into the South. To this McCone added that

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these forces might be equipped in ways to show our determination. In the end, it was agreed to raise this issue with Ambassador Taylor, at the Principals next meeting. Significantly, the value of ground forces as a bargaining counter apparently was not discussed, thus providing one more indication of the Principals reticence to deal with the issue of negotiations. (It is interesting to note in this respect that William Bundy's memorandum, formally summarizing the points of consensus and disagreement, does not deal with the early negotiating problem -- despite its being a specific agenda item which he had suggested as Chairman of the Working Group.) 120/

The only basic issue between the options on which the Principals did not arrive at a consensus was the question of the relative risks of major conflict entailed by Options B and C. General Wheeler stated that there was less risk of a major conflict before achieving success under Option B than under Option C. Secretary McNamara believed the opposite to be true. Secretary Rusk argued that if "B" were selected, there would be no chance to apply the JCS variant of "C," whereas under the Working Group's "C," this would still be left available. He observed that entry into the JCS variant of "C" would feel something like the Cuban missile crisis. McNamara then suggested a four-week program of actions following the general pattern of Option C. Mr. McCone stated that they sounded "fine," but that in his opinion the "negotiating mood" interfered with their potential effects. He agreed to attempt a paper to deal more directly with the relation of risk to likely success, as between the two options. In the end, the only conclusion that could be drawn was that there was not complete agreement that "B" ran a higher risk of major conflict than "C," as alleged by the Working Group. 121/

During the meeting of 24 November there was no clear decision as to which option was favored by the Principals. It seems likely that "A" was favored by Ball. Wheeler clearly favored "B," and he may have had support from McCone, although this is far from clear. On the basis of either their participation in the Working Group or from statements of preference made at the meeting, it is clear that "C" was favored by McNamara, McNaughton, Rusk, and the Bundy brothers. However McGeorge Bundy and McNamara apparently preferred a "firm C," whereas the other three wanted a more restrained, incremental approach. 122/

c. Policy Views from Saigon. The same group of Principals that met on the 24th re-assembled on 27 November for their first meeting with Ambassador Taylor. Present also was Michael Forrestal who had gone to Saigon to help prepare Taylor for the forthcoming strategy meetings and to apprise him of the Working Group efforts. 123/ Taylor led off with a prepared briefing on the current state of affairs within South Vietnam.

Ambassador Taylor's estimate of the situation in South Vietnam was rather bleak. Confirming many of the assessments made weeks earlier

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in intelligence estimates, he reported continued deterioration of the pacification program and continued weakness in the central government. The former was portrayed as related to increased direction and support of VC operations from Hanoi and increasing VC strength despite "very heavy losses inflicted almost daily" by the ARVN. Particular areas of concern were identified as the area surrounding Saigon and the northern provinces, which were "now in deep trouble." Taylor related GVN weakness to political factionalism, mounting war weariness and hopelessness, "particularly in the urban areas," and a lack of "team play or mutual loyalty" among many central and provincial officials. Calling such chronic weakness "a critical liability to future plans," he warned that lack of an effective central government caused U.S. efforts to assist South Vietnam to have little impact. 124/

To alter the course of what Taylor called "a losing game in South Vietnam," he recommended three measures: (1) "establish an adequate government"; (2) improve the counterinsurgency effort; and (3) "persuade or force the DRV" to stop aiding and directing the insurgency. With respect to the first, Taylor allowed that it was "hard to decide what is the minimum government which is necessary to permit reasonable hope" of success. However, he stated:

"...it is hard to visualize our being willing to make added outlays of resources and to run increasing political risks without an allied government which, at least, can speak for and to its people, can maintain law and order in the principal cities, can provide local protection for the vital military bases and installations, can raise and support Armed Forces, and can gear its efforts to those of the United States. Anything less than this would hardly be a government at all, and under such circumstances, the United States Government might do better to carry forward the war on a purely unilateral basis.

With regard to the counterinsurgency effort, he opined, "We cannot do much better than what we are doing at present until the government improves." 125/

Ambassador Taylor saw U.S. military actions directed at the DRV as fulfilling a twofold purpose. On the one hand, he believed that even if an effective government were established, "we will not succeed in the end unless we drive the DRV out of its reinforcing role and obtain its cooperation in bringing an end to the Viet Cong insurgency." On the other hand, he saw actions outside South Vietnam as a means to improve GVN morale and confidence. Acknowledging that using our aid, advice and encouragement on behalf of programs to stabilize the government would probably be insufficient for this purpose, he suggested additional measures:

"One way to accomplish this lift of morale would be to increase the covert operations against North Viet Nam by sea.

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and air and the counterinfiltration attacks within the Laotian corridor. While the former would be covert...knowledge of their occurrence could be made known...to give the morale lift which is desired. Additionally we could engage in reprisal bombings, to repay outrageous acts of the Viet Cong in South Viet Nam...."

However, he added that even all these actions might not be sufficient "to hold the present government upright," in which case we would have to reconsider our policies. Our alternatives, he said, would be either to support one form or another of a replacement government or to "limit our contribution to military action directed at North Viet-Nam." 126/

In addition to the military actions already identified with morale-raising purposes, Taylor suggested:

"...we could begin to escalate progressively by attacking appropriate targets in North Viet-Nam. If we justified our action primarily upon the need to reduce infiltration, it would be natural to direct these attacks on infiltration-related targets such as staging areas, training facilities, communications centers and the like.... In its final forms, this kind of attack could extend to the destruction of all important fixed targets in North Viet-Nam and to the interdiction of movement on all lines of communication. 127/

Ambassador Taylor's views regarding the circumstances under which such escalatory actions should be initiated were not entirely clear in his briefing to the Principals. After reiterating the necessity of stepping up the 34A operations, increasing those in Laos, and undertaking reprisals as part of the efforts to raise morale and strengthen the GVN, he stated two somewhat different, although not necessarily contradictory, viewpoints on the question of stronger military actions:

"If this course of action is inadequate, and the government falls, then we must start over again or try a new approach.... In any case, we should be prepared for emergency military action against the North if only to shore up a collapsing situation.

"If, on the other hand...the government maintains and proves itself, then we should be prepared to embark on a methodical program of mounting air attacks in order to accomplish our pressure objectives vis-a-vis the DRV...."

He then proposed a scenario for controlled escalation, the actions in which were quite similar to an extended Option A or a low-order Option C without declared negotiating willingness. 128/

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The impression is that Taylor visualized graduated air operations having primarily psychological impact on the North following logically from successful political efforts in the South -- but that he also wanted an (perhaps somewhat stronger) air campaign held in readiness as a punitive measure in the event of a critical reversal in the South. This impression is strengthened by his earlier comment about U.S. alternatives and by the second of "three principles" which he recommended to the Principals:

"a. Do not enter into negotiations until the DRV is hurting.

"b. Never let the DRV gain a victory in South Viet-Nam without having paid a disproportionate price.

"c. Keep the GVN in the forefront of the combat and the negotiations." 129/

Involving the GVN in all phases of our operations was an important aspect of the Ambassador's thinking about next courses of action. He stressed that before making a final decision on the course we would follow, it would be necessary to obtain the reactions of Prime Minister Huong and General Khanh to our various alternatives. He explained:

"They will be taking on risks as great or greater than ours so that they have a right to a serious hearing. We should make every effort to get them to ask our help in expanding the war. If they decline, we shall have to re-think the whole situation."

"If, as is likely, they urge us," Taylor added, we should take advantage of their enthusiasm "to nail down certain important points" on which we want their agreement. Included were GVN pledges to maintain military and police strength, to replace incompetent officials, and to suppress disorder and agreements to stipulated divisions of responsibility for conducting military operations. 130/

Taylor's briefing made clear his commitment to limited U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia and his believe in the necessity of assuring the DRV of this limitation. Further, he made explicit his expectation that the DRV would not accept U.S. offensive actions without some intensified military reaction in the South and that any DRV submission to our demands might well be temporary.

d. Discussions with Ambassador Taylor. Following the briefing, the Principals commented on a number of the Ambassador's observations and discussed further the question of future courses of action. Secretary Rusk asked what could be done to make the GVN perform better. Taylor replied that he must be able to convey a strong message but that we

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couldn't threaten the Saigon government. For example, a threat to "withdraw unless" would be "quite a gamble." The issue of neutralism was raised and "Ambassador Taylor noted that 'neutralism' as it existed in Saigon appeared to mean throwing the internal political situation open and thus inviting Communist participation." Mr. Ball observed that a neutralist state could not be maintained unless the VC were defeated and that the GVN must continue to be free to receive external aid until that occurred. Therefore, "neutralism in the sense of withdrawal of external assistance" did not seem to be a hopeful alternative. In apparent reply to Taylor's briefing comments to the effect that the United States might continue military action against North Vietnam despite a GVN collapse, Rusk commented that he "couldn't see a unilateral war" in this event. Taylor indicated that he meant "only punitive actions." Secretary McNamara agreed with Rusk, but added that if the GVN continued to weaken we would need to try Option C or A. "The consensus was that it was hard to visualize continuing in these circumstances [if the GVN collapsed or told us to get out], but that the choice must certainly be avoided if at all possible." 131/

After a discussion of some of the administrative problems in the GVN, "Ambassador Taylor noted that General Westmoreland had prepared a report of the military situation" in South Vietnam. (The report was later distributed to the group.) He indicated that "Westmoreland was generally more optimistic than he (Taylor)" and that he saw better morale, increased defections and the like as signs of improvement in the military situation. Further, he stated that Westmoreland would be inclined to wait six months before taking further actions in order to have a firmer base for them. However, Taylor added that "he himself did not believe that we could count on the situation holding together that long, and that we must do something sooner than this." Secretary McNamara also disagreed with Westmoreland's view, expressing doubts that the military situation would improve. In answer to specific questions, McNamara stated his opinions that (1) no, the political situation would not become stronger, but (2) yes, we would be justified in undertaking Option C even if the political situation did not improve. Taylor replied that "stronger action would definitely have a favorable effect" in South Vietnam, "but he was not sure this would be enough really to improve the situation." Others, including McNamara, agreed with Taylor's evaluation, but the Secretary added that "the strengthening effect of Option C could at least buy time, possibly measured in years." 132/

Ambassador Taylor then urged that "over the next two months we adopt a program of Option A plus the first stages of Option C." He argued that the GVN was badly in need of some "pulmotor treatment," that any other alternative would probably result in a worsened situation -- perhaps militarily. He added that the likelihood of GVN improvement seemed so doubtful that "we should move into C right away." Secretary Rusk asked if Option C would give Taylor the "bargaining leverage"

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needed with the GVN. The Ambassador replied by suggesting certain details of the message he would propose passing to the Saigon government. In effect these called for the GVN to agree to the kind of internal policies and command arrangements suggested in his briefing, in return for a prompt U.S. implementation of "Option A plus" and acknowledgment of the intention to go further if the GVN stabilized itself. 133/ It is important to note that the official memorandum of the foregoing discussion implies agreement among the Principals that Option A plus early stages of C should be recommended. The memorandum states, "It was urged that ..." and "to get what improvements we could it was thought that we should move into some parts of C soon."

There followed a discussion of the infiltration evidence, during which Mr. McCone indicated that an intelligence team had made a further investigation of it.

"It was agreed that State and Defense should check statements made by Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and General Wheeler on this subject, so that these could be related to the previous MACV and other estimates and a full explanation developed of how these earlier estimates had been made and why they had been wrong in the light of fuller evidence." 134/

Before the meeting adjourned (with agreement to meet again the next day), Ambassador Taylor raised a number of questions which he thought the Working Group papers had not covered adequately (TAB B). Only a few received answers during the meeting, and he agreed to furnish the Principals with the complete list. However, it was indicated that Option B or C could be initiated from a "standing start" -- presumably with no incidents necessarily occurring first. The GVN were acknowledged to have "plenty of capabilities" to participate -- even before arriving at the intended four-squadron strength of A-1 aircraft. It was stressed that the VNAF role would be in North Vietnam only -- not in Laos -- and Secretary McNamara indicated a strong role for them against targets below the 19th Parallel. Finally, a time-span of three to six months was indicated as the expected duration for Option C. 135/

On the following day, when the Principals reassembled, William Bundy circulated a draft scenario of actions proposed in the event a decision were made to undertake measures like those contained in Option A. It had been agreed at the end of the initial meeting that these would be reviewed by the group with the assumption that they could be implemented "with or without a decision to move into the full Option C program at some time thereafter." 136/ (It is important to note how readily the attention of the Principals focused on the similarity of preparatory actions and early military measures in the various options, apparently without regard to the particular negotiating rationale which each option incorporated.) Bundy's scenario of early military, political and diplomatic actions was based on a similar assumption "that a decision is or is not /going to be/ taken to go on with Option C thereafter if Hanoi does

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not bend or the GVN come apart." He indicated, however, that the Working Group believed "that at least a contingent decision to go on is now required." To facilitate discussion on the part of the Principals, worksheets indicating proposed language or procedures were distributed, to include the following action categories. 137/

1. U.S. public action
 - a. White House statement following 1 December meeting
 - b. Background briefing on infiltration
 - c. Congressional consultation
 - d. Major Presidential speech
 - e. Public report on infiltration
2. Consultation with the GVN
3. Consultation with key allies
4. Communications with Communist nations
5. Existing forms of military actions (including reconnaissance and RIAF strikes in Laos, GVN maritime operations, etc.)
6. Reprisal actions resulting from DE SOTO Patrols and "spectaculars"
7. Added military and other actions

Certain of these topics received more attention than others in the course of the meeting, with emphasis being placed on "spelling out" the exact steps that the Principals would be asking the President to approve. With respect to actions aimed at the U.S. public, McGeorge Bundy stressed that the Presidential speech must both (1) affirm U.S. determination and (2) be consistent with the infiltration evidence. General Wheeler stated that earlier infiltration reports could be defended because of their small data base and suggested that the discrepancies could be used to explain how the VC operated. It was determined that one man should be put in charge of assembling the available infiltration data for public release, and Chester Cooper was suggested for the job. With respect to coordination with the GVN, Ambassador Taylor pointed out the need to prepare a draft statement to the GVN for the President's review and agreed to prepare a table of the specific GVN actions needed. Secretary Rusk acknowledged the possible desirability of delaying until GVN leadership issues were resolved, but that "anything now would cause problems." Mr. Ball reminded that it would be necessary to query the GVN regarding release of some of the infiltration evidence. 133/

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Military and other related actions were also discussed: Secretary Rusk indicated the need to surface the GVN maritime operations, and Ambassador Taylor suggested that they and other morale-raising actions could be made public "in one package." In discussing the possible need for additional airfields in the northern part of South Vietnam, it was pointed out that a new jet field might take two years. Secretary McNamara said he thought there were enough fields to support Option C now if certain readily accessible improvements were added. He and the generals (Wheeler and Taylor) reminded the group that stopping the movement of U.S. dependents to South Vietnam or withdrawing those already there could not be concealed and that this problem must be resolved promptly -- certainly within the initial 30 days. Taylor cautioned that actions regarding dependents could not be taken until our full course was decided, presumably because of potential GVN fears of a U.S. withdrawal. The question of resumed DE SOTO Patrols was raised with the reminder that CINCPAC wanted them for intelligence purposes. Taylor, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy opposed the idea, while General Wheeler strongly supported it. Notes of the meeting indicate resolution to the effect that the patrols should not be resumed during the first 30-day period. It was also agreed to recommend joint U.S./GVN planning of reprisal actions and of further escalatory measures. 139/

At some point during the meeting it was determined that William Bundy would undertake preparation of a draft national security action paper containing policy guidance for the approaching period. The paper was to describe the strategic concept, outline the actions to be taken during the initial 30-day period, and indicate likely follow-on measures and the conditions under which they might be implemented. It was decided that the paper would be reviewed at another meeting of the Principals on 30 November, before submission to the President. A White House meeting had been scheduled for the following day. 140/

On the afternoon of the 30th, in Secretary Rusk's conference room, the Principals met again. Bundy's draft paper had been distributed to them earlier after being generally approved (re format) by Rusk and reviewed for substance by Messrs. McNaughton and Forrestal. 141/

In describing the basic concept, the paper presented U.S. objectives as "unchanged," although giving primary emphasis to our aims in South Vietnam. However, getting the DRV to remove its support and direction from the insurgency in the South, and obtaining their cooperation in ending VC operations there, were listed among the basic objectives -- not presented as a strategy for attaining them. The objectives were to be pursued in the first 30 days by measures including those contained in Option A, plus U.S. armed route reconnaissance operations in Laos. They were linked with Ambassador Taylor's rationale that these actions would be intended primarily "to help GVN morale and to increase the costs and strain on Hanoi." The concept also included Taylor's emphasis on

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pressing the GVN to make itself more effective and to push forward its pacification efforts. For the period beyond the first 30 days, the concept provided that

"...first-phase actions may be continued without change, or additional military measures may be taken including the withdrawal of dependents and the possible initiation of strikes a short distance across the border against the infiltration routes from the DRV. In the latter case this would become a transitional phase." 142/

The kind of actions that the transition would lead to were described in a carefully qualified manner:

"...if the GVN improves its effectiveness to an acceptable degree and Hanoi does not yield on acceptable terms, or if the GVN can only be kept going by stronger action, the U.S. is prepared -- at a time to be determined -- to enter into a second phase program...of graduated military pressures directed systematically against the DRV."

The concept continued with a mixture of suggested actions and rationale similar to that in Option C. The air strikes would be "progressively more serious" and "adjusted to the situation." The expected duration was indicated as "possibly running from two to six months." "Targets in the DRV would start with infiltration targets south of the 19th Parallel and work up to targets north of that point." The approach would be steady and deliberate, to give the United States the option "to proceed or not; to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not." It concluded with the following:

"Concurrently, the U.S. would be alert to any sign of yielding by Hanoi, and would be prepared to explore negotiated solutions that attain U.S. objectives in an acceptable manner. The U.S. would seek to control any negotiations and would oppose any independent South Vietnamese efforts to negotiate." 143/

Bundy's draft NSAM also included a summation of the recommended JCS alternative concept and a brief description of the various military, political and diplomatic measures to be taken during the first 30 days following implementation of the concept. Significantly, the latter included reprisal actions "preferably within 24 hours" for a wide range of specified VC provocations. It also contained a specific provision that DE SOTO Patrols would not be resumed during the initial 30-day period, but would be considered for the follow-on period.

In the documents available there was no record of the proceedings of the meeting on 30 November. The only evidence available was

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the notations appearing on the original draft NSAM, filed with other papers from the NSC Working Group at the State Department. Therefore, the following assessment of what occurred is limited to inferences from that sparse evidence. Moreover, based on this evidence, it is not absolutely certain that the changes indicated came as a result of the Principals meeting.

Several changes apparently were made in order not to ask the President to commit himself unnecessarily (e.g., the language was changed from "take" to "resume" a specific action in the second phase to "be prepared to take," etc.). Others had policy implications. The only significant change in the first category was to remove any reference in the title to NSAM and to call it merely a "position paper." In the latter category, several changes seem significant. For example, keeping the GVN going through the effects of stronger U.S. action was deleted as one of the circumstances under which we might initiate a program of "graduated military pressures" against the DRV. Apparently based on Secretary McNamara's comment, reference to the United States seeking to control the negotiations and blocking South Vietnamese efforts in this direction was removed. The summary of JCS views was also removed from the concept, in effect presenting a united front to the President. From the description of 30-day actions, all reference to the intent to publicize infiltration evidence or present it to allied and Congressional leaders was eliminated, including the intention to link reprisal actions to DRV infiltration to develop "a common thread of justification." Also removed was reference to a major Presidential speech, apparently on the advice of McGeorge Bundy. 144/

Although there is a bare minimum of rationale or explanation for these changes in the available evidence, the pattern described by the changes themselves is significant. In effect, Option A along with the lowest order of Option C actions were being recommended by the Principals in a manner that would represent the least possible additional commitment. This represented a considerable softening of the positions held at the end of the first Principals meeting, on the 24th.

It also represented a substantial deviation from the findings of the Working Group. It will be recalled that the group conceded Option A little chance of contributing to an improved GVN and saw its likely impact on South Vietnamese morale as no more lasting than the effects of the Tonkin Gulf reprisals. Moreover, even extended "A" was believed "at best" to be capable of little more than an improved U.S. position -- certainly not of a meaningful settlement. 145/ In effect, the Principals were returning to the initial concept of Option C held in the Working Group by Bundy, Johnson and McNaughton -- but without the initially flexible attitude toward national interest and objectives in Southeast Asia.

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It is important to consider the factors that may have brought about the change. (1) It may have resulted as a reaction to the persuasiveness of General Taylor's arguments. (2) It may have represented a genuine mellowing of individual viewpoints after the opportunity to consider other judgments and weigh all the factors. (3) It may have resulted from the Principals' uneasiness with the negotiating track included in Option C. (4) It may have reflected concern over public pressure for harsher measures that could have resulted from too much public emphasis on the increased infiltration. (5) It may have represented an attempt to enhance the chances of the President's approving some kind of stepped up U.S. action outside of South Vietnam. With regard to the latter, McGeorge Bundy, as the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, was in a position to convey President Johnson's mood to the group. Moreover, notes taken at the White House meeting tend to confirm that the President's mood was more closely akin to the measures recommended than to those in Option B or full Option C. Then again, it may be that all of these factors operated on the Principals in some measure.

Also significant, in the series of discussions held by the Principals, was their apparent lack of attention to the policy issues related to negotiations. Despite the fact that Option C measures were stipulated for the second phase of U.S. actions, the early negotiating posture intended to accompany that option was apparently paid little heed. According to the meeting notes, the only reference to our bargaining capability was Secretary Rusk's concern as to whether Option C actions would enable Ambassador Taylor to bargain in Saigon. Among the documents from the Principals meetings, the only reference to Hanoi's interest in negotiating occurred in Bundy's draft NSAM, where he reflected apparent Administration expectations that after more serious pressures were applied the DRV would move first in the quest for a settlement. 146/

In retrospect, the Principals appear to have assumed rather low motivation on the part of the DRV. Either this or they were overly optimistic regarding the threat value of U.S. military might, or both.

For example, Ambassador Taylor's perception of how a settlement might be reached -- which apparently produced little unfavorable reaction among the others -- indicated the assumption that DRV concessions to rather major demands could be obtained with relatively weak pressures. In his suggested scenario (acknowledged as "very close" to the concept accepted by the Principals), 147/ the U.S. negotiating posture accompanying a series of attacks, limited to infiltration targets "just north of the DMZ," was intended to be as follows:

"...in absence of public statements by DRV, initiate no public statements or publicity by ourselves or GVN. If DRV does make public statements, confine ourselves and

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GVN to statements that GVN is exercising right of self-defense and we are assisting....disclose to selected allies, and possibly USSR, U.S./GVN terms for cessation of attacks as follows:

A. Demands:

1. DRV return to strict observance of 1954 Accords with respect SVN -- that is, stop infiltration and bring about a cessation of VC armed insurgency.

B. In return:

1. U.S. will return to 1954 Accords with respect to military personnel in GVN and GVN would be willing to enter into trade talks looking toward normalization of economic relations between DRV and GVN.
2. Subject to faithful compliance by DRV with 1954 Accords, U.S. and GVN would give assurances that they not use force or support the use of force by any other party to upset the Accords with respect to the DRV.
3. ...the GVN would permit VC desiring to do so to return to the DRV without their arms or would grant amnesty..."

Taylor went on to suggest that "if and when Hanoi indicates its acceptance" the United States should avoid (1) the danger of a cease-fire accompanied by prolonged negotiations and (2) "making conditions so stringent" as to be impracticable. 148/

Significantly, the terms were to be conveyed to Hanoi privately. They did not constitute a declaratory policy in the usual sense of that term. Hence, it must be assumed that they would be presented to the DRV with the attitude of "acceptance or else" -- that they were not perceived primarily as conveying a firm public image. Moreover, the terms were designed to accompany what became known as "phase two," the graduated pressures of Option C -- not the 30-day actions derived from Option A. They were meant to represent the "early negotiating" posture of the United States -- not the "no-negotiation" posture associated with Option A.

This general attitude toward negotiations was apparently shared by other Principals. This is indicated by changes made in Option C procedures, in the Summary of the Working Group's findings, following

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the first Principals meeting. Essentially, these involved an adamant resistance to "any formal Geneva Conference on Vietnam." Formerly, such a conference was regarded as the "best forum" -- after conducting a number of military actions against the DRV. Under the revised approach, the U.S. Government would merely "watch and listen closely" for signs of weakening from Hanoi and Peking. If the DRV held firm in response to initial military actions against North Vietnam and if along with these actions an improvement had occurred in the GVN, the Administration would press harder for acceptance of the initial negotiating position. 149/ Thus, it is fairly clear that the policy position formulated by the Principals before presentation to the President included no provision for early bargaining at the conference table.

2. Courses of Action Approved in the White House

On 1 December, the Principals met with President Johnson and Vice President-elect Humphrey in the White House. During a meeting that lasted two-and-a-half hours, Ambassador Taylor briefed the President on the situation in South Vietnam, and the group reviewed the evidence of increasing DRV support for the conflicts in South Vietnam and Laos. Ways of countering the impact of infiltration and of improving the situation were discussed. At the conclusion of the meeting Secretary McNamara was reported to have been overheard saying to the President, "It would be impossible for Max to talk to these people /waiting reporters/ without leaving the impression that the situation is going to hell." Accordingly, Ambassador Taylor slipped out the White House rear entrance, and only a brief, formal statement was given to the press. 150/

The source documents available at the time of this writing do not indicate the precise nature of the President's decisions. Since a NSAM was not issued following the meeting, one would have to have access to White House case files and National Security Council meeting notes to be certain of what was decided. Even then, one might not find a clear-cut decision recorded. However, from handwritten notes of the meeting, from instructions issued to action agencies, and from later reports of diplomatic and military actions taken, it is possible to reconstruct the approximate nature of the discussion and the decisions reached.

The revised "Draft Position Paper on Southeast Asia," containing the two-phase concept for future U.S. policy and the proposed 30-day action program, provided the basis for the White House discussions. Handwritten notes of the proceedings refer to various topics in approximately the same order as they are listed in that portion of the position paper dealing with the 30-day action program. There is no indication that the over-all concept was discussed. However, it is evident from the notes that the various actions under discussion were considered in terms of the details of their implementation. 151/ This fact -- together with the content of the formal instructions later issued to

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Ambassador Taylor -- make it clear that, in general outline at least, the concept submitted by the Principals was accepted by the President. However, as will be seen, it is also clear that he gave his approval to implement only the first phase of the concept.

In addition to Ambassador Taylor's report, the meeting dealt mainly with two subjects: (1) Taylor's consultations with South Vietnamese leaders and (2) conversations with other U.S. allies who had an interest in the Vietnamese situation.

The President made it clear that he considered that pulling the South Vietnamese together was basic to anything else the United States might do. He asked the Ambassador specifically which groups he might talk to and what more we might do to help bring unity among South Vietnam's leaders. He asked whether we could not say to them "we just can't go on" unless they pulled together. To this, Taylor replied that we must temper our insistence somewhat, and suggested that we could say that "our aid is for the Huong government, not necessarily for its successor." The President asked whether there was not some way we could "get to" such groups as the Catholics, the Buddhists and the Army. Possible additional increments of military aid were then discussed as means of increasing U.S. leverage among military leaders. The President also asked about "the Communists" in South Vietnam. Taylor's reply was noted rather cryptically, but the impression given is that the Communists were being used already, but that he questioned the desirability of trying to pressure them. He apparently stated that they were "really neutralists," but that the French were "not really bothering" to use them. The President observed that the situation in South Vietnam "does look blacker" to the public than it apparently was. He wondered if something could not be done to change the impression being given in the news. 152/

Toward the end of the discussion of consultations with the South Vietnamese, President Johnson stated his conviction that the GVN was too weak to take on the DRV militarily. He acknowledged that the South Vietnamese had received good training, but emphasized that we "must have done everything we can" to strengthen them before such a conflict occurred. 153/ This attitude was reflected in the guidance given to Ambassador Taylor and in the statement he was authorized to make to the GVN. The statement contained a passage asserting that the U.S. Government did not believe

"that we should incur the risks which are inherent in any expansion of hostilities without first assuring that 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...."

The statement went on to emphasize that before the United States could move to expand hostilities, the GVN would have to be capable of

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"maintaining law and order," of ensuring that its plans for further operations would be carried out, and of coping with "the enemy reactions which must be expected to result" from changes in the current pattern of operations. 154/

The White House discussions of U.S. consultation with other allies were prefaced by the President's strong affirmation that we needed "new dramatic, effective" forms of assistance from several of these countries. Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the Philippines were specifically mentioned. Secretary Rusk added that the U.K. also could do more. A possible Republic of China contribution was discussed, but the Secretary expressed concern that introduction of GRC combat units would tend to merge the problem of Vietnam with the conflict between the two Chinese regimes. Apparently, the Principals' proposal to send a representative to the governments of Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines was approved. In each case, the representative was to explain our concept and proposed actions and request additional contributions by way of forces in the event the second phase of U.S. actions were entered. Vice President-elect Humphrey was suggested for consultations with the Philippine government. The President asked about the possibility of a West German contribution, but Secretary McNamara emphasized that German political problems would inhibit such a pledge from Bonn. Finally, it was agreed that Ambassador Taylor would cable the particular kind of third country assistance that would be welcomed after he had a chance to consult with the GVN. 155/

At the close of the meeting, the White House released a press statement which contained only two comments regarding any determinations that had been reached. One reaffirmed "the basic United States policy of providing all possible and useful assistance" to South Vietnam, specifically linking this policy with the Congressional Joint Resolution of 10 August. The other stated:

"The President instructed Ambassador Taylor to consult urgently with the South Vietnamese Government as to measures that should be taken to improve the situation in all its aspects." 156/

During the subsequent press briefing, George Reedy indicated to reporters that Taylor would be working on the specific details of his forthcoming conversations in Saigon "for another two to three days" and would have at least one more meeting with the President before his return. 157/ However, it seems clear that most of what he would say to GVN officials was settled during the initial White House meeting. A proposed text was appended to the Principals' draft position paper, and it is clear that this was discussed on 1 December. Apparently, the only change made at that time was to remove a proposed U.S. pledge to furnish air cover for the GVN maritime operations against the North Vietnamese coast. 158/

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After the meeting, the statement was recast in the form of Presidential instructions to Ambassador Taylor -- with specific authorization for the Ambassador to alter the phrasing as he thought necessary to insure effective communications with the GVN. However, the concept and the specific points for communication were unchanged. The instructions made specific provision for him to inform senior GVN officials of the U.S. willingness (1) to cooperate in intensifying the GVN maritime operations and (2) "to add U.S. airpower as needed to restrict the use of Laotian territory as an infiltration route into SVN." These pledges were prefaced by statements to the effect that U.S. actions directly against the DRV could not be taken until GVN effectiveness was assured along certain specified lines. The statements made explicit the policy view that "we should not incur the risks which are inherent in such an expansion of hostilities" until such improvements were made. As evidence of our desire to encourage these developments, however, the rationale stressed that the Administration was "willing to strike harder at the infiltration routes in Laos and at sea." 159/

The instructions also included specific provision that the U.S. Mission in Saigon was to work with the GVN in developing joint plans for reprisal operations and for air operations appropriate for a second phase of new U.S. actions. The general relationship between the two contemplated phases was explained, and the Phase Two purpose "of convincing the leaders of DRV that it is to their interest to cease to aid the Viet Cong" was stated. The joint character of the "progressively mounting" air operations against North Vietnam, should they be decided on later, was emphasized. 160/

As indicated earlier, there was no NSAM issued following the strategy meeting of 1 December. The reasons why are clear. In effect, the actions recommended by the Principals and approved by the President did not constitute a significant departure from the actions authorized in NSAM 314 (9 September 1964). That document had already provided for discussions with the Laotian government leading to possible U.S. armed reconnaissance operations along the infiltration routes. Further, it had provided for resumption of the 34A maritime operations, which had continued throughout the fall. In effect, the December strategy meeting produced little change except to make more concrete the concept of possible future operations against North Vietnam and to authorize steps to include the GVN in preparations for these possibilities.

It is clear that the President did not make any commitment at this point to expand the war through future operations against North Vietnam. The assurances intended for the GVN in this regard were conditional at best. The extent to which the President was committed to such a course in his mind, or in discussions with his leading advisors, was not made explicit in the sources available. It is implied, however, in brief notes which were apparently intended to summarize the mood of the meeting on 1 December. In what may have been a summation of the President's expressions, these notes indicate several themes: (1) it is necessary to weigh the risks of careful action versus the risks of loss

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(of South Vietnam?) without action; (2) it may be necessary to act from a base not as strong as hoped for; (3) it is not certain, however, how public opinion can be handled; and (4) it is desirable to send out a "somewhat stronger signal." In addition, a comment not entirely legible stated "Measures can't do as much _____ (1) U.N. and (2) international [negotiations?]." In the context of the discussions, the impression left by these notations is that the White House was considerably less than certain that future U.S. actions against North Vietnam would be taken, or that they would be desirable. 161/

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III

IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

When Ambassador Taylor next met with the President on the afternoon of 3 December, McGeorge Bundy was the only other official present. Prior to this occasion, Taylor had sat with the other Principals to review specific features of the Administration's position and to work out details of the scenario that was about to go into production. When he left the President's office, presumably having received the final version of his instructions, the Ambassador told reporters that he was going to hold "across-the-board" discussions with the GVN. Asserting that U.S. policy for South Vietnam remained the same, he stated that his aim would be to improve the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. Although he hinted of changes "in tactics and method," he quite naturally did not disclose the kind of operations in which the United States was about to engage or any future actions to which immediate activities could lead. 162/

1. Early Actions

Phase One actions to exert additional pressures against North Vietnam were quite limited. Only two, the GVN maritime operations and U.S. armed reconnaissance missions in Laos, were military actions. The others involved stage-managing the public release of evidence of the increased Communist infiltration into South Vietnam and the acquisition of additional assistance for that country from other governments.

a. GVN Maritime Operations. Maritime operations under OPLAN 34A represented nothing new. These had been underway steadily since 4 October, and their November schedule was in the process of being carried out at the time the decisions on immediate actions were being made. On 25 November, six PTF craft bombarded a barracks area on Tiger Island with 81mm mortars, setting numerous fires. Moreover, a proposed schedule for December had been submitted by COMUSMACV on 27 November. This included a total of 15 maritime operations involving shore bombardments, a junk capture, a kidnap mission, and a demolition sortie against a coastal highway bridge. 164/ According to the concept, these were to be intensified during Phase One.

Soon after the decisions had been made to begin Phase One, the JCS tasked COMUSMACV with developing a revised December 34A schedule to better reflect the newly adopted pressure concept. CINCPAC was requested to submit revised 34A plans so as to arrive in Washington not later than 8 December. The instructions specified that these were "to include proposed sequence and timing for increased frequency of maritime operations" in two packages. The first was to begin on 15 December, extend over a period of 30 days and provide for "shallow penetration raids...on all

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types of targets which would provide the greatest psychological benefits ..." Destructive results and military utility were to be strictly secondary considerations. Package Two was to add 4 to 6 U.S. aircraft to afford protective cover and incorporate action against certain North Vietnamese coastal targets above the 19th Parallel. This package was intended to begin approximately 30 days following initiation of the first, although the instructions cautioned that the plans should be "prepared to provide for an indefinite period" of operations under Package One. 165/

MACV's new proposal for maritime operations was submitted on 5 December, with proposals for psychological operations and aerial resupply/reinforce missions following close behind. On the 10th, approval for the latter two was communicated back to the field. At the time, the MAROPS proposals were still under consideration within the JCS. 166/ On the 12th, the JCS submitted their two-package proposal. Included in their first 30-day package were coastal bombardment of radar sites, barracks, and PT boat bases plus a maritime equivalent of aerial armed route reconnaissance. Patrol boats would make "fire sweeps" along the coast against "targets of opportunity." In addition, upon their return from bombardment missions, it was proposed that the GVN PT boats attempt the capture of NVN junks and SWATOW craft. With the single exception of the coastal fire sweeps, all of these initial package operations were approved by OSD, and instructions were issued to implement the initial increment of such operations on or about 15 December. 167/

In accord with the instructions initially issued regarding intensified maritime operations, OSD decisions on the proposed second package were deferred. The JCS indicated that the addition of U.S. air cover, and the necessary command and control procedures needed to support such operations, could be implemented on or about 15 January. They went on to recommend that if this were decided, the "maritime operations should be surfaced...prior to [implementation of] Package Two." 168/

The JCS were disconcerted over disapproval of the fire sweeps along the North Vietnamese coast. However, their concern stemmed not so much from the lack of support for those particular operations as from their view that the disapproval removed from the package the only significant intensification beyond the level already attained before the President's Phase One decision. At a Principals meeting on 19 December, Acting JCS Chairman, General Harold K. Johnson, pointed out that with the modifications now made to it, the 34A program was, in effect, not intensified at all. Moreover, as discussion revealed, seasonal sea conditions were now so severe that no maritime operation had been completed successfully during the previous three weeks. 169/ In effect, therefore, the "intensified" December schedule of approved maritime operations still remained to be implemented as the month drew to a close.

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For January, the JCS urged that several air missions be added to the kind of operations already approved. Included were two VNAF air strikes, using unmarked aircraft and U.S. air escort for returning surface craft. 170/ However, both of these items were disapproved; only the air operations in support of psychological and resupply operations gained acceptance. 171/ Apparently there was little additional MAROPS activity during January, 1965; the normal documentary sources include very little for this period.

b. Armed Reconnaissance in Laos. Like the maritime operations, armed reconnaissance in Laos was, in some respects, a continuation of operations that had been underway for some time. At least, U.S. aircraft had been operating over Laos since the previous May, performing reconnaissance functions and providing armed escort for these and (since October) the RIAF strike missions. Of course, armed escort was carried out under strict rules of engagement that permitted attacking ground targets only in response to hostile fire. Given the operational code YANKEE TEAM, these carrier and land-based missions had been following a constant pattern for several months. This had included roughly four daylight reconnaissance flights in the Plaine des Jarres - Route 7 area every two weeks, and during a like period, approximately ten reconnaissance flights in the Panhandle, and two night-reconnaissance flights along Route 7. Complementing these efforts were those of the RIAF, whose T-28's harassed the Pathet Lao, gave tactical air support to Royal Laotian Army units, interdicted Route 7 and the Panhandle, and performed armed route reconnaissance in Central Laos. During the period 1 October-30 December, there were a total of 724 T-28 sorties in the Panhandle alone. These had already precipitated several complaints from the DRV, alleging U.S.-sponsored air attacks on North Vietnamese territory. 172/

The intended U.S. policy was discussed with Premier Souvanna Phouma on 10 December by the new U.S. Ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan. He reported that Souvanna "fully supports the U.S. pressures program and is prepared to cooperate in full." The Premier particularly wanted interdiction of Routes 7, 8, and 12, but he insisted on making no public admission that U.S. aircraft had taken on new missions in Laos. The Administration had indicated to the Vientiane Embassy a few days earlier that it wished the RIAF to intensify its strike program also, particularly "in the Corridor areas and close to the DRV border." 173/

In the meantime, the JCS developed an air strike program to complement the YANKEE TEAM operation in accordance with current guidance, and had instructed CINCPAC to be prepared to carry it out. The program included missions against targets of opportunity along particular portions of Route 8 and Routes 121 and 12. It also included secondary targets for each mission that included barracks areas and military strong points. The second mission was to be flown not earlier than three days following the first. 174/ The program was briefed at a 12 December meeting of the

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Principals by Deputy Secretary Vance and was approved by them with one exception. They amended the ordnance instructions which had been prepared for CINCPAC to specifically exclude the use of napalm. For its first use against targets in Laos, they felt, the RIAF would be the only appropriate user. McGeorge Bundy stated that the amended program "fulfilled precisely the President's wishes," and that he (Bundy) would so inform the President. He further stated that, barring separate advice to the contrary, the program should be executed. It was also agreed at this meeting that there would be no public statements about armed reconnaissance operations in Laos unless a plane were lost. In such an event, the Principals stated, the Government should continue to insist that we were merely escorting reconnaissance flights as requested by the Laotian Government. 175/

Armed reconnaissance operations in Laos, called BARREL ROLL, got underway on 14 December. This first mission was flown by USAF jet aircraft along Route 8. It was followed on the 17th by carrier-based A-1 and jet aircraft, striking along Routes 121 and 12. On the 18th, this pattern of two missions by four aircraft each was determined by Secretary of Defense or higher authority to be the weekly standard -- at least through the third week. 176/ Just a day earlier, the JCS had proposed a second week's program that included repetition of the first week's operations plus missions along Route 7, 9 and 23. Their proposals were prepared with a statement of JCS understanding "that a gradual increase in intensity of operations is intended for the second week." Recalling Souvanna Phouma's reported requests for such operations, they also included a strong recommendation that Route 7 be struck as part of the second week's missions. 177/

This same rationale was voiced by General Johnson in the Principals meeting on 19 December. He pointed out that the BARREL ROLL program briefed there by Deputy Secretary Vance did not represent any intensification beyond the previous week's effort. Vance confirmed that not intensifying the program had been one of the criteria applied in selecting the second week's missions. Consensus was reached by the Principals that the program should remain about the same for the next two weeks, in accordance with the most recent guidance. 178/

At the end of December, when there was serious question about the efficacy of maintaining the direction of U.S. policy in South Vietnam, Defense officials requested an evaluation of the BARREL ROLL program. In particular, they were concerned as to "why neither the DRV nor the Communist Chinese have made any public mention of or appeared to have taken cognizance of our BARREL ROLL operations." 179/ In response, a DIA assessment indicated that the Communists apparently had made no "distinction between BARREL ROLL missions on the one hand and the Laotian T-28 strikes and YANKEE TEAM missions on the other." Attributing all stepped up operations in Laos to the United States and its "lackeys," they had lumped all operations together as "U.S. armed interference in

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Laotian's [sic] affairs, gross violations of the General Agreements, and events which are causing a grave situation in Laos and Indochina." DIA went on to observe that "it would be most difficult to distinguish between YANKEE TEAM with its flat suppression aircraft from the BARREL ROLL missions." Further, the assessment observed that "BARREL ROLL strikes have followed T-28 strikes by varying periods of time and have been of lesser intensity. They probably appear to be a continuation of the Laotian program." It concluded:

"On balance, therefore, while the Communists are apparently aware of some increased use of U.S. aircraft, they probably have not considered the BARREL ROLL strikes to date as a significant change in the pattern or as representing a new threat to their activities." 180/

Despite the lack of discernible Communist reaction to BARREL ROLL by the end of the year and considerable concern among the JCS, there was little change in the operation during early January. On the 4th, CINCPAC was authorized to go ahead with the fourth week's program:

"One U.S. armed reconnaissance/pre-briefed air strike missions in Laos for the week of 4-10 January 1965, is approved. Additional missions will be the subject of later message." (Underlining added)

The approved mission called for night armed reconnaissance along Route 7, the first of its kind. 181/ At the time, the JCS were awaiting a decision on their proposals for a complementary mission, but the Department of State had objected to their choice of a secondary target because it was located near Cambodian territory. Earlier in the series, the Tchepone barracks had been deleted as a secondary mission by the White House because a Hanson Baldwin article had named it as a likely target. On 5 January, the JCS representative reminded the Principals that the currently approved BARREL ROLL mission constituted the fourth week of these operations and, therefore, would terminate the initial 30-day period of Phase One pressures. The JCS were quite concerned that there had not yet been plans made for a "transition phase" of stepped up attacks to begin around mid-January. 182/

c. Surfacing Infiltration Evidence. An integral part of the Administration's pressures policy, particularly if U.S. forces were to be involved in direct attacks on North Vietnam, was the presentation to the public of convincing evidence of DRV responsibility for the precarious situation in South Vietnam. As seen earlier, a former intelligence specialist, Chester Cooper, was selected to compile a public account of the infiltration of trained cadre and guerrilla fighters, to be used for this purpose. His account was to be developed from the various classified reports that had been produced and was to lay particular stress on the alarming increase in the rate of infiltration in the latter half of 1964.

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Cooper submitted his report on 4 December. It was based on (1) a State-sponsored updating of the so-called Jordan Report, which described also the DRV's direction, control and materiel support of the insurgency (this had been discussed during the policy discussions in the Spring and initiated during the Summer); (2) the MACV infiltration study, based on interrogations of VC prisoners and completed in October; and (3) reports from a DIA/CIA INR team who went to Saigon in mid-November to evaluate the MACV report (they confirmed its validity). His report consisted of four items: (1) a summary statement and a more detailed public discussion of VC infiltration [TAB D]; (2) a list of possible questions and suggested answers for use with the press or the Congress; (3) "a reconciliation, or at least an explanation of past low estimates of infiltration given in Congressional testimony and to the press"; and (4) a listing of available documentary evidence and graphic materials to aid in public presentations. In his covering memorandum, Cooper urged that the materials be forwarded to Saigon so as to make MACV and Embassy officials fully aware of the proposed approach and to make consistent its use by U.S. and GVN personnel. 183/

The Cooper materials were forwarded for review to the Saigon Embassy on 8 December, and to the Principals on the 9th. 184/ Shortly thereafter, Secretary Rusk cabled Ambassador Taylor, expressing his concern that early release of the infiltration data "would generate pressures for actions beyond what we now contemplate." He sought Taylor's advice as to whether release would be wise. In the Ambassador's reply, he urged early release. He stated, "I do not feel that, at this point, the substance of the release will generate pressure for extreme action." Moreover, he expressed the view that release would serve to quiet the currently rife speculation among news correspondents and parts of the GVN concerning what the United States was intending to do in SVN. Citing a New York Daily News article (7 December) as an example of what he felt were increasingly likely leaks, he expressed his desire to make planned deliberate announcements of what the United States was now doing and what might be done in the future. He expressed his intention to have the GVN release the report on infiltration, complete with press briefings and statements, between 10-17 December. 185/

Despite strong recommendations from the field to release the infiltration data, the Principals determined that it should not yet be made public. During the first part of December, the chief advocate for not releasing it was Secretary McNamara. At their meeting on 12 December, Mr. Vance stated that Mr. McNamara wanted to withhold the infiltration data for the time being. His rationale was not recorded in the minutes. The State Department opinion in response was that the Department "did not consider it of any great moment." Thereafter, the Principals decided that release should be withheld, at least until their next meeting, 19 December. 186/

By the time they met again, a week later, several expressions of support for releasing the data had been received. On the 14th

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Ambassador Taylor recalled that the ARVN intelligence chief had reviewed the original MACV infiltration report and the proposed press release and had "concurred in commending declassification." On the 16th Ambassador Sullivan praised the Cooper report and suggested passing it to Souvanna Phouma prior to what he hoped would be a prompt public release. 187/ At the Principals meeting these views were cited in a strong statement by William Bundy concerning the problems of keeping the infiltration evidence out of the press. General Johnson, Acting Chairman, JCS, favored release as a morale boost to U.S. personnel in South Vietnam. McGeorge Bundy and Carl Rowen (USIA) favored gradual or piecemeal release. However, Mr. Vance repeated Secretary McNamara's wish to continue suppression of the infiltration report -- possibly for an indefinite period. This view finally prevailed, as the Principals agreed not to release the Cooper report either in Saigon or Washington. Instead, they felt that the President might disseminate some of the information through such vehicles as his State of the Union message or in a contemplated Christmas address to U.S. forces in Saigon. 188/

Following the meeting, but before receiving reports concerning the current political upheaval in Saigon, the State Department cabled the Administration's decision not to make a formal GVN/US release of the infiltration data. It gave as rationale the feeling that formal release "could be misinterpreted and become vehicle [for] undesirable speculation," and suggested alternative procedures. Stating that "general background briefings...should continue to indicate infiltration has increased without getting into specifics," it indicated that under pressure, the Saigon Embassy "could have one or more deep background sessions with [the] American forces." The cable cautioned, however, that specific numbers and comparisons with previous years' estimates should be avoided. These would not be released, it was advised, until late in January after senior Administration officials had testified to Congress in a scheduled inquiry. The current aim was stated "to get general picture into survey stores such as Grose article of November 1 rather than as spot news commanding wide attention." The cable concluded by acknowledging a "just received" Taylor message and approving his stated judgment to proceed with periodic background briefings in Saigon, along lines outlined above. 189/

Following the rift between the South Vietnamese military leaders and the American Embassy, resistance to the release of infiltration data hardened. In cables of 24 December, Ambassador Taylor was instructed to avoid background briefings on the infiltration increases until the political situation clarified. He was counseled that release of the data would be "unwise" unless he were to obtain evidence that the South Vietnamese military was planning to go ahead with a unilateral release. 190/ These instructions prevailed until well into January, 1965.

d. Consultations with "Third Countries." In the days immediately following the policy decisions of 1-3 December, several U.S. allies were consulted concerning the intended U.S. approach in Southeast Asia. In

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accord with the Principals' views, the governments of Thailand and Laos were briefed by the respective U.S. Ambassadors to those countries. Foreign Minister Thuan Khoman later visited the President in Washington and presumably pursued the matter further. The Canadians were contacted in both Ottawa and Washington. William Bundy held discussions in New Zealand and Australia on 4-5 December. Prime Minister Wilson of the United Kingdom was thoroughly briefed during a series of meetings in Washington, 7-9 December. Later, William Bundy told the Principals that the U.K., Australia and New Zealand received the full picture of immediate U.S. actions and its stipulations to the GVN and the potential two-phased concept of graduated pressures on North Vietnam. The Canadian Government was told slightly less. The Philippines, South Korea and the Republic of China were briefed on Phase One only. 191/

One of the aims stressed by President Johnson in the meeting of 1 and 3 December, and continually thereafter, was obtaining increased assistance for the GVN and for our efforts on its behalf from our allies. During the 12 December Principals meeting, for example, William Bundy related the President's recent wish to obtain assistance even from governments without strong Southeast Asia commitments, like Denmark, West Germany and India. This was mentioned in the context of a summary report on current "third-country assistance of all kinds to South Vietnam." 192/

At the time, however, not only general assistance from many countries but specifically military assistance from a select few was particularly sought. During the consultations with allied governments, both Australia and New Zealand were pressed to send troop units to assist ARVN. Both supported the U.S. policy decisions as probably necessary, but neither was willing at the time to make a commitment. New Zealand officials expressed grave doubts that Phase II would lead to negotiations, predicting instead that the DRV would only increase the clandestine troop deployments to the South. They expressed doubts about the advisability of sending allied ground forces into South Vietnam. 193/

The concept under which the allied troop deployments were believed desirable was related to that which the NSC Working Group had recommended as deserving further study. Contemplated was an international force built around one U.S. division, to be deployed just south of the DMZ in conjunction with stepped-up US/GVN air operations against North Vietnam. In essence, therefore, it was a Phase Two concept, dependent in some respects on the degree of success achieved during Phase One activities. The concept was examined in detail by the Joint Staff in early December, and their staff study was forwarded to the services and the Joint Pacific Headquarters "for comment and recommendations" on 10 December. The purposes cited for such a force deployment by the Joint Staff were stated as follows: (1) to deter ground invasion by the DRV; (2) to hold a "blocking position against DRV attacks down the coastal plain and make more difficult DRV efforts to bypass"; and (3) to be "capable of holding the defensive positions against attack until reinforcements arrive if required." 194/

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The degree to which the international force was believed to offer a useful option seems to have been in question. While the State Department and other non-military agencies apparently favored it, the Department of Defense was less than enthusiastic. At the 19 December Principals meeting, for example, all of those present agreed that "suitable planning toward such a force should go forward" except Assistant Defense Secretary McNaughton. He stated that he thought the idea had been shelved. 195/ Later, in their review of the Joint Staff's study, the services expressed reservations concerning the concept. They questioned its military utility, due to the deployments being framed essentially within a narrow deterrent context. They recommended instead a continued adherence to the deployment concept in the approved SEATO plans, which in their totality were aimed at the military defense of all Southeast Asia. The Army, in particular, expressed concern regarding routes and modes of possible DRV advance into South Vietnam that differed from those assumed by the study's below-the-DMZ concept. The Air Force pointed out that the international force concept conflicted with the JCS concept for deterring and dealing with overt DRV/CHICOM aggression as submitted on 14 November (JCSM-955-64). 196/

Mr. McNaughton's comments on 19 December seem to have been correct. The case files containing the service comments on the international force concept indicate no further action by the JCS after mid-January.

In the meantime, however, a different approach to attracting wider allied participation in the military defense of South Vietnam appeared promising. On 29 December, OSD/ISA reported readiness on the part of the Philippine, ROK and GRC Governments to provide various forms of assistance to South Vietnam. Included in the available Philippine and Korean packages were an assortment of military forces. The ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff offered a combat engineer battalion, an engineer field maintenance team, an Army transportation company, and a Marine Corps combat engineer company. The Philippine Government stated its willingness to send a reinforced infantry battalion, an engineer construction battalion, and some Special Forces units. 197/

2. Relations with the GVN

Following his second meeting with President Johnson, Ambassador Taylor returned to Saigon. He arrived on 6 December amid press speculation concerning the details of his instructions and subsequent U.S. actions. 198/ The basic charge given him by the President had been well publicized since their meeting on the 1st: "to consult urgently with the government of Prime Minister Tran Van Huong as to measures to be taken to improve the situation in all its aspects." However, such a diplomatically worded statement left much room for imaginative interpretation -- particularly in view of the Ambassador's "unannounced stopover in Hong Kong to get a briefing by U.S. 'China watchers' in that listening post." Several correspondents speculated on the likelihood of air action

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against the North. One, with an apparent inside source, even reported that these would be held in abeyance pending the outcome of strikes in Laos and the GVN reactions to U.S. suggestions for improvement. 198/

a. Joint Planning. In the days immediately following his return, Ambassador Taylor's schedule precipitated press reports of frantic activity within the Embassy and other parts of the U.S. Mission in Saigon. Taylor first briefed his Embassy Council and the Embassy staff on the policy discussions in Washington and the joint US/GVN courses of action which it was hoped would be followed in South Vietnam during ensuing weeks. On 7 December, he met with Premier Huong and his senior ministers and with General Khanh. On these occasions he outlined the military and diplomatic actions which the U.S. Government intended to take during Phase One and explained how the Administration related the possibilities of Phase Two actions to GVN performance. The Ambassador described in general terms the kinds of administrative improvements and joint planning activities which U.S. officials thought the GVN should undertake. 199/

Similar sessions were held during the next few days, as the details for the joint GVN/US efforts were worked out. On the evening of the 8th, Ambassador Taylor held a reception for members of the High National Council and General Westmoreland hosted the top ARVN generals at dinner. At both occasions, Taylor briefed the assembled on U.S. attitudes toward the GVN and, presumably, on the Administration's calculations of U.S. risk relative to GVN capability. On the following day, he held a lengthy session with Premier Huong, Deputy Premier Vien and General Khanh. On this occasion, he distributed a paper outlining nine specific actions which the U.S. Government believed were needed to strengthen the GVN and in which the local U.S. mission was committed to help. Taylor reported that the "paper was generally well received" and that "specific joint action responsibilities" had been agreed on. These were to be confirmed in writing on the following day. On that same day, he submitted a proposed GVN press release, describing in general terms the nature of the new U.S. assistance to be given and the new areas of GVN and joint GVN/US planning, designed to improve the situation in South Vietnam. 200/

On the 11th, having obtained Administration approval, an official GVN statement was released to the press. It related that "a series of discussions with the U.S. Mission" had just been completed and that the U.S. Government had offered additional assistance "to improve the execution of the Government's programs and to restrain [not 'offset' as originally worded] the mounting infiltration of men and equipment" from North Vietnam. Among military measures, it specified that U.S. support would enable "increased numbers of [South Vietnamese] military, paramilitary and police forces" and would permit "the strengthening of the air defense of South Vietnam." It also mentioned assistance "for a variety of forms of industrial, urban and rural development" and promised

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a GVN effort to improve "security and local government in the rural areas." The statement closed with the following two paragraphs, which subsequent events made to appear ironic but which were juxtaposed with great care:

"Together, the Government of Vietnam and the United States mission are making joint plans to achieve greater effectiveness against the infiltration threat.

"In the course of the discussions, the United States representatives expressed full support for the duly constituted Government of Prime Minister Huong." 201/

As the following section will show, the joint planning that had just gotten underway for reprisal actions and Phase II operations was soon to be halted. It was deferred for a period of about three weeks during the forthcoming GVN crisis. However, as implicit in the quoted paragraphs above, its resumption provided effective U.S. leverage to help bring about an accommodation between the military dissidents and the civilian regime.

b. GVN Crises. Late in the evening of 19 December, high-ranking South Vietnamese military leaders, led by General Khanh, moved to remove all power from the civilian regime of Premier Huong. The move came in the announced dissolution of the High National Council, which had been serving as a provisional legislature pending adoption of a permanent constitution, and the arrest of some of its members. Air Commodore Ky, acting as spokesman for the military, claimed that their intent was "to act as a mediator [to resolve] all differences in order to achieve national unity." The immediate apparent conflict was with the Buddhists who had been demonstrating and threatening to provoke civil disorders in protest against the Huong government. In Ambassador Taylor's view, however, the underlying motive was growing antipathy with particular members of the High National Council, brought to a head by the Council's refusal to approve a military plan to retire General (Big) Minh from active service (and thus remove him from a position to contend with the ruling military clique). Moreover, the military had become quite impatient with the civilian officials. 202/

The general consensus among the Ambassador, General Westmoreland and State Department officials was that General Khanh's relationship with the other influential generals and younger officers was rather uncertain. Therefore, they sought to bolster Premier Huong's resolve to remain in office on the basis of an understanding with the generals -- even to the extent of seeking Khanh's resignation or dismissal. When presented with U.S. views, Khanh gave initial appearances of recognizing that the military seizure had directly defied the U.S. policy position and the stipulated basis for continuing joint GVN/US efforts, and of accepting the need to withdraw. However, he quickly attempted to turn the crisis into a direct confrontation between himself and Ambassador Taylor. 203/ On the 22nd, he issued a strong public affirmation of the military leaders' actions,

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of the need to avoid situations "favorable to the common enemies [communism and colonialism in any form]," and of the military's resolve "not to carry out the policy of any foreign country." On the 24th, information was received that he intended to pressure Premier Huong into declaring Ambassador Taylor persona non grata. 204/

Administration reaction to this challenge indicated that it considered Khanh's defiance as a threat to the foundations of U.S. policy in South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor was instructed to inform Huong that the U.S. Government regarded the PNG issue as a "matter of gravest importance," and that "any acceptance of [Khanh's] demand or hesitation in rejecting it would make it virtually impossible...to continue support [of the] GVN effort." Suggesting that Huong might ask if he thought the "American People could be brought to support continued U.S. effort in SVN in face [of] PNG action against trusted Ambassador," the Administration urged persistence in encouraging Huong to seek an accommodation with the other military leaders. Moreover, high-ranking MACV personnel were urged to exploit their close relationships with South Vietnamese counterparts to encourage such an arrangement. As leverage, Taylor was encouraged to emphasize the intended directions of U.S. policy, subsequent to a strengthened and stable GVN. Specifically, he was urged to point out that joint reprisals for unusual VC actions and "any possible future decision to initiate [the] second phase" were impossible as long as current conditions persisted. He was told, "without offering anything beyond terms of your instructions you could use these to their fullest to bring [Ky and the other generals] around." 205/

There is no indication in the available sources that this advice was directly employed. It is evident, however, that Ambassador Taylor had explained the dependency of further U.S. actions on GVN progress very clearly to the key military leaders on 8 and 20 December. 206/ Therefore, they were well aware that continued U.S. assistance along the policy line explained to them was predicated on their cooperation, and this was demonstrated early in the crisis. Even before Khanh's public declaration of independence from U.S. policy, it became known that joint talks concerning increased aid to the South Vietnamese war effort had been suspended. A few days later that fact was given additional circulation, with emphasis that this suspension included particularly any discussions of measures to reduce the infiltration from Laos and North Vietnam. 207/

The degree to which the suspensions of joint planning actions affected the judgments of the South Vietnamese generals is, of course, not clear. What is apparent, however, is that this factor together with careful Embassy and Administration efforts to clarify possible misunderstandings led the generals to reconsider. By 28 December, Ambassador Taylor was reporting encouraging signs of an accommodation. 208/ On the 29th, Secretary Rusk advised the President that the "generals were having second thoughts" and that "he hoped to see signs of political unity in Saigon soon." These comments were made in close cooperation with reports

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that the Administration now felt that Premier Huong's cabinet might require broader representation. Finally, on the 9th, the generals pledged to return to terms agreed to during the previous August whereby matters of state would be left in the hands of a civilian government. The joint communique issued by Huong and Khanh also promised to speedily convene a representative constituent assembly to replace the High National Council. 209/

The generals' reassessments were no doubt helped by a strong U.S. public statement, directed toward the South Vietnamese press, explaining the U.S. policy position toward that country's political situation. In language strikingly similar to the President's draft instructions to Taylor, it included the following:

"The primary concern of the United States Government and its representatives is that there be in Saigon a stable government in place, able to speak for all its components, to carry out plans and to execute decisions. Without such a government, United States cooperation with and assistance to South Vietnam cannot be effective.

"...The sole object of United States activities has been and continues to be the reestablishment as quickly as possible of conditions favorable to the more effective prosecution of the war against the Vietcong." 210/

Consistent with the expressed U.S. policy position, discussions between U.S. and GVN officials concerning expanded assistance to the South Vietnamese war effort were resumed on 11 January. 211/

However, the apparent reconciliation of South Vietnam's military and civilian leadership was short-lived. Close on the heels of an announced GVN decision (17 January) to increase its military draft calls -- long advocated by the U.S. Mission -- student and Buddhist riots swept through Hue and Dalat. On the 20th, as arrangements were completed to appoint four leading generals to Premier Huong's cabinet, a leading Buddhist official issued a proclamation accusing the Huong Government of attempting to split the Buddhist movement. On the 21st, Tri Quang issued a statement charging that the Huong Government could not exist without U.S. support, a charge that gained in intensity in the days to follow. On the 23rd, Buddhist leaders ordered a military struggle against the United States. Denouncing Premier Huong as a lackey of the U.S. Ambassador, they accused Taylor of seeking to wipe out Buddhism in Vietnam. In Hue, student-led demonstrators sacked the USIA library and destroyed an estimated 8,000 books. Two days later, riots and strikes were in progress in Hue, Saigon and Da Nang, and Hue was placed under martial law. Meanwhile, military leaders were attempting to convince Buddhist spokesmen to call off their demonstrations against the GVN and the United States. Finally, on the 27th, the generals withdrew their support from the Huong

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Government, and General Khanh issued a statement that he was resuming power "to resolve the political situation." Soon after, the Buddhist leaders issued orders to their followers to halt their demonstrations, at least until they had sufficient opportunity to observe the performance of the new regime. 212/

Thus, in late January, the United States Government was faced with a dilemma. In December, it had spoken out quite clearly to the effect that its continued assistance along previously determined policy lines was dependent upon the effective functioning of a duly constituted South Vietnamese Government. By its actions and statements during the initial December crisis, it had indicated that what it had in mind was a civilian regime governing without interference from any particular group. Now, less than a month from the settlement of the former crisis along lines compatible with the preferred U.S. solution, it was faced with another military coup. A time for reassessing former policy decisions and taking stock of the shifting debits and assets in the U.S. position had arrived.

c. Joint Reprisals. Meanwhile, an issue of great significance to the Administration, as well as to future relations with the GVN, was adding to the growing dissatisfaction with progress achieved in other Phase One actions. One of the basic elements in Phase One policy was to have been joint GVN/US reprisal actions in response to any "unusual actions" by the VC. When faced with a significant provocation at the end of December, the Administration failed to authorize such actions. At the time, the circumstances in South Vietnam provided cogent reasons for not doing so, but it nevertheless represented a significant departure from the agreed policy position.

At the height of the first government crisis, on Christmas Eve, the Brink U.S. officers billet in downtown Saigon was bombed and severely damaged. Two Americans were killed and 58 injured; 13 Vietnamese also were injured. 213/ No suspicious person was observed near the building, so the responsible party was unknown. In reporting the incident, Ambassador Taylor treated it as an occasion for reprisal action. The immediate Administration assessment was that under current political circumstances, neither the American public nor international opinion might believe that the VC had done it. Moreover, with clear evidence lacking, it felt that a reprisal at this time might appear as though "we are trying to shoot our way out of an internal political crisis." Given the political disunity in Saigon, the Administration believed "it would be hard for the American people to understand action to extend the war." Therefore, so the reasoning went, it would be undesirable to undertake reprisals at that time. However, in cabling this assessment, Secretary Rusk added: "but we are prepared to make quick decision if you Taylor make recommendation with different assessment of above factors or with other factors not covered above." 214/

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Recommendations to take reprisal action came from several quarters. Citing what it called "a further indication" of Viet Cong responsibility, and cautioning against adding the Brink affair to the Bien Hoa instance of unreciprocated enemy provocation, CINCPAC urged a reprisal attack. He argued that the "bombing of Brink BOQ was an act aimed directly at U.S. armed forces in RVN" and that failure to respond would only encourage further attacks. 215/ Ambassador Taylor forwarded what he termed "a unanimous recommendation" by himself and members of the U.S. Mission Council "that a reprisal bombing attack be executed [as soon as possible]" on a specified target "accompanied by statement relating this action to Brink bombing." He stated that "no one in this part of the world has [the] slightest doubt of VC guilt" and pointed out that the NLF was publicly taking credit for the incident. 216/ Citing Taylor's request and concurring in his recommendation, even to the specific target selection, the JCS added their voices to those arguing for reprisals. In their proposed execute message to CINCPAC, they proposed a one-day mission by 40 strike aircraft against the Vit Thu Lu Army barracks. Further, they recommended that the VNAF should participate if their state of readiness and time permitted. 217/

In spite of these strong recommendations, the decision was made not to retaliate for the Brink bombing incident. On 29 December, the following message was dispatched to the U.S. embassies in Southeast Asia and to CINCPAC:

"Highest levels today reached negative decision on proposal ...for reprisal action for BOQ bombing. We will be sending fuller statement of reasoning and considerations affecting future actions after Secretary's return from Texas tonight." 218/

Available materials do not include any further explanation.

3. Policy Views in January

As the new year began, the Administration was beset with frustration over an apparent lack of impact from Phase One operations, over its failure to take reprisals after an attack on U.S. personnel, and over the still troublesome crisis within the GVN. In this mood, U.S. policy was subjected to various kinds of criticism and comment. Some came from within the Administration, various reactions came from outside it.

a. Public Debate. At the height of the GVN crisis, a number of newspapers and periodicals joined with the already committed (in opposition) and influential New York Times and St. Louis Post Dispatch in questioning U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia and/or advocating U.S. withdrawal from the entanglements of South Vietnam. 219/ In the midst of this kind of public questioning, a major debate arose among members of Congress and enmeshed, on occasion, leading officials in the Administration. Leading off in opposition (26 December) was Senator Church,

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who criticized U.S. involvement in South Vietnam and urged a shift of policy in support of the neutralization of all Southeast Asia. Senator Dirksen voiced agreement (2 January) with the need for a policy reassessment, preferably involving both the Administration and bi-partisan Congressional leadership, but he stated his own view that "to give up in Vietnam means a loss of face throughout the Orient." 220/

The debate blossomed in January. In a particularly active television day, Sunday, 3 January, Secretary Rusk defended Vietnam policy in the context of a year-end foreign policy report. Ruling out either a U.S. withdrawal or a major expansion of the war, Rusk gave assurances that with internal unity, and our aid and persistence the South Vietnamese could themselves defeat the insurgency. On another network, three Senators expressed impatience with U.S. policy in Vietnam and urged a public reevaluation of it. Senator Morse criticized our involvement in South Vietnam on a unilateral basis, while Senators Cooper and Monroney spoke in favor of a full-fledged Senate debate to "come to grips" with the situation there. Senator Mansfield also appeared on the 3rd, to urge consideration of Church's neutralization idea as an alternative to current policy but in keeping with the President's desire neither to withdraw nor carry the war to North Vietnam. 221/ On the 6th, in response to an Associated Press survey, the views in the Senate were shown to be quite divided. Of 63 Senators commenting, 31 suggested a negotiated settlement after the anti-communist bargaining positions were improved, while 10 favored negotiating immediately. Eight others favored commitment of U.S. forces against North Vietnam, 3 urged immediate withdrawal of U.S. advisers and military aid, and 11 stated that they didn't know what should be done other than to help strengthen the GVN. On 11 January, Senator Russell reacted to a briefing by CIA Director McCone with a statement that "up until now we have been losing ground instead of gaining it." He urged reevaluation of the U.S. position in South Vietnam, cautioning that unless a more effective government developed in Saigon the situation would become a prolonged stalemate at best. 222/

On 14 January, as a result of reports of the loss of two U.S. jet combat aircraft over Laos, accounts of U.S. air operations against Laotian infiltration routes gained wide circulation for the first time. One in particular, a U.P.I. story by Arthur Dommen, in effect blew the lid on the entire YANKEE TEAM operation in Laos since May of 1964. 223/ Despite official State or Defense refusal to comment on the nature of the Laotian air missions, these disclosures added new fuel to the public policy debate. In a Senate speech the following day, in which he expressed his uneasiness over "recent reports of American air strikes in Laos and North Vietnam," Senator McGovern criticized what he called "the policy, now gaining support in Washington, of extending the war to the north." He denied that bombing North Vietnam could "seriously weaken guerrilla fighters 1,000 miles away" and urged seeking a "political settlement" with North Vietnam. On the 17th, Senator Saltonstall told a radio audience that he thought bombing the supply lines in Laos was

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was "the right thing to do." Senator Long and Congressman Ford indicated on a TV program that they didn't feel that such operations were "a particularly dangerous course" for the nation to follow and that they were the kind of actions that could help protect our forces in South Vietnam. Senator Morse criticized the bombings as part of the Administration's "foreign policy of concealment in Southeast Asia." On the 19th, in the Senate, he repeated his blasts, charging that the air strikes ignored the 1962 Geneva Accords and violated the nation's belief in "substituting the rule of law for the jungle law of military might." Broadening his attack he warned that "there is no hope of avoiding a massive war in Asia" if the U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia were to continue without change. 224/

b. Policy Assessments. The intensifying public debate and the events and forces which precipitated it brought about an equally searching reassessment of policy within the Administration. While there is little evidence in the available materials that shows any serious questioning of former policy decisions among the Principals, questioning did occur within the agencies which they represented. It is clear that some of the judgments and alternative approaches were discussed with these NSC members, and presumably, some found their way into discussions with the President.

One very significant and probably influential viewpoint was registered by the Saigon Embassy. In a message (TAB E) described as the reflections of Alexis Johnson and Ambassador Taylor on which General Westmoreland concurred, the thrust of the advice seemed to be to move into Phase Two, almost in spite of the political outcome in Saigon. After listing four possible "solutions" to the then-unsettled GVN crisis, Taylor identified either a military takeover coupled with Huong's resignation or a successor civilian government dominated by the military as equally the worst possible outcomes. (It is important to note here that, depending on how one interprets the structure of the January 27th regime, one or the other of these was in fact the case at the beginning of the air strikes in February, 1965.) In the event of such an outcome, Taylor argued that the United States could either "carry on about as we are now" or "seek to disengage from the present intimacy of relationship with the GVN" while continuing "to accept responsibility for [its] air and maritime defense...against the DRV." In the case of disengagement, he argued, the United States could offset the danger of South Vietnamese leaders being panicked into making a deal with the NLF "if we were engaged in reprisal attacks or had initiated Phase II operations against DRV." The message then summarized the three different conditions under which the Mission officials thought Phase Two operations could be undertaken:

- "A. In association with the GVN after the latter has proved itself as a reasonably stable government able to control its armed forces.

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- B. Under a situation such as now as an emergency stimulant hopefully to create unity at home and restore failing morale.
- C. As a unilateral U.S. action to compensate for a reduced in-country U.S. presence." (Underlining added)

In other words, under any conceivable alliance condition short of complete U.S. abandonment of South Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor and his top-level associates in Saigon saw the graduated air strikes of Phase Two as an appropriate course of action. As they concluded, "Without Phase II operations, we see slight chance of moving toward a successful solution." 225/

Within the more influential sections of the State Department, policy reexamination took a similar, though not identical, tack. Rather than adjust the substance or projected extent of the pressures policy, the tendency was to recalculate and adjust the conditions under which it was considered appropriate to apply it. The motivation for a reassessment was the sense of impending disaster in South Vietnam. What the Saigon Embassy reports appear to have portrayed at the time as concrete instances of foot-dragging, political maneuvering, and sparring for advantage among political and military leaders seem to have been interpreted in Washington as an impending sell-out to the NLF. For example, the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, who had been an important participant in the policy and decision-making processes through most of 1964, offered the following prognosis:

"...the situation in Vietnam is now likely to come apart more rapidly than we had anticipated in November. We would still stick to the estimate that the most likely form of coming apart would be a government or key groups starting to negotiate covertly with the Liberation Front or Hanoi, perhaps not asking in the first instance that we get out, but with that necessarily following at a fairly early stage." 226/

The perceived impacts of a collapse in Saigon on other nations -- perhaps even more than the political fortunes of South Vietnam itself -- were a significant part of the State Department calculations (Tab F). If a unilateral "Vietnam solution" were to be arranged, so the thinking went in January 1965, not only would Laos and Cambodia be indefensible, but Thailand's position would become unpredictable. Bundy wrote:

"Most seriously, there is grave question whether the Thai in these circumstances would retain any confidence at all in our continued support....As events have developed, the American public would probably not be too sharply critical, but the real question would be whether Thailand and other nations were weakened and taken over thereafter."

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The reasons why this kind of impact was believed likely was related to a perceived lack of realism or effectiveness in U.S. policies during the late autumn. Bundy reflected an apparently widely shared concern that Administration actions and statements since the election had convinced the Vietnamese and other Asians that the U.S. Government did not intend to take stronger action and was "possibly looking for a way out." Moreover, he saw this impression being created by our "insisting on a more perfect government than can reasonably be expected, before we consider any additional action -- and that we might even pull out our support unless such a government emerges." 227/

To change this impression and reverse the disturbing trends, Bundy and others in State suggested stronger actions, even though recognizing that these actions incurred certain risks. However the immediate actions suggested fell somewhat short of Phase Two (a term that was not used in the correspondence). They included: (1) "an early occasion for reprisal action..."; (2) "possibly beginning low-level reconnaissance of the DRV..."; (3) "an orderly withdrawal of our dependents," which was termed "a grave mistake in the absence of stronger action"; and (4) "introduction of limited U.S. ground forces into the northern area of South Vietnam...concurrently with the first air attacks into the DRV." They downgraded the potential of further intensifying the air operations in Laos, indicating that such actions "would not meet the problem of Saigon morale" and might precipitate a "Communist intervention on a substantial scale in Laos...." The perceived risks of the suggested actions were: (1) a deepened U.S. commitment at a time when South Vietnamese will appeared weak; (2) the likelihood of provoking open opposition to U.S. policies in nations like India and Japan; (3) the uncertainty of any meaningful stiffening effort on the GVN; and (4) the inability of "limited actions against the southern DRV" to sharply reduce infiltration or "to induce Hanoi to call it off." 228/

If the graduated, "progressively mounting," air operations of Phase II were implied by these suggestions, it appears that they were perceived as being entered rather gingerly and with little intent to intensify them to whatever extent might be required to force a decision in Hanoi. Rather, the expectancies in State were quite different: "on balance we believe that such action would have some faint hope of really improving the Vietnamese situation, and, above all, would put us in a much stronger position to hold the next line of defense, namely Thailand." Moreover, Bundy and others felt that even with the stronger actions, the negotiating process that they believed was bound to come about could not be expected to bring about a really secure and independent South Vietnam. Still, despite this shortcoming, they reasoned that their suggested "stronger actions" would have the desirable effect in Southeast Asia: "...we would still have appeared to Asians to have done a lot more about it." 229/

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Underlying the State Department's concerns over the impact of U.S. Vietnam policy on the rest of Southeast Asia were current developments in the communist world. For one thing, the Soviet Union had re-entered Southeast Asian politics in an active way, after a period of nearly three years of diligent detachment. Following a reported Soviet pledge in November to increase economic and military aid to North Vietnam, the Administration held a series of conversations in December with representatives of the new Soviet regime. During at least one of these -- in addition to exchanging the now standard respective lines about who violated the Geneva Accords -- Secretary Rusk stressed the seriousness of the situation created by Hanoi's and Peking's policies, implying strongly that we would remain in South Vietnam until those policies changed or had resulted in "a real scrap." Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko replied that if the United States felt so strongly about improving the situation in Vietnam, it should be willing to attend an international conference to discuss Laos and Vietnam. However, he would not agree with Rusk's request for assurances that Laos would be represented by Souvanna Phouma. 230/

Within a few weeks of this conversation, Mr. Gromyko sent assurances to the DRV that the Soviet Union would support it in the face of aggressive actions by the United States. Further, he expressed the official Soviet view that it was the duty of all participants in the Geneva agreements to take the steps necessary to frustrate U.S. military plans to extend the war in Indo-China. This note, sent on 30 December, was made public in a renewed call on 4 January for a conference on Laos, to be convened without preconditions. On 17 January, Pravda carried an authoritative statement warning that "the provocations of the armed forces of the United States and their Saigon puppets against North Vietnam" carried dangers of "large armed conflict," and citing naval attacks on the DRV coast and U.S. air attacks in Laos as examples. On the 22nd, in letters to both Hanoi and Peking, Gromyko reiterated the Soviet pledge to aid North Vietnam in resisting any U.S. military action. 231/

In addition to renewed Soviet activity in Southeast Asia, that of Communist China also appeared ominous. Fanned by Sukarno's abrupt withdrawal of Indonesia's participation in the U.N., some U.S. officials voiced concern over the development of a "Peking-Jakarta axis" to promote revolution in Asia. North Vietnam, together with North Korea, were seen as natural allies who might join in to form an international grouping exerting an attraction on other Asian states to counter that of the U.N. Peking was viewed as the instigator and prime benefactor of such a grouping. 232/

Complementing the State Department policy assessments, were those in OSD. For example, in early January, Assistant Secretary McNaughton regarded U.S. stakes in South Vietnam as: (1) to hold onto "buffer real estate" near Thailand and Malaysia and (2) to maintain our national

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reputation. In his view the latter was the more important of the two. Sharing the State view that South Vietnam was being lost ("this means that a government not unfriendly to the DRV will probably emerge within two years"), he believed that the U.S. reputation would suffer least "if we continue to support South Vietnam and if Khanh and company continue to behave like children as the game is lost." However, he pointed out that "dogged perseverance" was also recommended because the situation might possibly improve. 233/

In specific terms, McNaughton defined perseverance as including the following course of action:

- "a. Continue to take risks on behalf of SVN. A reprisal should be carried out soon. (Dependents could be removed at that time.)
- b. Keep slugging away. Keep help flowing, BUT do not increase the number of US men in SVN. (Additional US soldiers are as likely to be counter-productive as productive.)
- c. Do not lead or appear to lead in any negotiations. Chances of reversing the tide will be better and, if we don't reverse the tide, our reputation will emerge in better condition.
- d. If we leave, be sure it is a departure of the kind which would put everyone on our side, wondering how we stuck it and took it so long."

In the event of inability to prevent deterioration within South Vietnam, he urged the development of plans to move to a fall-back position by helping shore-up Thailand and Malaysia. 234/

An OSD assessment made immediately after the Khanh coup in late January adds perspective to this viewpoint. In it, McNaughton stated and Secretary McNamara agreed, "U.S. objective in South Vietnam is not to 'help friend' but to contain China." In particular, both Malaysia and Thailand were seen as the next targets of Chinese aggressiveness. Neither official saw any alternative to "keep plugging" insofar as U.S. efforts inside South Vietnam were concerned. However, outside the borders, both favored initiating strikes against North Vietnam. At first, they believed, these should take the form of reprisals; beyond that, the Administration would have to "feel its way" into stronger, graduated pressures. McNaughton doubted that such strikes would actually help the situation in South Vietnam, but thought they should be carried out anyway. McNamara believed they probably would help the situation, in addition to their broader impacts on the U.S. position in Southeast Asia. 235/

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Though different in some respects, all of these policy views pointed in a similar direction. In his own way, each Principal argued that it was unproductive to hold off on further actions against North Vietnam until the GVN began to operate in an effective manner. Each suggested broader benefits that could be gained for the United States if firmer measures were taken directly against the DRV.

The impact of these views can be seen in the policy guidance emanating from Washington in mid and late January 1965. For example, on the 11th, Ambassador Taylor was apprised of Administration doubts that General Khanh had put aside his intentions to stage a coup and was given counsel for such an eventuality. Essentially, the guidance was to avoid actions that would further commit the United States to any particular form of political solution. The underlying rationale expressed was that if a military government did emerge, "we might well have to swallow our pride and work with it." 236/ Apparently, the Administration's adamant insistence on an effective GVN along lines specified by the United States had been eroded. However, on the 14th, guidance to Taylor indicated that the Administration had not yet determined to move into a phase of action more vigorous than the current one. In the immediate wake of public disclosures concerning the bombing operations in Laos, Secretary Rusk concurred in Taylor's proposal to brief the GVN leaders on these operations, but cautioned against encouraging their expectations of new U.S. moves against the North. Rusk considered it "essential that they not be given [the] impression that [BARREL ROLL, etc.] represents a major step-up of activity against the DRV or that it represents an important new phase of U.S. operational activity." 237/ The immediate matter for speculation was the striking of a key highway bridge in Laos, but the program still called for two missions per week.

Clear indication that the Administration was contemplating some kind of increased military activity came on 25 January. Ambassador Taylor was asked to comment on the "Departmental view" that U.S. dependents should be withdrawn to "clear the decks" in Saigon and enable better concentration of U.S. efforts on behalf of South Vietnam. 238/ Previously, the JCS had reversed their initial position on this issue and requested the removal, a view which was forwarded to State "for consideration at the highest levels of government" in mid-January. 239/ Recalling the Bundy policy assessment of 6 January (TAB F), it will be noted that clearing the decks by removing dependents was recommended only in association with "stronger actions." However, there is no indication of any decision at this point to move into Phase Two. The Rusk cable made specific reference to a current interest in reprisal actions. Moreover, consideration of later events and decisions compels the judgment that it was only reprisals which the Administration had in mind as January drew to a close.

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IV.C.

FOOTNOTES

October 1964 - January 1965

1. SNIE 53-2-64, 1 October 1964, pp. 1-3 passim. (TOP SECRET).
2. Ibid., p. 7; see also pp. 1, 2, 9 (TOP SECRET).
3. SNIE 10-3-64, 9 October 1964, p. 2 (TOP SECRET).
4. Taylor to Department of State, 14 October 1964 (TOP SECRET).
5. Taylor message to President Johnson, 16 October 1964 (JPS 303, DTG 161030Z), described in CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Courses of Action, Southeast Asia," 27 October 1964 (JCS M-902-64) (TOP SECRET).
6. "Chronological Study of Infiltration from North Vietnam", 24 October 1964 (SECRET).
7. See Peter Grose, in New York Times, 2 October 1964.
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