

Chapter 10: Retrospective: A Road Deepened and Another Not Taken

a. One is bound ~~in any event~~ to pause with the death of President Kennedy, and to reflect briefly on his policy concerning Vietnam and Laos. ~~Moreover~~, in the long Vietnam story, the American decision of the fall of 1963 ~~is bound to~~ bulk^s large. Its significance in terms of the US role in Vietnamese politics has been deepened by time. Every time there has been dissatisfaction with the performance of a South Vietnamese government, there have been voices to recall that "we went once to that well, and the water turned out brackish." There has been debate on whether the 1963 actions were right or wrong, or perhaps better stated, "Was this the least bad course the US could have followed, in a choice of evils?" Second, and less discussed, what effect did the US immersion in South Vietnamese politics have on the US role and on the broad US sense of commitment, as felt both in Washington and Saigon? And thirdly, though hardly discussed at all at the time or to this day, was there an alternative and wholly different road that might have been taken? Looking back, the 1963 decisions come to rank almost alongside those of 1961, barely below those of 1954-55 in importance and those of 1964-65 in both ~~gravity~~ and importance.

Take first the more specific questions.

b. Right or wrong? A respectable segment of American opinion, including a few professionals ^{at what} and experienced newspaper people who knew South Vietnam as well as any others, felt at the

*But men woman no things we wanted. That way we
flashed president. We got rid of independence figure. This fits
the situation*

time and may still feel today that the ultimate decision concerning
Diem was wrong as a policy and, some of these would say, in
morality as well. Among this number was the then Vice-President
of the United States, Lyndon Johnson.

In its broad form, the argument is simply that, as I recall
a distinguished Frenchman putting it not long after, "At least
the Diem regime could govern. Now you have nothing." Part of
this was hindsight, but a major part was the view that effective-
ness in an Asian government is everything, that only with a firm
hand can any of the embryonic nations of Asia be held together
for any purpose, including their own defense. To American ears,
the view can be made to sound cynical; it would hardly seem so
in nations which owe their national independence and stature to
men like Louis XIV or Bismarck. In its most palatable form, the
argument might be put that in times of stress and external danger,
the refinements of civil liberty must give way to the need for
clear and firm authority.

A similar reaction has, indeed, been clearly implied
from Communist Asians. Both the Chinese and North Vietnamese have
made it pretty plain not only that they regarded the political
crisis of 1963 as an immense windfall, but that the ultimate US
posture and role in overthrowing Diem was a welcome surprise.
They were surprised because, of course, US behavior was unlike
their stereotype, just not "imperialist" and of course belying
their eternal label, _____, linking Diem to the US as its
stooge. The note of welcome, ^{however}, must mean that they
regarded Diem as still a formidable rival. Suddenly he was gone,
and there was a vacuum of leadership that permitted them to gain

greatly.

Such foreign reactions partake heavily of total pragmatism, plus in the French case a tendency to discount heavily the claims and pretensions of disorganized opposition elements in an under-developed country. Whether founded or not, such a balance of reactions was not the one that either the American public or the American decision-making circle could apply. What was done by Diem in his concluding months truly hit a raw nerve for Americans as a whole, as it must have done for the British people, but perhaps for no others. Whether this is Anglo-Saxon moralism is beside the point; it is a fact and it had weight.* The pressure of articulate elements in the public and in the Congress was not at all such as to compel the ultimate Kennedy decision. Yet it was a significant factor in that direction, and also in making the response generally favorable afterward. And, within the circle of the President's advisors, the liberal attitude that the US simply could not be associated with such actions was clearly present in men as outwardly diverse as Harriman and Lodge. Often expressed as "The American public won't stand for this," what was meant was something more personal. There was a piece of it, I venture, in all of us concerned.

Yet, as the summary of the McNamara group's thinking

* Cite Sulzberger's quote of Couve.

*Not very middle. US wanted green light
for overthrow of Diem.*

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shows, the ultimate test was practical. Not only was Diem repugnant, but he had ceased to be able to govern effectively. By late September, there was no need to decide whether repugnance alone would have been enough. (Probably not, in my judgment, though it might have taken little more to bring it to that point.) The McNamara group was sincerely convinced that the practical argument had become totally compelling.

Thus, I would defend the course of action taken from late September onward, and almost necessarily the closely parallel course followed since mid-August. In a situation where there were no good options, the middle road of dissociation seems to me to have been right. In policy, because the chances of South Vietnam being preserved were rightly judged to be less under Diem even than under a disorganized succession. Less even than what actually happened in 1964-65 alone? In hindsight, I still believe so, though of course there is a strong argument the other way. And there is of course the argument that Diem's hopelessness would have shown itself sooner and let the US off the hook. It is too Machiavellian for my taste. ^{TP} In morality, the difficulty seems to be less. Surely the deaths of Diem and Nhu must be set against the virtual certainty that they themselves would have gone on to cause the deaths of many. I do not say that a great supporting power, in the position the US occupied over the years in South Vietnam, has a moral obligation to ~~weigh its basic course~~ ^{act} in the face of anything short of the gravest repression by the

What about effect on other rulers
of seeing the U.S. combine in Germany
overthrow

Shouldn't there be discussion somewhere
of how we should ~~proceed~~

Why when the former serves only because of US:

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local government. On the contrary, the effort to minimize external involvement has a moral as well as practical base, if one assumes that the objective of political independence itself has a moral component. But it does seem to me clear that in the face of the kind of thing that was happening in South Vietnam from mid-August onward, a nation like the US must subordinate its concern to let things alone to the concern for present deprivation of liberty and life. Just what the threshold may be is not easy to define or describe. Over and over, through the years, there have been those who pointed out the obvious, that the US by its mere presence, was sustaining the government of the time.

^{NO P} This is inescapable, but it does not follow that there is a moral obligation to act--unless the pattern has become grave indeed. To say that, through failure to act, the US becomes as responsible as if it did act to change the government is to ^{be} ~~be~~ a false conclusion in morality. It is certainly false in terms of political reactions and expectations.

c. The political fact was that through what it did in the fall of 1963 the US deepened its commitment to the preservation of South Vietnamese national independence. This was not stated at the time by Vietnamese, nor was it any significant part of the argument within the US Government. So far as either written record or oral recollection can establish, no participant in the debate rested any weight, or even dwelt, on the argument that to engage US prestige and judgment in the internal politics of South Vietnam was inevitably to increase the investment of

both in the wider contest for the country itself. The homespun analogy is that of the parent who speaks up at PTA to oust an incompetent chairman; he or she cannot complain if the result is a job on the selection committee, or in the end as the new chairman. In this case, human nature at the individual level is exactly duplicated at the national level. In an intangible way, Americans in both public and policy circles were bound henceforth to feel more responsible for what happened in South Vietnam. In the case of the policy makers there was doubtless the additional personal investment that comes from hoping to see one's past judgment vindicated. The old New Yorker cartoon that shows a plane in flames and its inventor walking away from the crowd saying cheerily, "Back to the old drawing board," is not a picture of any men I have known.

On the South Vietnamese side, the sense of expectation and reliance was also inevitably increased. I have no evidence for this, for it was bound to be intangible. In the aftermath period, any such emotion was subsumed in general gratitude for the US role, which for a long time made Ambassador Lodge a personal hero. Only as the gravity of the situation sank in were South Vietnamese attitudes clearer. Perhaps the best way to describe the change is to note that with the Diem regime, even after 1961, the US had always been to some extent at arms' length. After the fall of 1963 every American twitch was registered in the sensitive Saigon political rumor mill, and the most unwitting or modest act took on new significance. Politically,

the US was far more engaged, whether it wished to be or not, and not for a long time was there to be a sense that a Saigon government stood on its feet to the degree that Diem had done.

Most basically of all, the South Vietnamese sense that the US would have to act to help them was perceptibly increased. This was not because of any specific message that had been given to the coup group before November 1st, or that was said afterward: on the contrary, the words were neither more nor less than what had been said before to Diem. (Examples if possible.) Rather it was the situation itself that spoke. If the US was deeply enough concerned to run the risks it had run for internal political change, then any South Vietnamese was bound to conclude that the US would go to very great lengths in other ways for the preservation of his country. It was a logical and inevitable reaction.

Looking back, it is remarkable to me that the Report of the McNamara group made no mention of this point, except to the extent that it was implicit in its rejection of the US going to the lengths of actually sponsoring a coup. Neither in that report or at any other time in September or October did the participants in the policy debate face up to a result that any political realist would have foreseen.

Why was this? In part because the process was so confused, so laden with personality clashes, and so distorted and inflamed by publicity that it never got far away from the immediate issues of tactical judgment. The process of policy-making was almost at its worst from mid-August through the beginning of October, and thereafter events came so rapidly that time was not taken for reflection.

Yet this is only a part of the reason. The greater part is that all the participants assumed that the stakes in South Vietnam were so serious as to warrant the deepened commitment, if that was what it came to. One test of this proposition is that no one, pro- or anti-Diem, argued at any time that if we did not like what came out of the political hopper, we could always pull out and blame the outcome on South Vietnamese immaturity and incompetence. On the contrary, such contingency planning as was done assumed that the US might have to be prepared to go to great lengths to settle a fight for power, and should even introduce its own military combat units to settle the issue.*

Men who were prepared to propose, or to entertain, such a total commitment of US power were clearly implying strong judgments as to the importance of the outcome.

d. This brings us to the third question: was any basic alternative considered? Might one have been? The answer to the first part of the question is, again, categorically negative.

Up to the day of President Kennedy's death, no one in the policy circle suggested seriously that the US start to think in terms of withdrawing with the task unfinished. One or two such voices were raised in the Senate (cite McGovern, as quoted in NYT ad of 7 March 1971), but even these pitched the case overwhelmingly on the decline of liberty in South Vietnam under Diem; the implication could well have been that if Diem were overthrown the case for continuing would *revive*. Out of government as within it, the general feeling that things would somehow be better if

* Cite Roche on Hilsman at the AHA in 12/70, also printed in the NYT for Sunday, January 31, 1971.

Diem left--strongest in liberal circles of course--tended to drown out any serious voices asking if the whole venture was worth it. At any rate, I recall no such voices, and quick research has turned up none.

In hindsight, again one wonders why. If it was only 50-50 that a new government would be better than Diem (meaning Diem before May of 1963, as was certainly the thought), and if Diem before the crisis had still had major weaknesses, and if Hanoi and the Viet Cong were still tough and very hard to reduce, why did not the thought occur that this was a good time to call it quits? Into the bargain, it was a time when failure could most plausibly be blamed on the South Vietnamese and located in areas of behavior most immune to US influence.

Hellman says RPK raised this Island 243

The reason must be sought in the underlying set of the minds of ^{PRESIDENT} Senator Kennedy and his advisors. What JFK said in early September reflected exactly what the internal record shows was being said by his senior advisors in council. Short of the most dire extremes, the US simply should not think of withdrawing. De Gaulle's neutralization proposal was impractical if not mischievous. Negotiation offered no hopeful way out that could possibly be consistent with the minimum prescription, perhaps best defined ^{AS A} ~~in Galbraith's~~ "non-Communist government free of external interference," ^{AS GALBRAITH HAD PUT IT IN} of his April 1962 memorandum.

Thus, even on the somber international forecasts on which JFK acted in October, there was nothing to do but to soldier through. I know no evidence that he seriously thought otherwise

Might for here Fulleigh's rejection of negotiation as inconsistent with our goal in myth & reality spread in January 64

up to the day of his death, other than in what he said to Kenneth O'Donnell and Mike Mansfield in May. If it had been his serious intent as of that time to start to pull out after 1964 regardless of the situation, one would have thought to see some sign of this in plan, private remark, or public word, as the situation in South Vietnam lent itself to doing just that. Perhaps there was such a sign in his apparent approval of the McNamara-Taylor prediction of October 2 concerning the withdrawal of the bulk of US forces by the end of 1965. But if so, it was monumentally obscured by the obvious link between the McNamara-Taylor prediction and their optimistic appraisal of the military situation. As for ^{additional} private remarks, I can find no record of any in this sense. And in terms of his public utterances, the record in early September 1963 is that he strengthened anything he had said before about the importance of South Vietnam to Southeast Asia, the threat of China, and the whole rationale for the US being there. True, he also stressed more than ever that the outcome depended on the South Vietnamese, but the two emphases went hand in hand. If there had been in process a basic change of mind, one would have thought to see the emphasis shifted. That it was not seems to me the strongest evidence that up to his death JFK had not changed his mind on US policy in South Vietnam.

e. As to a verdict on his handling of South Vietnam, this hinges so much on wider-focus judgments of Vietnam itself

and on the wider picture of Asia that it would be premature to ~~attempt a judgment~~ at this point in the narrative. His biographers are of course right in regarding South Vietnam as an area of failure in his foreign policies. How, to what extent and in what areas such a verdict is warranted are questions best left to essays later in this book.

There remains, for some, the question of what JFK would have done later, if he had lived. This is a wholly speculative question. Those who have tackled it have almost invariably done so to prove a point in the swirl of American politics in the late 60's. Or they have been affected by the strong emotional attachment that Kennedy aroused in so many who worked for him, or for that matter lived in his time.

My own comments on the matter could hardly be divorced from either factor, certainly not from the strong feelings of loyalty and admiration that I held for him in 1961-63 and retain today. The factors and the evidence seem to me clear and easy to define. To weigh and balance them is something else again. I find that task impossible even as a mental process, distorted by emotion and the interpretation of later events, and thus undignified, unpersuasive, and perhaps in the last analysis unworthy of the man himself. I understand why others have felt the temptation, and do not criticize them. To me the question has faded. For those to whom it lives, my contribution can only be the story told here, and the attempt to be honest in telling it.

Very convincing & well put

Chapter 12: The First Six Months of the Johnson Administration
(November 22, 1963, to May 16, 1964)

a. Lyndon B. Johnson's accession to the Presidency coincided with growing realization throughout the American government, both in Washington and Saigon, that the situation in South Vietnam was significantly worse than it had been judged to be through the spring and summer of 1963 and by the McNamara/Taylor mission of late September. From early December onward, the only question was how fast the situation was deteriorating. Apart from one faint reaffirmation by McNamara in January of his out-by-the-end-of-1965 forecast of October 2, 1963, the record is ~~remarkably~~ bare of official claims of progress. There ^{was} ~~was~~ a multitude of future plans and programs, for which high hopes were frequently expressed. But the main theme of the year was sober realization of the gravity of the situation, and an increasingly desperate groping for means to improve it.

Thus, the first six months of the Johnson Administration were marked above all by a great deal of Presidentially directed effort to make the existing line of policy work. Alongside this, but definitely in a subordinate and contingent role, went the beginnings of serious thinking about stronger forms of action directed against North Vietnam itself. A third theme of the period was a general stiffening of posture by the US itself in March and April, and by the bulk of the membership of SEATO at its April meeting.

b. How did the new President come to grips with the problem? Several contemporary writers, including the ablest journalists, have said that LBJ paid little attention to Vietnam during his first year in office. True, it figured little in his public utterances or in the highly publicized hectic pace of that first confidence-restoring period. But behind the scenes, at all levels concerned with Indochina, his personal force and imprint were felt much more strongly, right from the start, than JFK had been at any past times except for May and November of 1961 and September/October of 1963. From the very first, the new President was in charge, relying heavily on his senior advisors but bearing down equally heavily on them for performance and ideas. Inevitably, domestic and Congressional matters were center stage in the new Administration as a whole, with Civil Rights and tax reduction the major issues. In those first months, the relative time given to foreign policy was less than it had been for JFK, but within that time Vietnam bulked very large.

In his approach, LBJ undoubtedly started with the impressions of his 1961 trip, but even more vividly with what he had seen and felt in the fall of 1963. The first had left him with an indelible judgment of the great importance of Vietnam for Southeast Asia, and of the significance ~~estimated~~ ^{it} ~~of~~ of confidence in US. ~~firmness~~. On these central points he had felt at one with JFK. Not so with the decision to dissociate from Diem. In early September 1963, he had

been strongly opposed to this, and the conversion of McNamara and others by early October had not turned him around, although he knew and respected the arguments that had been advanced at that time--and continued to hold in high regard many who had advocated the October line of policy and action. Yet, to his inner politician's sense, it was extremely risky to dismantle any structure of government unless you had a fairly clear idea of what would come in its place. Repression did not appeal to him, but still less did chaos--and it seemed to him that the more downright American opponents of Diem were prepared recklessly to court the latter.

So there had been a real difference of substance at that time, between the Vice-President and his President, the only one so far as I have been able to find in the course of JFK's handling of the issue. Perhaps more important even than the policy question concerning Diem had been Johnson's reaction to the way the issue had been argued. He had been appalled at the visibility of the divisions within government through the summer and early fall, and at the way key individuals had aired their case to the press and in the drawing rooms of Washington. In contrast to his own strict adherence to privacy (so much so that I was ignorant of his position at the time), he knew not only from the newspapers but from direct experience that others had repeatedly exceeded what he regarded as norms of discretion and indeed of loyalty to their superiors.

So far as I could tell, LBJ never looked back at the substance of the Diem decision. ^(*) He did make it emphatic, from the very first, that the private deliberations of government

* CHECK GRAFF.

were indeed private, although it was to be more than a year before this led to any appreciable narrowing of the decision-participating circles as they had existed under JFK. So far as the senior circle of advisors went, LBJ was prepared to give them his full confidence; he thought them loyal, discreet, and competent, and they soon proved to his satisfaction that this was the case. The decks were clear and level so far as he was concerned, with the single exception of those who had been crusaders about Diem and had taken the case to the public. Apart from this small category of individuals, he never showed the slightest sign of crying over spilt milk; with Lincoln, he might have said: "If you have made a bad bargain, hug it all the tighter."

c. President Johnson's first actions concerning Vietnam were wholly directed, as in other fields, to steadying the ship on course. Ambassador Lodge ⁽¹¹⁻²³⁾ ~~had come~~ to Washington following the Honolulu meeting of November 20, and on November 21 a detailed report of that meeting had been prepared, under action headings, by McGeorge Bundy in conjunction with State and Defense staffs. The President saw Lodge at some length on Sunday, November 24th, and on November 26th, the day after President Kennedy's funeral, he approved the action recommendations that had come from Honolulu, in the form of a National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM)--the customary vehicle under Kennedy for formal Presidential decisions directed to the agencies concerned with policy abroad.

Both in the Lodge talk and in the NSAM, there were two keynotes. The first was that every action should be judged in terms of its effectiveness toward the central object, which was to assist the people and government of South Vietnam to win their struggle against an externally supported and directed threat. This was straight Kennedy, with only a touch of emphasis. More Johnsonian was the second point, a strong order that the government act in a unified way, with full teamwork and without backbiting.

It has been reported that in the course of the talk with Lodge, Johnson said, in effect, that he was not going to be the first American President to lose a war. Did this set a policy line that colored his whole approach thereafter, or affected his advisors? (cite Wicker). The sources for this report do not make clear just how the remark was phrased, but it is worth noting that JFK in September had said in public almost the same thing: "The US is not in Vietnam to see a war lost."* One must consider that the circumstances of the Lodge talk were both emotional and quite possibly tinged, for the new President, by the unspoken feeling that he must measure up and show his colors. The resolve was undoubtedly there, but it seems to me quite exaggerated to read into it any clear picture of how the new President intended to handle dimensions of the Vietnam problem that ~~could~~ then ~~be~~ foreseen only dimly. Nor was the remark interpreted by those who heard it as prejudging the future.

*New York Times, September 9, 1963; Mecklin, pp. 202-203.

The effect of these opening actions was quite simple and direct. ~~Whether Johnson used the exact phrase I cannot recall,~~ ST but the sum of what he said and wrote ^Fin those opening weeks was that those concerned with the problem must recognize that it was the only foreign policy problem in which men were actually fighting and dying, and that no man should go to bed at night without feeling that he had done all he could.*

As for the initial lines of action, these concerned primarily the critical situation in the Mekong Delta, the adjustment of economic and military assistance programs, and above all the effort to ^{HELP} get the new South Vietnamese government ~~GET~~ moving in terms of simple effectiveness as well as public support. In addition, the Honolulu meeting had generated proposals for planning of small-scale covert actions against the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos and against North Vietnam itself. The latter actions, carried out by South Vietnamese without American participation, dated back to a Kennedy directive of May 1961, and to a further planning order of May 1963. Up to this point, they had been extremely weak in the face of the North Vietnamese tight security system. ¹¹ The new President at this stage approved plans to strengthen them. ~~It was a move that was to lead to significant consequences, as we shall see at a later point.~~ ~~At the time~~ ^I It seemed, to all concerned, only an attempt to be sure that all possible lines of action were being pursued. With the thousands of men Hanoi had now

*footnote on sources of "the only war we have" remarks.

sent South, to support a South Vietnamese response in kind (on a much smaller scale) raised no greater or different policy issues than it had back in 1961.

After that first weekend, Lodge returned to Saigon. Almost at once it became clear that the Viet Cong offensive was continuing to bite off huge chunks of the strategic hamlet structure, particularly in the Delta and in the province of Long An just south of Saigon itself. Here the figures of a dramatic report of December 7th, cabled by Lodge, showed that of a total of ____ strategic hamlets alleged to be in good shape during the summer, only ____ still stood, with many of these probably so infiltrated by the Viet Cong as not to need further action. On the same day, the monthly report for November found the Saigon government still lacking in any adequate civilian component, and on the military side reported that government weapons losses had exceeded weapons captured from the Viet Cong by nearly 4-1 in November. In the welter of statistics that beset the reporting of the war all along, this particular one had come by then to be regarded as least subject to distortion and most indicative; it showed not only something about military trends, but something about underlying morale, which was in the end bound to be more crucial.

In Washington, these reports fell like lead. Almost at once they caused McNamara to proposed, and the President to approve, another trip to Saigon on December 19-20, after the annual NATO meeting in Paris. As so often through that winter

and spring, Washington felt it just could not figure out what was really happening on the scene, and needed a first-hand look. The attitude reflected the inherent confusion of the situation, but also, it must be said, lack of confidence in the reporting of the Mission. After relying unduly for two years and more on the misleading reports of the Diem administrative structure, the Saigon mission now had to sort things out for itself. For some time, the strain and pressure ^{here} was too great, and although the reports were long and honest, they could not satisfy Washington's greed for new understanding. Moreover, the trips reflected the almost desperate desire of the President and McNamara, in particular, to get on top of things, and their belief that a great deal could be accomplished simply by better management. The Honolulu meetings of 1962 had seemed for a time to meet the management need, but in hindsight they appeared to have been based wholly on second-hand reports of the situation. ^{DEWIS & PROG. INC.} Now the effort was to see and ~~decide~~ at once and on the spot.

McNamara's December trip nearly opened, and closed, in disaster. From Paris to Saigon, the party was only four, of whom I was one in my new position as Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs.* The plane was fuelled to the maximum, so as to fly nonstop to Saigon. As it lumbered down

*In late October, Paul Nitze had been nominated by President Kennedy to be Secretary of the Navy, and I to move up and replace him in the top ISA post. The nominations were confirmed by the Senate on the very day of the Kennedy assassination and it fell to President Johnson to make the final decision on appointment, which he did in both cases on November 27.

the runway on a misty and snowy December morning, suddenly there loomed dead in its path another aircraft which had landed but not drawn clear. Instantly, our pilot applied the brakes and, seconds later, the reversed engines at full power. Having only a ^(single small) ~~simple~~ window, we inside could see nothing, and feel only the shuddering of ___ tons being braked from near take-off speed. Happily, through the quick reflex of our pilot and his skill in holding the plane on course, we stopped a hundred yards short of the other plane and drew off the runway. Promptly the passengers left the plane by ladder, as the smoking and peeling tires threatened to burst into flame at any moment. It was a close call, though in two hours we were on our way in another plane.

The visit served its purpose, brief as it was. Plainly, the situation had become critical in about 13 of the 46 provinces. Equally plainly, the new government was a floundering committee operation, in which no single man or men had emerged with decisive power or capacity. And, most plainly of all, the confusion in the countryside was such that a new evaluation was desperately needed all along the line. One could not tell whether the apparent progress of the spring and summer of 1963 had been an illusion all along, or a partial reality destroyed after the fall of Diem. What was clear was that all reporting in the past had been superficial, and much of it misleading. McNamara himself was shaken, and so even more was John McCone, who was in Saigon ^{at the time} at the same time. The fact that McCone had

been a doubter on the Diem decision was now quite beside the point. He concluded that the whole system of information and intelligence on the US side was inadequate, ~~to have any real feel of what was going on~~. Lodge's "feel" was that the new government should improve in January, but he was the first to admit that the whole American mission was shrouded in ignorance. At once on his return, McCone set in motion a special project to send to Vietnam a picked group of about ten CIA men who had had long experience either in Vietnam or in Southeast Asia under field conditions. After some bureaucratic haggling, the project was approved, and the group was in South Vietnam by mid-January. The problem of assessing the situation was being tackled as it had never been before.

McNamara reported to the President on December 21, and briefly to the press in a fashion that stopped considerably short of his real feelings, but also acknowledged the Viet Cong gains--the first time this had been done in such a statement. The press by now had made its own assessment, and through December and January painted a somber picture with, no bright spots. (excerpts).

As the fateful year 1963 came to a close, there was one final action. It concerned the deGaulle "neutralization" proposal of August, on which President Kennedy had at the time expressed himself in clear negative fashion (9-13A). Now, Lodge reported, political circles in Saigon, doubtless stimulated by the substantial local French community, continued to

discuss the idea and in some cases to wonder whether the US really rejected it. To the State Department and to Lodge alike, the answer was as clear in December as it had been in August.

On December ____, Assistant Secretary Hilsman spoke vehemently on TV to the effect that the US would never consider this proposal, and on the Department's advice, President Johnson sent a New Year's Greeting to General Minh in Saigon, reiterating the same position. (quotation and citation).

It might have seemed that this, joined with emphatic statements by the Saigon government itself, would clear the air on this particular issue. But deGaulle was about to expand his effort at playing a new role in Asia. On January 18, 1964, there appeared an obviously inspired article circulated by Agence France Presse, the half-independent French news agency. Its theme was twofold: new stress on "neutralization" as the right answer for Southeast Asia, and a clear hint that France might recognize the Peking government soon. Then, on January 28⁷th, the hint became fact, causing distinct annoyance in Washington as the first break in many years in the pattern of recognition between the Communist and Nationalist Chinese. The switch was hardly unfriendly in itself, but its manner and timing seemed even to France's friends within the Administration to be deliberately provocative. (cite Newhouse and Sulzberger).

In Saigon, the effect was much more marked. Over the last ten days of January, the American Embassy found Vietnamese who believed that deGaulle had somehow made a deal, trading Chinese approval of his vision of Southeast Asia for French

recognition; the result, for South Vietnam, would be pressure on the US to leave, and a South Vietnam left alone to make its peace with the North. More specifically, a number of reports came in that top members of the government--notably Generals Don, Kim, Xuan, and Dinh--were sympathetic to the French position. The epithets "neutralist" and "pro-French" were being used against these men. Just what these labels really meant was not wholly clear at the time, nor has it been since: over the years, "neutralist"^(L.N.F.S.) came to mean, vaguely, sympathy for some form of political accommodation with the NLF. In early 1964, the meaning was a bit more specific and related to deGaulle's proposals. In combination with "pro-French," the epithet was a harsh one and so intended.

Lodge reported the agitation, and added his suspicion that French agents in Saigon were doing their best to stir up political trouble. Yet he did not seem unduly concerned about the matter, or inclined to credit the charges being made. On the contrary, his reports during January generally thought the new government was doing better, and contained no hint of possible change (or of any desire on his part to see a shift).

Then, on January 28th, the general in command of the First Corps (the northernmost in South Vietnam), Nguyen Khanh, appeared in Saigon. His regular American advisor, Colonel Jasper Wilson, was with him, and on January 28th or 29th, Khanh gave Wilson, as a message to Lodge, a long oral list of charges against other generals, of sympathy for "neutralism" and even

of possible coup plotting with the French to bring about a "neutralist" solution. The conversation was pointed enough for Wilson to relay it promptly to Lodge, and for the latter to take it seriously. His reaction was to complain indignantly to Washington about French activity, and to suggest ways of dealing with it. Neither Lodge nor Wilson surmised that Khanh was signalling his own intent to act, and in a veiled way asking the US reaction. In hindsight, it seems almost certain that he was, and quite probable that he regarded the absence of any remonstrance as significant.

At any rate, early in the morning of January 30th, Lodge was awakened with a message via Wilson from Khanh, that Khanh was acting ^(as the agent) to arrest and replace top generals. The coup, for such it was, was executed quickly and without bloodshed. Generals Don, Kim, Xuan and Dinh were removed from office and for a time placed under arrest. General Duan Van Minh ("Big Minh") was invited to remain as titular Chief of State, but in a powerless position. He alone in the ruling group of the previous three months had established a strong popular position, traveling around the countryside and communicating in some fashion a sense of trust--which, alas, seemed to ^{most} ~~all~~ observers to exceed substantially his capacity to govern or to lead in action.

Such was the "Khanh coup." Neither memory nor document tell more about it than this. It was most definitely not anticipated or stimulated by any American. Wilson was simply an honest officer with little political discernment, and Lodge

and his staff emerge as possibly somewhat naive, but no more. Because it had not occurred to the Americans in Saigon that a further coup was at all likely, they had not expressed opposition to one or taken the subject seriously. Perhaps the fact that Khanh acted with only a very small group of associates, and only a battalion or two of troops, is both explanation and excuse for American ignorance and passivity. Henceforth, ~~the~~ the alert for possible coup actions was to be much more sensitive, although, as events were to show, Americans could do little about them, at least until the later period when American military units were a latent element in any situation.

On January 30th, then, Khanh was in power, keeping Minh for the time being, appointing three Vice-Premiers, but leaving no doubt that he was in charge. One of his first desires was to break totally with France and expel even the private French citizens working in South Vietnam. This, of course, fitted with his stated reasons for acting, ^(I think) Whether there was any basis whatever for his charges against the French, or the "pro-French" generals, remains obscure; ^(Lodge) and Khanh's ^(Lodge) career in office leaves open the question whether he was sincere or purely an opportunist seeking for power by any route. Lodge, in any case, dissuaded him from breaking relations with France or moving against the French community, pointing out simply (as he was to do to other leaders, on later occasions, once in my presence) that there was no way of replacing the French doctors or the 450 French lycee and university teachers.

Lodge at once recommended that the US accept and support the Khanh government. As he and most of those concerned ^{url} ~~A~~ Washington now saw it, the committee government since November had been floundering and its initial popular support had been much eroded. The change to one-man rule, even by the coup method, might be for the best. Khanh over the years had appeared to many Americans, and to others such as Robert Thompson, the ablest of the generals. He was articulate and forceful, and had been a successful division and corps commander. He had been left out of the generals' committee of November, and ~~the~~ grudges at this level were ^(EVIDENT.) ~~obvious~~. Yet he seemed to have the support of most of the younger generals and colonels. Perhaps the bright light of leadership would come from such a man and such a group, as it had under Pak in Korea.

Such was the thinking, or if you will the rationalization. After taking a deep breath, President Johnson decided that Khanh must be supported. In the end, there really was no other choice, though there was, as we shall see, a choice on whether to embrace Khanh with any fervor. In hindsight, most students of the tortured political history of South Vietnam would today agree that the Khanh coup was a disastrous event. It removed, for a long time to come, any chance of a true government of unity, or of all the available talents, or with any claim to the crucial element of legitimacy. It set one man against another, enshrined coups as a way of change, built suspicion where only trust could have helped, stirred up military politics and civilian alike, and resulted in the second wholesale change of provincial

officials in six months. However had the November government had been, it had had through popular approval alone an intangible ~~type of~~ legitimacy; surely its continuation and ~~perhaps its~~ ~~slow improvement~~ would have been better. [It is a lot easier to record this judgment than to say what the US could have done to detect or discourage what took place.]

As the US put the best face it could on the situation, the accumulating sense of weakness in the countryside came to the fore with new emphasis. In early February, McCone's CIA team began to report, finding almost without exception that the situation in the provinces was much worse than they had been led to expect, or than it had been painted. These reports were a major input into a high-level evaluation, published in mid-February, that a Viet Cong takeover was a probability within months if present trends were not arrested and reversed. It was by far the most drastic judgment that had been given up to that time.

At this critical point, President Johnson shook up the [team] at the Washington end. On February 17, with Secretary Rusk's assent, he assigned the primary operating responsibility for Vietnam to William H. Sullivan as the head of a Vietnam Coordinating Committee from all interested agencies. Sullivan was, of course, already a veteran of INdochina; he had been Averell Harriman's No. 2 in the Laos negotiations of 1961-62, and since then had served as Harriman's assistant. From thenceforth a single man, specially chosen, was to be concerned solely

with Vietnam at all times.*

This change, with other personal factors, led in that same week to the resignation of Roger Hilsman as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. In the following week, I was asked to take his place, effective March 16th, and the appointment was announced on February 29th. {By agreement, Sullivan and his group were to report formally through me.} It was a change I had not sought or desired--but then and later I have not been able to improve on Harry Truman's saying: "If you don't like the heat, stay out of the kitchen."

In these last two weeks of February, then, the mood was one of "full alarm." The Sullivan committee worked on actions within South Vietnam, and almost at once a subordinate working group was established under Robert Johnson of State to examine fully all aspects of a program of graduated military pressures against the North. This was to include action against the supply lines in Laos and against North Vietnam itself, starting with the covert South Vietnamese program that had been authorized in January but extending upward to overt US actions, particularly bombing from the air (ground invasion was not considered then, or, as we shall see later, seriously at any time). The working group was wholly civilian, its examination being intended to mesh with the more formal military planning effort of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who in early March did indeed, and for the

*The successive holders of this position were Sullivan till June of 1964, Michael Forrestal from July through December of 1964, Leonard Unger from January of 1965 to the spring of 1967, and Philip C. Habib from then till the opening of the Paris talks in 1968. After reverting briefly to me as Assistant Secretary, the responsibility returned to Sullivan in 1969 on his return from 4 years as Ambassador to the

first time, recommend a bombing program of the north as being essential to prevent Hanoi from taking over the South.

On February 21, the President made a specific move both to make clear his high state of concern and to warn North Vietnam. In a formal speech in Los Angeles he included the following language:

"In South Viet Nam, terror and violence, directed and supplied by outside enemies, press against the lives and the liberties of a people who seek only to be left in peace. For ten years our country has been committed to the support of their freedom, and that commitment we will continue to honor. The contest in which South Viet Nam is now engaged is first and foremost a contest to be won by the government and people of that country for themselves. But those engaged in external direction and supply would do well to be reminded to remember (sic in release--check Public Papers version) that this type of aggression is a deeply dangerous game."*

Naturally, the fires of speculation raged, and were not dimmed when the President on February 29th responded bluntly, without amplification, that this was what he had said, and what he meant. It was a warning shot across the bow, [and so intended.]

Did this act, or the planning process under way behind the scenes, mean that the President or his senior advisors had made up their minds for escalation? The question hangs over the whole account of the year 1964, and the reader will wish to suspend judgment. Suffice it to say that in February and March, as indeed later and throughout the year, the feeling among those closest both to the President and the problem was, that he most definitely had not made up his mind or become committed in any

*Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon B. Johnson,

way to stronger action, either bombing specifically or more generally a "military" as opposed to a "political" approach.*

*Roger Hilsman's account of this period (To Move a Nation, pp. 535-537) implies strongly, and was read by most reviewers to mean, (a) that his departure from government was due to policy differences, and (b) that President Johnson, by the time Hilsman left, was committed to escalation. Mr. Hilsman has assured me in correspondence that he did not intend to create the latter inference, and I have it on the testimony of others concerned that, whatever the circumstances of his departure, they had nothing to do with his policy views, including his strenuous advocacy of so-called "counter-guerrilla" military techniques. Mr. Hilsman's "either/or" discussion of the "military" and "political" approaches simply does not square with the idiom of policy debate at any time in 1963-64. (Perhaps it was a holdover from the bitter arguments of September 1963, which I missed.) Nor, I might add, does it fit with the prescriptions in Mr. Hilsman's own farewell memoranda of March 1964. In parts not quoted in his book, these included the greatest possible stress on demonstrative action, specifically a major deployment of ground forces to Thailand, to show Hanoi that the US would "take whatever measures are necessary in Southeast Asia to protect those who oppose the Communists and to maintain our power and influence in the area." As his book does show (p. 536), Mr. Hilsman also stood quite ready to see bombing of infiltration bases and other targets in the north, but said this should come only after improvement in the south had been achieved--the very conclusion the Administration reached in March and June. Whether Mr. Hilsman's ideas on "counter-guerrilla" warfare were practical for South Vietnam and for dealing with the infiltration routes is a question I must leave to others. For what it is worth, I (and I am sure many others at policy levels) always thought he was right in considerable degree, but asking more than a demoralized South Vietnamese force could deliver for years to come. None of us thought that, apart from this personal obsession, Mr. Hilsman's policy attitude differed in any material way from that of others concerned at this period. Re-reading his farewell memoranda, I do not think a historian would believe so either.

The McNamara Trip of March 1964

Yet there is no doubt that serious policy changes were for the first time under consideration, and that the President himself was deeply involved. Specifically, it was clearly his decision, at the end of February, that McNamara should make ~~still~~ another trip to Saigon beginning March 5th. The mandate was threefold, conveyed orally at a blunt meeting in the Cabinet Room just before departure. First and foremost, the President told McNamara in vivid terms to show that the US was behind Khanh 100%, ~~and~~ that this was "our man," that we were going to help him win out for his people, and that the US could be counted on for all necessary help. This was to be shown by public and demonstrative acts, and nailed down in private by making it crystal clear to anyone within earshot that coups were out. Secondly, McNamara was to work out with Khanh a concrete program of South Vietnamese measures and of US assistance in support. And thirdly, McNamara was to explore with Lodge, in private, what stronger measures or threats of action might be considered if the situation seemed to warrant such steps.

The bulk of the preparatory effort for the trip went into evaluation of the situation and development of a tentative program for the South--aspects too tedious to spell out now. Alongside these, the discussion of stronger measures was definitely subordinate. However, it deserves full discussion to make clear just what the thinking and state of mind were toward significant policy changes.

In preparation for the trip, the Robert Johnson group had on March 1 completed a first crack at its study. Although Johnson was a member of the State Department Policy Planning Staff under Walt Rostow, he most definitely did not share the pro-bombing views with which Rostow had deluged his colleagues ever since November of 1961, including memoranda to the new President in December of 1963 and to Rusk in mid-February 1964. If Rostow was committed to the virtues and possibilities of bombing, Robert Johnson was extremely skeptical and had made this clear to all concerned before taking the job. He and his group spoke their minds plainly, not attempting to arrive at any conclusion but presenting a well-balanced picture of the pros and cons of any bombing program. Essentially they concluded that though Hanoi had the power to end the Viet Cong action by cutting off its direction and support, it was unlikely that a bombing program on any reasonable scale would in fact ^{cause} bring about ^{the same} ~~this result~~, at least in any ^(brief) ~~short~~ period of time. In short, bombing was no magic answer. In this, the report contributed to an attitude that persisted throughout among civilians, with Rostow almost the sole exception.

Armed with this and much other material, I personally drafted a possible report for McNamara to use as a basis for discussion in Saigon, and to revise and submit on his return. Both he and I, ~~(then~~ in my last two weeks in Defense before handing over to John McNaughton), recalled only too vividly the ~~immense~~ difficulty we had found in September in writing a report from

scratch. It was natural to turn to such advance drafts as a general practice for decision-making periods, and the device proved most useful in getting all Washington viewpoints as well as getting Saigon's clearest judgment. In this case, my draft was re-worked by McNamara and circulated to all participants in the trip and their superiors. At almost the same time, John McCone circulated his own evaluation. The two documents together go far to establish the thinking of the government at this time.

In essence, both set the stakes high. Either a Viet Cong takeover or a negotiated "neutralist" solution would mean Communist control of South Vietnam. If this came about, it was my draft conclusion that:

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

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

"Thus, purely in terms of foreign policy, the stakes are high. They are increased by domestic factors."

This was the first attempt to assess the stakes and the consequences of failure, since November of 1961. Set against the language of that earlier period, it will be found to differ only in detail and in supporting specifics--notably the mention of Indonesia being likely to turn Communist and take over Malaysia.* I do not recall any demur to what I wrote in March of 1964, but equally there was not then real debate on just how high the stakes were. High enough, it was clear, to warrant the most intensive effort within South Vietnam, and ~~to warrant~~ a hard look at stronger measures, and this was all that was then being discussed. ~~So~~ ^{What} I wrote can only be taken as a close approximation of what was generally believed at the time in the top policy circle.

From this point, both ^{went} ~~went~~ on to stress that the South was the ~~real~~ crucial arena in the struggle. Here the trend was downward, and morale shaky, with the threat of further coups endemic. It was even possible that the situation was already beyond the point of no return. ~~The situation in the South must~~ be improved at all costs, and preferably should be in much better shape, or at least on an upward curve, before action against the North was considered. Indeed, McCone went further to raise a ^{question} ~~contingency~~ my paper did not mention: if the situation in the South did not get better, could action against the North

*Implicit is that by this time I and others did consider the Sukarno government to be heavily Communist-influenced. I do not think I meant to convey that it was already Communist in all but name; at least I certainly did not think that in several recorded discussions and speeches ~~once~~ I moved to State and dealt directly with the problem. (60)

then be ^{effective} ~~and~~ or wise, given its serious negative effects in the world? It was the first mention of the ugly contingency that did in the end present itself, and McCone's ^(RAISING THE QUESTION) ~~judgment~~ reflects clearly the reserve that was, I think, generally felt in the inner circle at this time.

As for Hanoi's role, McCone gave a balanced picture, that Hanoi was supplying leadership, direction, and crucial materiel, but that a very substantial part of the Viet Cong effort was indigenous to South Vietnam. Conceivably Hanoi was vulnerable to damage or the threat of damage, but any program of military pressures was strewn with pitfalls and dangers. As always, ^{since 1960} there was no doubt that Hanoi ran its own show. I wrote: "Hanoi leans toward Peking as against Moscow, but it wants to win this one by itself." The judgment concerning Peking was based, as I recall, on fairly clear articles from Hanoi at this period, taking the Chinese side in the increasingly bitter doctrinal disputes of this period between Peking and Moscow. To these ~~disputes~~ President Johnson had referred, in his speech of February 21, as "the spreading civil war among the Communists."* At this time and later--at all the period^s of intense debate on policy--there was no doubt of the gravity of the Sino-Soviet split. The practical question was whether stronger action against North Vietnam would bring the Communist giants together ^(AND KEEP THE SPIRIT) ~~in support~~. As of early 1964 McCone thought that a modest program would not. ~~We shall return to the point.~~

*Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon B. Johnson,

Such was the general thinking of the McNamara group as it left. McCone was along for evaluation, David Bell, the Director of AID, for all types of civilian supporting action, William Sullivan for State and the new Committee, and McNaughton and I for Defense. As in September, McNamara laid down that if there were specific dissents from the conclusions to be conveyed to the President, they should be frankly expressed. This had in fact been done in September on ~~some~~^{some} lesser points, but both then and in March the group in the end saw the situation essentially in the same light.

En route, a day was spent in Honolulu, for a careful run-through of all the major military contingency plans in the Pacific Headquarters. The dominant impression, for one who had been exposed like myself to the rudimentary and brash plans of 1961 (which always seemed to fall back on nuclear weapons), was that there had been great improvement in detail and realism. The conclusion remained the same--that any extension of war outside South Vietnam was complex, costly, and unpredictable in military terms alone. The other strong impression I find recorded in my notes was that the ^{34. A}plan for covert action, in operation for a month, was not showing real hope of progress. My notes say: "a general picture of failure and discouragement." Then and later, none of us thought that such action could be more than a reminder to Hanoi and a minor lift to the

morale of the South Vietnamese.*

Then, from March 8th through March 12th, the group went through the usual gruelling schedule of briefings, visits, and side talks in South Vietnam. The public highlight was McNamara's carrying out of the President's instruction to make Khanh "our man," through a series of joint appearances and speeches. Neither ~~men~~ seemed at ease in the performance, but all political Vietnamese got the message--for better or worse. I am inclined to think it was for worse. The situation needed both political stability and a dose of reassurance on American firmness. Could not these points have been made in a less dramatic and personal way, one that would not have appeared to give Khanh American backing no matter what he did? But this is hindsight. I remember crossing my fingers, no more.

As to Khanh's capacities, McNamara and all of us formed a favorable impression. As a senior staff officer and graduate of American senior military training (Leavenworth), he had an orderly planning mind, much more in tune with American methods than his predecessors, and ¹⁹⁶⁵ ~~apparently~~ open and frank ^(IN THE LINE OF HIS PROGRAM.). Discount this as one did, it seemed a step forward. Whether the ^a ~~cap~~city existed to carry out these or any other plans was, of course, an open question. But at least there was now a man in charge, as there had not seemed to be in December.

Moreover, Lodge himself was undiscouraged. He thought that with a few victories the situation could change rapidly

*At most, as Roger Hilsman put it in one of his departing memoranda, these "pinpricks" might help toward an objective "of keeping the threat of eventual destruction alive in Hanoi's mind." Hilsman, p. 536.

for the better, and that with persistence the outlook was good. General Harkins thought that things should be ready to move again, after what ^(LCS, I think...) he viewed as a year lost to political shuffling. On the situation in the countryside, there could be no doubt that it was worse than in December, and that if one looked back to September there ^{had} been, as one senior officer put it to me, "tremendous loss" at least in the key Delta area, where of course the majority of the population lived. For the present the picture was dark; for the future there appeared to be ^(LCS, I think...) hope.

On the question of stronger action, there was one private session with only McNamara, Lodge, and a handful of others. Though my notes are cryptic, they make clear that there was quick rejection of the idea of any early military attacks against either the Laos infiltration routes or North Vietnam itself. Thereafter, there was glancing mention of such possibilities as reconnaissance of the North, and then a return to long consideration of the steps to be taken within the south.

So the group returned with a slightly more hopeful picture than Washington had held before its departure, with a detailed program of action involving extensive military ^{and} political headings as well as military ones, and with a "wait and think some more" ^(LCS, I think...) recommendation ^(LCS, I think...) on stronger action directed against Hanoi. The completed report to the President was presented to him on March 14th, and approved on March 17th, with a strong direction that all concerned should give ^(LCS, I think...) ~~the~~ execution of ~~these plans~~ top priority. The concluding sections directed the preparation of contingency plans for stronger action, to include the political

and diplomatic factors as well as the military component. Such plans were now taken in hand by John McNaughton's office in the Defense Department, using the men and ideas of the earlier Robert Johnson group. The three most acute problems McNamara's report already saw were justification (clear evidence of Hanoi's role), Communist escalation in response, and pressures for premature negotiation.*

To round out the actions arising from his intensive month of review, the President now approved McNamara delivering a major speech on Vietnam at an occasion he had already accepted, for March 26th. McNamara's speaking appearances were ^{FEW.} ~~rare~~. He was chosen in this instance, I am sure, because he could give a

*One final word on the March 17th Presidential directive. As others have now revealed (cite Ellsberg), the statement of objectives in this paper defined the US purpose as the preservation of a "non-Communist South Vietnam." The language came straight from the draft I had done before we left for Saigon; it survived without change, and so far as I can recall without challenge, and remained for more than two years the apparently authoritative internal US statement. It was an unfortunate formulation, rarely used in any public utterance. Indeed, what was consistently said in public conformed to two much more sophisticated and realistic definitions--preserving South Vietnamese independence and then simply enabling the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future without external interference. (e.g., LBJ to AP, Documents, 1964, p. 37--note the added phrase about being free to seek help, which was aimed at the French neutralization idea.)

It was, I recall, late in 1966 that a Pentagon representative invoked the language in justification of some military measure or course. I and others were initially disbelieving, but upon checking the validity of the citation, and the fact that it had not been superseded, initiated prompt action that led to a change into line with the public definitions. Whether the March 1964 formulation made a difference is a question best taken up in a much later essay on military strategy. (Chapter ___ below.) In brief, I do not think it did.

first-hand report of the situation. It was at once agreed that the speech should be drafted in the State Department, and should include a full historical explanation of the struggle and how it had reached this critical point. On the future, it should continue and reinforce the general note of warning the President had struck on February 21, but stop well short of any ultimatum. In short, the speech was designed to educate and alert the American people.

This I believe it did, at least for the limited circle that follow such matters. Only much later did I come to realize how little "range" or breadth of impact the best-planned speeches of Secretaries of State or Defense really have. The President alone, and perhaps today only the President on TV, can really reach the American people. But at any rate the McNamara speech stands as a sober and responsible effort, and an honest reflection of what was believed in the government.

The speech was in four parts: a historical section, a statement of US objectives, an appraisal of the situation of the Khanh program, and a discussion of alternative policy options. Among these, the historical section reads today as somewhat oversimplified concerning the Diem period, although it essentially recognized the mixture of indigenous and external elements in the conflict--better, indeed than later official statements.* The

*Here I must take note for a moment of the comments of James Thomson, who was at the time on my staff and served as principal draftsman of the speech. Writing in the Atlantic for May 1968, Thomson recounts that in the preparation, one of his seniors (unmistakeably myself) took him to task for saying that the struggle was in part a "civil war." Since the speech spoke both of Hanoi's "critical" role and of the Viet Cong's "large indigenous support," I am at a loss to recall what the argument was about. I recall only that Thomson seemed in generally highly pleased with the speech and with his part in it--and continued in

discussion of US "objectives" was not so much that as a discussion of why the struggle was important to US interests. (Then and later, it was hard to keep the two separate. In any walk of life, they tend to merge.) This boiled down to three points:

First, and most important, is the simple fact that South Viet-Nam, a member of the free-world family, is striving to preserve its independence from Communist attack. The Vietnamese have asked our help. We have given it. We shall continue to give it.

We do so in their interest; and we do so in our own clear self-interest. For basic to the principles of freedom and self-determination which have sustained our country for almost two centuries is the right of peoples everywhere to live and develop in peace. Our own security is strengthened by the determination of others to remain free, and by our commitment to assist them. We will not let this member of our family down, regardless of its distance from our shores.

The ultimate goal of the United States in Southeast Asia, as in the rest of the world, is to help maintain free and independent nations which can develop politically, economically, and socially and which can be responsible members of the world community. In this region and elsewhere many peoples share our sense of the value of such freedom and independence. They have taken the risks and made the sacrifices linked to the commitment to membership in the family of the free world. They have done this in the belief that we would back up our pledges to help defend them. It is not right or even expedient--nor is it in our nature--to abandon them when the going is difficult.

Second, Southeast Asia has great strategic significance in the forward defense of the United States. Its location across east-west air and sea lanes flanks the Indian subcontinent on one side and Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines on the other and dominates the gateway between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In Communist hands this area would pose a most serious threat to the security of the United States and to the family of free-world nations to which we belong. To defend Southeast Asia, we must meet the challenge in South Viet-Nam. (cont.)

And third, South Viet-Nam is a test case for the new Communist strategy [It was necessary] to prove in the Vietnamese test case that the free world can cope with Communist 'wars of liberation' as we have coped successfully with Communist aggression at other levels.*

In explaining the third aspect, the text was clear that Hanoi was "the prime aggressor," but that for Peiping, victory in Vietnam would be both "a first step toward eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Viet-Nams and Southeast Asia" and a "vindication of China's views in the worldwide ideological struggle" with the Soviet Union. Although Khrushchev's famous 1961 speech was still invoked, the emphasis as between the two Communist giants had shifted immensely since then. Indeed implicit in the conclusions was the view that the Soviet Union would be relatively quiet, unless tempted into a tougher line of action by a success for the Chinese view.

Finally the language on possible changes in policy make it pretty clear both where the government stood and how uncertain it remained. Summarily rejecting the option of withdrawal, McNamara proceeded as follows:

Other critics have called for a second and similar option--a 'neutralization' of Viet-Nam. This, however, is the game of 'what's mine is mine, and what's yours is negotiable.' No one seriously believes the Communists would agree to neutralization of North Viet-Nam. And, so far as South Viet-Nam is concerned, we have learned from the past that the Communists rarely honor the kind of treaty that runs counter to their compulsion to expand.

Under the shadow of Communist power, neutralization(cont.)

*Jules Davids (Ed.) Documents on American Foreign Relations 1964 (New York, Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 202-205.

would in reality be an interim device to permit Communist consolidation and eventual takeover. When General Taylor and I were in Hue, at the north end of South Viet-Nam, 2 weeks ago, several Vietnamese students carried posters which showed their recognition of the reality of neutralization. The signs read: 'Neutralize today, communize tomorrow.'

Neutralization of South Viet-Nam, which is today under unprovoked subversive attack, would not be in any sense an achievement of the objectives I have outlined. As we tried to convey in Laos, we have no objection in principle to neutrality in the sense of nonalignment. But even there we are learning lessons. Communist abuse of the Geneva accords, by treating the Laos corridor as a sanctuary for infiltration, constantly threatens the precarious neutrality. 'Neutralization of South Viet-Nam'--an ambiguous phrase at best--was therefore rejected.

The third option before the President was initiation of military actions outside South Viet-Nam, particularly against North Viet-Nam, in order to supplement the counterinsurgency program in South Viet-Nam. This course of action--its implications and ways of carrying it out--has been carefully studied.

Whatever ultimate course of action may be forced upon us by the other side, it is clear that actions under this option would be only a supplement to, not a substitute for, progress within South Viet-Nam's own borders.

The fourth course of action was to concentrate on helping the South Vietnamese win the battle in their own country. This, all agree, is essential no matter what else is done.

The President therefore approved the 12 recommendations that General Taylor and I made relating to this option.

We have reaffirmed U.S. support for South Viet-Nam's Government and pledged economic assistance and military training and logistical support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.*

*Jules Davids (Ed.), Documents on American Foreign Relations 1964 (New York, Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 207-208.

Rare is the occasion when a voice from within the Executive Branch can be set alongside an independent voice from the Congress, to frame a near-perfect simultaneous "fix" of the state of informed opinion in both branches of government. Such an occasion did arise in late March, for on the 25th--the day before McNamara spoke--Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, delivered on the Senate floor a celebrated speech entitled "Old Myths and New Realities." As the title suggests, much of the speech was an earnest plea to take note that the character of the cold war had changed, that different Communist nations posed different threats or problems and should be treated differently, and that US policy in Latin America (specifically toward Panama and Cuba) was outdated and too "hard line." The theme of re-evaluation was extended to the treatment of China. Although Communist China was seen as the Communist nation that "poses immediate threats to the free world," and as maintaining an "attitude of implacable hostility toward the United States," nonetheless the US should be seeking flexibility and be alert for change toward "competitive coexistence."

The speech was well written and objectively expressed. Although no personal targets were singled out, the sections on Latin America and China, in particular, seemed gently aimed at the President, who in fact was impelled to devote much of a major speech the following month to a veiled reply.*

*LBJ to the AP, April 20, 1964. Public Papers _____
_____. The two speeches appear alongside each other
in Documents, 1964, pp. 20-40.

When it came to Vietnam, however, Senator Fulbright's views were extraordinarily close to those that Secretary McNamara was to expound the following night. As to the possibility of negotiations toward neutralization, Fulbright concluded, in words that incidentally made clear his own view of the ^{the} objective:

It is difficult to see how a negotiation, under present military circumstances, could lead to termination of the war under conditions that would preserve the freedom of South Vietnam.

Hence, he went on:

It seems clear that only two realistic options are open to us in the immediate future: the expansion of the conflict in one way or another*, or a renewed effort to bolster the capacity of the South Vietnamese to prosecute the war successfully on its present scale. The matter calls for thorough examination by responsible officials in the executive branch; and until they have had an opportunity to evaluate the contingencies and feasibilities of the options open to us, it seems to me that we have no choice but to support the South Vietnamese Government and Army by the most effective means available. Whatever specific policy decisions are made, it should be clear to all concerned that the United States will continue to meet its obligations and fulfill its commitments with respect to Vietnam.**

*Defined earlier in the speech as "the direct commitment of large numbers of American troops" or "equipping the South Vietnamese Army to attack North Vietnamese territory, possibly by means of commando-type operations from the sea or the air."

**Documents on American Foreign Relations 1964, p. 29. Congressional Record, March 25, 1964, p. _____.

The Fulbright speech of course made headlines, and had a continuing impact and influence. Its passages about Vietnam were not stressed at the time in comment, nor were they later to be recalled vividly. One must conclude that they were taken to express a general feeling in informed American circles at this time--that Vietnam was becoming difficult and might become critical, that measured stronger action might be needed, but that in any then-foreseeable event the US should stick it out.

that things were getting tough, but that the US had to stick with it. (Samples of Congressional statement, and particularly the key quote from Fulbright's "Old Myths and New Realities" speech.)

Mid-March to Mid-April: Cambodian Crisis and SEATO Meeting

At this point it may be a relief to turn away from the dry language of speeches and policy papers, and look at what was happening on the closely related fronts of Laos and Cambodia. In the former, the situation had been slowly deteriorating all winter, and by March the North Vietnamese forces, behind the usual Pathet Lao front, had considerably enlarged their ~~corridor~~ ^{THE CORRIDOR OF} area of control in eastern Laos, and were also putting significant pressure on the Kong Le neutralist forces at the edge of the Plaine des Jarres in northern Laos. It was a nibbling operation, as always, and sufficiently alarming for Hilsman to have urged, before leaving, ^{the} deployment of US F-100 fighter-bombers to Thailand and even the sending of ^{1 BRIGADE} a brigade, as had been done in May of 1962, just before the Accords were signed. To others, including myself, the latter seemed a card already played, ~~per-~~ ^{haps} saying little to Hanoi, perhaps saying more than we really intended to the Lao government and to the Thai about future US engagement in Laos. ¹¹ So Laos remained a background worry, with small-scale South Vietnamese cross-border operations directed to be on a stand-by basis. On this subject, the President himself sent a cautionary cable to Lodge on March 17, warning that any actions the Lao and South Vietnamese might work out at the

military level must have the political approval of Souvanna Phouma. (Z.)

Cambodia was an entirely different case. All through the winter, Sihanouk had been urging a reconvened Geneva Conference to reaffirm his neutrality and to confirm his borders. It was a continuation of the judgment he had reached in the summer, that Hanoi was going to win. This was essentially a frightened man, and there was no lack of sympathy for his purpose in Washington, notwithstanding some lingering resentment of his gross lapse in December in referring to President Kennedy's death (p. __ above.) However, the border questions were difficult and technical, so that the American position, concerted with the French and especially with the British, had been to support a prior quadripartite meeting between Cambodia and its three neighbors, to define the border issues. The position was honest, although also influenced, especially after January, by desire to avoid a wider conference that could be used by the French to push their overall proposals for neutralization.* These diplomatic overtures and responses had been in a low key, and indeed all through the months of Sihanouk's evident change of view, there had been no specific cause for his having a grievance against the US.

On March 14th, this changed abruptly. A South Vietnamese armored reconnaissance unit, with American advisors, made a 180°

*To these the American government remained, if anything, more firmly opposed: as Hilsman put it in one of his farewell memoranda, "DeGaulle, [Walter] Lippmann, and [Senator Mike] Mansfield have set the neutralist hares running with self-fulfilling prophecies . . . [and] lofty, unrealistic thoughts of a peaceful neutralist Asia."

wrong turn, crossed into Cambodia in an area where the border was not marked by any conspicuous geographic feature, and proceeded to shoot up a Cambodian village named Chantrea, which it evidently believed to be a Viet Cong stronghold village on the South Vietnamese side of the border. A tragic mistake by any standard, it was ^{also} my personal baptism of fire. ^{by my first week} Before I had ^(AFTER 13 WS) even been sworn in as Assistant Secretary on March 16th, I handled the military reports that confirmed what had happened, made the recommendation ~~(quickly accepted)~~ that we should admit the facts and persuade the South Vietnamese to offer indemnity (as they did), and saw the French ~~Minister~~ in an effort to make clear what had happened and why. Then, as later, the French had much influence in Phnom Penh, as they had ceased to have in Laos. Moreover, as I recall remarking to the French Ambassador at the time: "Cambodia is one situation where we do have a common viewpoint."

It was to be the first of many such cases, often less clear on the facts than this one, in some degree unavoidable. ^{THE INCIDENT RECENTLY ACCUSED BY COMMUNIST, AND} The precedent of candor and honest admission was followed thereafter, ^{IT} and may in the end have had some weight with Sihanouk, ^{FOR} Even in this first case, his initial reaction of outrage seemed to die down rapidly. All along, as Washington saw it, he was playing the best game he knew how, to preserve the surviving remnants of the ancient Khmer Kingdom of history. The Prince's ^{FRAG} fragment outbursts, often contrived, did not alter the essential American desire not to get involved in Cambodia, and to lean over backward to treat the Prince and his country fairly. ^{AS}

~~his prompt action over Chantrea suggests,~~ President Johnson shared this view from the first; others of us were often annoyed by Sihanouk, he, ~~never~~ in my memory, ...

As March turned into April, I found myself participating in the inaugural satellite TV transmission to Japan, making a speech at the Cherry Blossom Festival, and entertaining Princess Souvanna Phouma, ^(a friend) with the interpreting help of two young ^(compatriots in Saigon) men, the son of a distinguished journalist present and my own son aged 14. ^{It was a new life,} and the lighter moments were pleasant. They could not hide or mute the growing tension beneath.

Almost at once there was a new trip to be made, this time ^(to the meeting of the SEATO alliance in Manila on April 14-16, and then with Secretary Rusk) to Saigon. (Many have wondered why Rusk so often left the Saigon trips to McNamara. The answer in considerable measure is that the Secretary of State had a much less controllable schedule. Rusk missed few opportunities, but found it very difficult to plan trips ahead unless he had a job in the area.) In Saigon, the mission was to evaluate the situation anew, and to discuss quietly with Lodge the status of planning on possible military pressures against Hanoi.

The SEATO meeting was, for an alliance conference, unusually dramatic. It was marked for the first time by clear and visible differences, but in the end these contributed to a strong show of solidarity and resolve by the majority present.

The press highlighted the splitting apart; in the long run the drawing together was more important.

The differences were, of course, primarily with France, represented ~~at the meeting~~ by Foreign Minister Couve de Murville, whose capacity for cool articulation of his country's position I had seen and admired five years before at a Geneva Conference concerning Berlin. More passively, Pakistan too was now out of ~~accord,~~ ^(S. A. P.) ~~stee~~ an attitude which Foreign Minister ~~A~~ Bhutto chose to express by staying in Djakarta at the last moment and not coming to Manila at all.

The other delegations present were, from the first preliminary conversations onward, bound and determined that the meeting should produce a strong communique, in support of South Vietnam in particular. The British (represented by Lord Carrington) had a subordinate purpose, to get some expression at least of sympathy for the major effort they were by now making to help Malaysia against the Indonesian "confrontation."

On April 12, before the meeting began, Couve and Secretary Rusk had a long conversation with only minimum staff present. I believe it was the first direct exchange at any level since DeGaulle's actions of January. At any rate, it was extremely frank and, to me at least, revealing. Couve made no bones about his belief that we were in a hopeless situation in Vietnam: the political situation was "rotten," we were reduced to supporting an Army attempting to rule a country, in essence we had no policy. If we were to decide to engage American forces or attack the

North, that at least would be a policy which he and France could understand, though they definitely did not advocate it. We might win that way: he implied the victory would be Pyrrhic, or at best costly.

Pressed to explain the French alternative, Couve started by saying that China was clearly expansionist and that Southeast Asia had always been a target of Chinese ^{expansionist} expansion. All Southeast Asian countries were terrified of ^{Chinese} ~~Chinese~~ expansion. ^(EXPANSION THERE.) Yet, he thought, China's present interest in Southeast Asia related largely to their fear of an American presence there. Even in 1956, the Chinese had considered that the US was taking up a hostile and threatening position in Vietnam, and ^(THAT) ~~our~~ military forces there ^{was} disturbing. Now, the concern in China was much greater. The only way to deal with it was to withdraw the American presence. Then, he thought, Peking would accept a neutralized area along the lines the French were urging.

It was a tour de force of simple logic, if the premise of Chinese policy was correct. Nothing was said of what would happen as between North and South Vietnam, although Couve did say flatly that if in the end any military moves across borders took place, France would in no circumstances be involved.

I think I state the case fairly. It may have been, for Couve, colored by French motives to acquire or expand its own positions in various parts of Southeast Asia.* But Rusk did not push on these, and there seemed no point in doing so then or later. The question was much bigger, and Couve's was a classic statement of a view that has all along had takers ranging

* NEWHOUSE CITE.

from U Thant to, as we have seen, Chester Bowles--with of course individual variations. In Couve's case, the apparent paradox seemed greatest: China was big, expansionist, terrifying; yet she would leave Southeast Asia alone if only a few thousands of American forces and helpers (hundreds as of 1956!) were removed.

The discussion was, of course, a stalemate. Rusk was totally unconvinced, as Couve had surely expected he would be. As so often with French diplomats, I felt unsure whether I was listening to the voice of the 17th century or the 21st. Perhaps both. The memory remains vivid, and the issue has not died.

After that calm and rational start, the proceedings for a time became fairly vigorous. Thanat Khoman of Thailand made barbed remarks about French policy in his opening public speech, and the exchanges throughout were edged and more. In the end, the French simply dissociated themselves from the communique language concerning Vietnam. This language, worked out harmoniously among the others present, spoke emphatically of the vital importance of preserving the independence of South Vietnam, referred to its status as a protocol state under SEATO, and affirmed that those nations giving help to South Vietnam were doing so in accordance with their obligations under SEATO, ^(11, L) and pledged on this occasion to increase their efforts. (Find specific language.)

Since the communique spoke only for those who signed and participated in it, this was not a formal action of SEATO

as an alliance, nor did it mean that the participants were saying that there now existed a state of "armed attack" against South Vietnam, so as to invoke Article 4, Section 1 of the Treaty. As Rusk was to testify before Congress in August, the US was not yet acting under that Article. What the members did express was that assistance to a threatened protocol state was, in a general sense, a fulfillment of a broad obligation to help that arose from the treaty, even though the treaty became specific only at a higher point of aggression. It was a narrow distinction, and we shall see later whether it was important at any stage. Certainly, the March 1964 communique sought to, and to a large extent did, put some bite and force back into the SEATO relationship. The lift in morale among the participants was clearly visible as the Conference came to an end. To the Thai in particular, always immensely SEATO-conscious, the outcome seemed to give reassurance--for the time being.

Unfortunately, or at any rate as a fact, the drawing together of the SEATO members, ex France and Pakistan, did not mean that any at this stage were consulted seriously on what steps might become wise or necessary in ~~South~~ Vietnam. Partly this reflected the highly tentative state of American thinking, and partly the habit of solo American decision that had become ingrained in 1961 and 1963. [Certainly not at this March meeting, and so far as I can find not at any time until after the 1964 election, was the US seriously sharing its thoughts with those who were in the end to become, in one degree or another, its partners in military effort. Only the British were an exception to this, and this only on ~~one notable~~ occasion to which we shall come in the next chapter.]

After Manila, Saigon. Here most of the ~~occasions~~ were disappointingly formal and showcase. Khanh threw out hints that he would like to see stronger action, in contrast to his March line that this should not be looked at seriously until he had shown how much improvement was possible in the South. Rusk gave no encouragement, and the meetings lacked the ~~bite~~ that the March program discussions had seemed to have.

In private, Rusk met with Lodge, Harkins, Westmoreland ^(ABOVE IS EXCLUDED) and General ~~W. H. Westmoreland~~. ^{WESTMORELAND'S NAME APPEARED IN} (Harkins' deputy at that time, and named to succeed him on April 25th), General Earle Wheeler (then Army Chief of Staff) ^{AND A SMALL STAFF GROUP.} ~~destined to succeed General Taylor as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, in which he remained from mid-1964 to mid-1970~~, and myself, I had already sent Lodge a special message giving the state of planning in Washington and the major questions that were seen, and Rusk and I brought with us to the meeting a further draft plan for a series of military and diplomatic actions. Lodge reacted by putting forward in more detail what he had twice previously suggested in general terms, a "carrot and stick" approach under which Hanoi would be offered economic help if it desisted from its effort against the South, but at the same time threatened with direct damage if it did not. The idea was somewhat more subtle than this truncated summary, but this was its essence. Lodge specifically suggested that any script, or plan, for putting pressure on Hanoi or for combining pressure and inducements, required a secure and reliable diplomatic channel. He suggested that ^A ~~the~~ new Canadian ICC representative, J. Blair Seaborn, ^{WAS TO} about to enter on duty in June, ~~was a secure and reliable man whom he had known at the UN.~~ ^{AS TO THE}

Tentatively, Rusk approved both the man and the idea of a ~~subtle~~ ^(indirect) program of pressure, inducements, and communication. What he and all of us had in mind was a process that might extend over a substantial period of time, and be accompanied from time to time by demonstrative actions in any desired direction. A level or improving situation in South Vietnam was assumed, almost of necessity.

Attempted Coup in Laos

During our Saigon visit, Ambassador Unger had reported on the worrisome military situation in Laos, and had then returned to his post. Almost at once he was caught up in a totally unexpected political crisis brought on this time by the right wing. Early on the 19th, two Lao generals took Souvanna Phouma prisoner and established military control in Vientiane.

After an intensive exchange of messages on the night of the 19th had shown how serious and uncertain the situation was, Rusk on the morning of the 20th--as he left for Washington--
^{Convinced by me to send me to Vientiane to lend what added weight I could to the effort to restore the situation.}
~~ordered me~~ to Vientiane to lend what added weight I could to the effort to restore the situation. Then, as always, the preservation of the basic Government of National Union was fundamental to American policy in Laos. So far as usefulness went, I turned out to be a ~~useless~~ fifth wheel. But it was a fascinating experience, and the episode was peculiarly Lao.

The two generals were Khouprasith (Abbey) and Siho (_____), the former a respected senior officer, ~~then and since~~, the latter a onetime "hatchet man" for Phoumi, whom one quickly sized up as little better than a thug. With

a small force, they had taken Souvanna Phouma prisoner on the night of the 19th, with some shooting in the process. The next day ^{(CHUCK DUNN (S.T.))} in the face of the instant disapproval of all the major nations represented on the spot, whose support was important to any Lao government, Souvanna and others were taken to Luang Prabang to seek the King's mediation. When they returned, Unger and I quickly sought out Souvanna, going through two groups of "coup" sentries in the process and having tommy guns poked toward our ribs. It was an unusual setting for diplomacy, as we were joined in rapid succession by British, Australian, Canadian, Indian, UN, and French representatives. Only the Russian, for some reason, seemed not to be hooked up to the grapevine that had reported the return from Luang Prabang. Or perhaps he needed instructions, though his government's position was, like ours, for prompt restoration of Souvanna. ^{The Prince} ~~Souvanna~~ received us with poise and simple courage, remarking acidly on a smashed vase and bullet holes in his walls. In short order he made it clear that our message of support was all very well, but that the people to convince were the generals.

So down the dusty main street of Vientiane our motley caravan went, to find Siho totally obdurate, but Khouprasith ^(S.T.) rather moving, as well as capable of a first-rate putdown in the face of excess oratory by the Frenchman. Khouprasith argued simply that the Lao military forces, and villagers too, were being nibbled slowly to pieces by the Communists, that the ICC was doing nothing, that Souvanna was helpless, and that perhaps a strong hand could change things. His basic picture hit home,

but the answer was simple--only through the preservation of the Souvanna government could the Laos he obviously cared about hope to survive.

It was not in the nature of a Lao political crisis to sort itself out quickly, and this was the gravest Souvanna was to encounter in all the years of his rule from 1962 to the writing of this book. But by ^(7th 21st) ~~that evening~~, when I left, it seemed ~~clear~~ ^{clearly} that the generals would yield. In fact, over the next two weeks Souvanna's authority was gradually restored, although he made some concessions to the political right. In the end the episode was a major way-station in the political demise of Phoumi, who either had or had not had a role in the coup, and was discredited either way. To anticipate, he ^(would) ~~would~~ up in ~~1965~~ ¹⁹⁶⁴ in Bangkok early in 1965. On this 1964 occasion, we saw him briefly, and I found myself thinking of the derogatory epithet used for a European statesman--this was a "rubber lion" indeed.*

By early May, then, Souvanna seemed to have worked things out. Since the spring of 1963, a year earlier, he had

*Jean Larteguy, The Bronze Drums (a translation of Les Tambours de Bronze, _____, New York, _____) is a "novel" so brilliantly written and so near history as to be in many respects an improvement on it. Centered on the 1964 coup, its unmistakable portraits of Souvanna, Phoumi, and all the major Lao characters--as well as of the central French figure--are drawn vividly from life. The American characters are almost wholly fictional, but the broad picture of the American position ^(is) not unfair or false in impression at least as to 1964 events. Larteguy brings out most clearly what the coup did to Kong Le's position, and how the Communist side moved in the confusion and weakness to finish off Kong Le and his forces. As the next chapter shows, I believe this interpretation to be correct.

However SVI left - the PL minister said as before.

been governing without the Pathet Lao filling their seats in the government. Now, in giving the right some clearer role, he did expand the power of other ministries. (?) ~~But~~ It was essentially no more of a neutralist-rightist government than it had been for a year, and indeed with Phoumi's personal eclipse Souvanna and his neutralist group seemed in some ways stronger ^(AND MORE IN CONTROL) ~~than~~ they had been before. ^{There} ~~Certainly~~ the coup and its failure did not seem to mean a tougher policy. ~~Indeed~~ ^(IN WASHINGTON) The worry was the reverse, that the temporary political and military weakening of government would invite trouble.

In this process, US policy never varied at all. From the President down, in Washington and Saigon, the support for Souvanna was total. If, conceivably, the rightist generals had thought the US would be sympathetic or ^(would) return to its 1960 posture under the new Administration, or had drawn some inference from American acceptance of the Khanh coup in Vietnam, they were quickly and thoroughly disabused. In Laos, the political solution of the 1962 Accords was blessed throughout by a stout and courageous Prime Minister in Souvanna. One was vividly conscious of the difference in Vietnam!

There, the government in late April and early May seemed to be showing little movement or progress in acting on key parts of the March program, such as mobilization of all men over 20. On May 4, Khanh unburdened himself rather plaintively to Lodge, implying that he could do nothing unless the US took a stronger line. Lodge stiffened him for the time being, but he returned to the point when McNamara visited Saigon briefly on May 12-14, on the President's ^s orders, to check up on the various parts of

the program and try to push them forward. McNamara discouraged him and urged total focus on the South.

Meanwhile, Rusk had taken the first action to carry out some form of the Lodge "carrot and stick" idea. On April 30th, he visited Ottawa on other matters, and obtained Canadian agreement that THE NEW 100 MEN, F. BROWN Seaborn, would seek to serve as an interlocutor with Hanoi on his arrival in June. The ~~general~~ message he might deliver was outlined, at this stage a general statement of the limits of US objectives, but that the US was totally determined to see that South Vietnam did remain independent. IF HANOI LAND OFF
~~This being assured~~ North Vietnam could be assured of a friendly US disposition and forthcoming treatment.

Other forms of staff planning had gone ahead at the same time, including expansion of the covert South Vietnamese program, the laying out of various complex scripts for pressure and communication, and even a hypothetical exercise to bring together and test some of the planning. All this came under the head of active contingency preparation. Senior officials (and I myself, for other reasons) did not participate.

Thus, in mid-May the mood remained definitely one of watchful waiting. Could Khanh take hold? Was there a program that could affect Hanoi's policy? Or would events tend to take charge? ~~The last question was to be answered first,~~

Chapter 13: To the Brink and Back: ~~The May-June Crisis~~
MAY AND JUNE OF 1964

a. Between the middle of May and the middle of June, a sharp Communist offensive in Laos became the triggering event for intense consideration by the Johnson Administration of extending military action into Laos and North Vietnam. A full range of possibilities was aired at this period, and if the Communist drive in Laos had reached close to the Mekong Valley it is entirely possible that a serious program would have been initiated, probably with a Congressional Resolution as one opening move. However, the action in Laos did not move that way, and by mid-June it had been decided to hold off and to try to carry through the November elections on a "middle road" program that avoided stronger or wider actions except for a few small measures. In essence, the Administration went to the brink in its own mind, but then drew back in the belief that the situations in Laos and Vietnam were not beyond reach of ~~real~~ improvement without stronger measures.

The period is complex to tell, partly because so much of the account must concern deliberations that were not known to the public and have not been covered in other accounts, partly because all three areas, Laos first and foremost, but also South Vietnam and Cambodia, were at critical points. In the Cambodian case, the issue was before the United Nations, so that the diplomatic track was to the fore there. Diplomacy

was also an intensive factor in Laos, and a background element in the handling of Vietnam. The consideration of military and political measures within Indochina went hand in hand with difficult decisions on emerging negotiating tracks. It was a period that changed much and set the stage for the future, far more than the newspaper reader could well have judged at the time. At the same time, in terms of basic US decisions, it was an inconclusive period. Although the US posture became firmer in the course of the month, the keynote by mid-June was to "muddle through" and put to one side the various programs to affect Hanoi that had been framed in the spring.

b. On the painter's theory of putting in background first, let us take the least critical and volatile situation, Cambodia.

and

Following the burning of the British /^{and} American Embassies and the Chantrea incident, in mid-March, Sihanouk had put off scheduled talks with South Vietnam on the border questions.* Since such talks had been intended as a stepping stone to a four-party conference involving Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and South Vietnam, the effect was to make this diplomatic route more difficult. Nonetheless, the British, with American

*The issue here principally concerned small islands off the Cambodian coast, which the Diem government had claimed for South Vietnam at a time of high tension with Cambodia. In early 1964 and at all later times when the matter came up, it seemed clear that the Saigon government was prepared to drop the claims in any context that promised some improvement in relations.

nd urging, continued to press for this practical motivated as before by desire to avoid a wider confrontation that might give a major opening to the French view on action. Thus frustrated in the larger Geneva conference d, there was concern that Sihanouk might again react ly. In fact, from early April onward, he dropped his c efforts for the time being, almost certainly on French advice and in reliance on what might come out of a planned trip to France in June.*

The respite was brief. On May 7-8, South Vietnamese units ~~(this time with no American advisors present)~~ crossed into Cambodian territory in a continuing military action and in an area where the border was not well defined. Despite a prompt apology and offer of indemnity (?), Sihanouk on May 13 filed a formal complaint in the U.N. Security Council, charging both South Vietnam ~~(the Republic of Vietnam in its formal title)~~ and the US with aggressive acts (check wording).

Almost at once, the State Department recommended, and the President approved, a twofold US response. First, this should be the occasion for a full defense of the US position in South Vietnam, describing the activity of Hanoi both generally and along the Cambodian frontier, and explaining that this activity was at the root of a situation along the

*See Michael Leifer, Cambodia: The Search for Security (New York, Praeger, 1967), pp. 149-155. This excellent account of Sihanouk's motives and actions in this period curiously fails to take account of the U.N. approach in any depth.

border in which incidents were almost inevitable. Second, in order to deal constructively with the problem, the US would support an investigation by the Security Council and the designation by the Council of an international force to police the border. This dual position was quickly presented to the Khanh government, which agreed to follow the same line.

Hence, on May 21st, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson made a major speech in the Security Council. In setting forth the agreed position, he ~~took the occasion to define~~ US objectives and policy in Southeast Asia and Vietnam in the following terms:

First, the United States has no, repeat no, national military objective anywhere in Southeast Asia. United States policy for Southeast Asia is very simple. It is the restoration of peace so that the peoples of that area can go about their own independent business in whatever associations they may freely choose for themselves without interference from the outside.

I trust my words have been clear enough on this point.

Second, the United States Government is currently involved in the affairs of the Republic of Viet-Nam for one reason and one reason only: because the Republic of Viet-Nam requested the help of the United States and of other governments to defend itself against armed attack fomented, equipped, and directed from the outside.

This is not the first time that the United States Government has come to the aid of peoples prepared to fight for their freedom and independence against armed aggression sponsored from outside their borders. Nor will it be the last time unless the lesson is learned once and for all by all aggressors that armed aggression does not pay--that it no longer works--that it will not be tolerated.*

*Documents, 1964, p. 234. The speech will also be found in the Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, and in the New York Times, May 22, p.

I think this is a
 be cut

Long after the event, one of Ambassador Stevenson's biographers has claimed that he had no personal responsibility for this speech (citation.) The argument seems to me curious and belittling to a distinguished American. Whatever Stevenson's personal role, ~~in the preparation of~~ the speech, it reflected the considered judgment of the State Department from every aspect (including international law) and of the White House staff that customarily reviewed such texts--almost certainly in this instance the President himself. The point is worth emphasis because the "no outside interference" statement of the US objective in Southeast Asia is clearly ~~more~~ tempered and limited. ^{(FN.) COMPARE} ~~than~~ the much-disputed internal statement of March 17 defining the objective in South Vietnam as a "non-communist" country. ^(FOOTNOTE - ABOVE. END FN.) Moreover, the characterization of Hanoi's actions as amounting to "armed attack" and "armed aggression" reflects the stronger view that was assuredly being taken by this time. "Aggression" was a word that had been used often before (citations). "Armed attack"--the triggering language for the right of individual and collective self-defense under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter--had been an implicit finding in the White Paper of 1961, which invoked Article 51 in defending the initial Kennedy decision to send supporting forces. Moreover, LBJ had used the phrase on April 20th in a speech (Documents, 1964, p. 57). Yet the use of both terms in a formal U.N. speech was undoubtedly a small step upward in US verbal firmness, and so considered and planned.

The greater part of the speech was taken up, however, with the specific elements of the border situation and with the

Why would the force have been acceptable to the

13 - 6

outlining of possible types of police forces. Behind the latter proposal lay a serious planning effort by the Pentagon, which at this time (as my notes show) envisaged a force of 1200-1500 men, well equipped with helicopters and other transportation. The proposal for such a force was wholly serious, universally supported in both Washington and Saigon, and seemed modest and attainable. What a difference it could have made!

The UN debate continued for several more days, and on June 4th the Security Council voted 9-0 (with two abstentions, including the Soviet Union?) to send a three nation subcommittee to the scene "to consider such measures as may prevent any recurrence of such incidents." Brazil, the Ivory Coast, and Morocco were chosen. To jump ahead of the story, their representatives went to the area in July, and reported their findings on July 27, with a recommendation for the stationing of United Nations observers. However, in late August and early September, the Cambodian government drew back, for reasons we shall examine in a later chapter.

Thus, in the end the proceedings came to nothing. The US position had at least been made clear, but in other respects the matter did not have any direct or immediate impact on the situations in Laos and South Vietnam. Essentially, Cambodia by the Prince's choice was a separate track. As the Administration saw it, US support for Cambodia's independence and territorial integrity was at all times clear, although for wider reasons American tactics did not accord with Sihanouk's preferences.

Once the matter was in the UN, its handling fell almost entirely to the Mission in New York and to those in Washington concerned with UN matters, acting on a policy line agreed from the outset and taken for granted even as the situation in Laos erupted. To this we now turn.

c. Ever since the 1962 Accords, the Plaine des Jarres in north-central Laos had been the point of contact and confrontation between the Communist side and the neutralist forces. As we have seen (Chapter ____), the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese bent every effort in 1962-3 to bring over Kong Le's forces by pressure and inducement, and succeeded to a limited degree in creating a "true neutralist" force under a Colonel Deuane. However, Kong Le continued in control of the bulk of the original neutralist force, and in possession of a narrowed but substantial area in the western part of the Plaine. Still further to the west, along Route 7 to its intersection with Route 13 running north and south between Vientiane and Luang Prabang, regular government forces (originally Phoumi's, but now clearly under Souvanna Phouma) remained in nominal control. However, from the spring of 1963 onward, there had been a steady infiltrating process all through this area, so that in practice Route 13 had become unusable for ordinary civilian traffic between the two major towns of Laos. It bears noting that all this had happened in the face of the clear cease-fire agreement of 1962, and with the ICC helpless and frustrated by Polish obstruction.

As we have seen, this frustration had contributed to the rash attempted coup by Generals Kouprasith and Siho in April of 1964. From February onward, the pressure from the Communist side had been building up and there were ample reports of intensive supply efforts for the Communist and "true neutralist" forces in the Plaine des Jarres.

On May 17, the Communist side struck hard. Almost at once, Kong Le was forced off the Plaine des Jarres and into the hills to its west, losing substantially in the process. Concurrently, Communist forces, (led and dominated by North Vietnamese regulars, as it appeared at the time and as later evidence confirms), moved south from the Plaine des Jarres and threatened to ^{THRUST} ~~move~~ directly to the Mekong at (place). Within the first five days, ~~of the offensive~~, the offensive appeared to threaten not only Kong Le's forces but outright takeover of the country. Whether the takeover was military or, as Hanoi perhaps anticipated, through the collapse of Souvanna Phouma's weakened government, the result would be the same, an end to the 1962 Accords, Hanoi's control of Laos via the Pathet Lao as a front, and a much increased threat to both Thailand and South Vietnam.

Thus, the military events of those first days were seen not merely as, in themselves, a major change in the pattern of territorial control, but as an indication that Hanoi might be going all out in Laos. As recently as March, it had been the considered intelligence judgment that Hanoi had more than ample control of the corridor to South Vietnam and the area to the west of North Vietnam itself. Why then was it moving so hard?

The intelligence community in mid-May, after the first few days of the offensive, was inclined to doubt that it was an all-out effort, but no one could be sure of its limits. (V-30a, 30b, 37a.) At any rate, it was felt that in the absence of some strong US counter-moves, the Communist side would be the more likely to keep on, and that in any event Souvanna Phouma might collapse.

In fact, ~~Souvanna Phouma made the first move~~. His reaction was outrage, and once again he showed firmness and courage under pressure. Almost at once, he requested US help in getting air power into Laos. The Lao Air Force had barely learned to fly the handful of old T-28 fighter-bombers the US had sent to Laos in the summer of 1963, and could not maintain them for sustained use. (Note on the T-28, WWII training a/c/, speed limits, etc.) Now, Ambassador Unger offered a supply of bombs and US technicians to help in maintenance, and Souvanna Phouma promptly accepted.

recounted Militarily, the T-28's were a primitive force; psychologically they proved from the first to be a vital shot in the arm. Faced with Russian guns and tanks in the Plaine des Jarres, the Kong Le and other government forces could for the first time see their side hitting back. From henceforth the T-28's were used not only in the Plaine des Jarres but to bomb the part of Route 7 over which supplies moved to the Plaine des Jarres from North Vietnam.*

*Eventually, the T-28's extended their coverage to the corridor route, and in the eyes of many Americans became the most effective and discriminating form of military action used in Laos. Successive American Ambassadors in Laos and Thailand pounded the table for more propeller-driven aircraft. They got all there were, but it would have been infinitely preferable if more had been produced, instead of what became the almost indiscriminate and harassing use of supersonic jet fighter-bombers unable to select

Secondly, Unger on May 21 offered, and Souvanna Phouma accepted, the use of US jet reconnaissance planes for low-level reconnaissance in Laos. This action was promptly announced in Washington.* This had been done briefly in the critical period of 1962. Now the reason was essentially the same--to spot Communist military moves primarily, and secondarily for psychological effect. ~~The aircraft for this purpose came from bases in South Vietnam for a short while, and then from carriers off the South Vietnamese coast and nearer to the scene.~~ Initially, the reconnaissance planes were unarmed, by deliberate decision.

These two moves having been taken, Washington began urgently to examine the long-brewing scripts for diplomatic and military action aimed at getting Hanoi to lay off. The crisis had broken on Sunday, May 17. By the following Saturday, a refined program calling for careful warning and military preparations, followed if these were fruitless by selected air attacks on North Vietnam, was before the Secretaries of State and Defense. With Messrs. McCone, Taylor, and McGeorge Bundy, these now formed an Executive Committee (EXCOM), to operate along the lines that had been followed in the Cuba missile crisis and others, that is to sit normally without the President but to sift the options and report to him. (The reporting was usually

(cont.) targets with the necessary precision, and far too prone to error.

*Baltimore Sun, May 22, 1964.

NOT TALL
LATER

done at this time through McGeorge Bundy, but on occasion through one or both of the Secretaries.) It was a tight and useful group. On this occasion it chewed over the first draft, rejecting it in favor of a more general approach, but not coming to any conclusion in meetings that ran through much of Sunday, the 24th and at a staff level into the 25th.

On May 26th, word was received of the death of Prime Minister Nehru of India. Under Indian custom the body would not be embalmed, so that the funeral was to be held almost at once. Hence, Rusk as the President's representative had to leave that morning. The rest of the group, with George Ball replacing Rusk, met with the President late that day. It was an interim session, without a firm recommendation, and with no action paper ready.

The President's decision was to convene the key men from Saigon and Washington for the following Monday and Tuesday in Honolulu. Clearly he felt, as so often, the need to get the judgment of the men on the ground. Was it really desperate or not? And did Washington's plans make sense? In the intervening period, Rusk would be making soundings at New Delhi, and should then stop in Bangkok and Saigon ~~himself~~, before coming to Honolulu.

The second decision of the meeting was that the British should be told of the state of American thinking, including the possibility of stronger action in Laos or North Vietnam, or both. All through the winter, London and Washington had

worked closely together over Cambodian diplomacy and Laos politics. Britain had a key position as co-Chairman of both the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Conferences, was a SEATO member which had joined in the strong April Communique, and was perhaps most importantly the nation an American government consulted almost instinctively for wisdom and judgment. Sir Alec Home as Prime Minister and Richard A. ("Rab") Butler as Foreign Secretary were anything but American stooges; rather, both were valued for their independence, Home also for directness and candor, Butler more for sophistication and experience.

The first move that Wednesday afternoon was for George Ball as Acting Secretary to see the British Ambassador, Lord Harlech. Quickly, it was made clear that the British wanted to talk face-to face. Since this seemed hard to do in Washington, with all hands about to go to Honolulu, it was finally agreed that I should go to London at once, then to join Rusk from Bangkok onward. In some secrecy, I became the sole passenger in an all-too-familiar military C-135 (the original of the 707), leaving from New Jersey that night.

The secrecy had⁷lifted by morning, by wise British choice, and I was greeted by a probing group of the press at London Airport. After making a feeble try to make my mission seem routine, I was taken to Ambassador Bruce and thence on a solid round of talks culminating in a full session with Foreign Secretary Butler.

My message was not particularly complex. If the Communist side (the British agreed this meant Hanoi) continued to push in Laos, or if the situation in South Vietnam continued

to look more serious, the US might feel impelled to take a series of military actions, probably starting in Laos but extending in the end to attacks on North Vietnam. These would be accompanied by communications to Hanoi, for which we had already told the British we planned to use the Canadian channel. In the end a broad Geneva-type conference would be needed, but we would like to defer this until effective accord with Hanoi had been reached or at least tested. In particular, we did^{not} wish to see an early conference on Laos, which on May 20 had been strongly proposed by General de Gaulle. Rather, as the British already knew, we wanted to follow the route Souvanna had now requested, consultations under Article 4 of the 1962 Accords, to see if Hanoi could not be induced to pull back.

In laying out these points, I made clear that the President had reached no decision, but equally that the Honolulu conference might indicate that one was urgently needed. We did not ask for any firm British undertaking of any sort at this time, and would not make final decisions without their being at least fully cut in about our intentions.

Butler's reply was, predictably, noncommittal. He made it clear that British opinion was in general much more sympathetic to action in Laos than in South Vietnam. The former seemed a case of a decent neutralist settlement which Hanoi was clearly violating, the latter more ambiguous as between local and external factors. The British government at its senior level

10 - 11

had by now come to accept generally our view of Hanoi's crucial role in South Vietnam, partly as a result of a careful exchange of intelligence from all sources. The public, as Butler made clear, was something else again, and the point was underscored by his legal advisor raising the question whether Hanoi's conduct in fact amounted to "armed attack" within the meaning of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.* If Bruce and I had been forced to guess, we would perhaps have judged that in the full contingency as we laid it out, we would have British diplomatic cooperation and general support, but somewhat reluctant and definitely cautious. To ask for British military support was not in my brief; by this time, they were of course heavily committed in helping Malaysia against the Indonesian confrontation in Borneo, and had a total of _____ forces there. This topic was discussed at some length, but separately and with no direct link between the Indonesia and Laos/Vietnam situations.** At the close, Bruce and I reported the conversations fully, and left it at that. The British press speculated at length, and with some thoughts that were near the mark, but both we and the British managed to keep our discussions, then and later, from having any significant leak.

*This point had come up in the earliest American staff studies of late February. The UN and other precedents had in the end seemed clear on the basis of ^{the} publicly demonstrable situation of early 1964 alone. But the point has never been beyond argument, and is taken up in a later section of this book, _____. For the view held generally in 1961-63, see Hilsman, p. _____. (quote).

**See Chapter _____ below, p. _____.

Meanwhile, Secretary Rusk in New Delhi had had a brief and rather acid exchange with Kosygin (check), representing the USSR at the funeral. However, by this time there⁴ had been a note of hope from the Soviet camp, in the form of a diplomatic proposal concerning Laos put forward on the 27th by the Polish Government. Instead of an immediate 14-nation conference, as de Gaulle was urging, this proposed a preliminary meeting among the two co-Chairmen (Britain and the USSR), the three members of the ICC (India, Canada, and Poland itself), and the three contending groups of factions from within Laos itself. It was an ingenious idea, as Rusk ^{AT ONCE} had noted in a cable from New Delhi, and on the 29th Washington announced its support. By then, it was clear that the Communist parties were not ready to participate in Souvanna's Article 4 consultations; the Poles seemed to be providing a serious alternative avenue for discussion. Since they could hardly be acting without Russian blessing (or perhaps prompting), the picture seemed for a time lighter.

Going on to Bangkok, Rusk at once got a full taste of Thai feelings. Since the death of Marshall Sarit in December, leadership had fallen to General Thanom (rest of name), who at first seemed shaky but emerged with more confidence and force as the months went by. This time, he and other Thai leaders were engrossed with the threat from Laos. The SEATO Council had met earlier in the week, and the Thai had readily sensed that several members of SEATO were uncertain partners in carrying out the SEATO plans that called for forces ^{to go where?} from several nations in the event of a military threat via Laos. By this time,

besides the British, Australia and New Zealand had the bulk of their small deployable forces tied up in defense of Malaysia. This left, in terms of possible effective forces, only the US and Thailand itself.

Thus, ^{Rusk} ~~the suggestion~~ was strongly urged that there should at once be bilateral planning between the two nations, at a military level and without any new commitment. The Thai pointed out that, in the absence of such plans, a thrust to the Mekong could create a drastic and immediate threat to their country, for which the only military plans (those of SEATO) relied unrealistically on other nations. It was a strong argument, successively reviewed and reinforced in Honolulu and Washington. The upshot was a Presidentially approved undertaking for bilateral military planning, subject to review and approval in Washington and after military approval not to be carried into effect without a political decision by both sides. Agreement was completed on June 22, 1964, and the planning exercise became known within government as Project 22. It was much later to become a matter of acute controversy.* At the time, the action loomed small in the complex of what was being considered, and was not regarded as especially significant. The universal expectation in this period was that the US would have to deploy military forces at once to Thailand if a threat emerged from Laos,

*The Symington Hearings of 1969 dwelt at great length on this agreement, and whether it expanded the US commitment to Thailand beyond the limits of the SEATO obligation. (citations.) While the agreement was not disclosed as fully or promptly to the Congress as it should have been, there were many references to it over the years, in hearings before committees having to do with military assistance appropriations for Thailand in particular. I myself testified about it in the fall of 1966, in an executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (the same that included my testimony on a Congressional Resolution

and that these forces would fight, if necessary, to defend Thailand under the SEATO obligation.. It was also expected, as we shall see in a moment, that Congress would have an active role in the process of decision.

Returning to the thread of the Rusk trip, his next stop in Saigon was overnight, and with only a few hours for business. The talk with Khanh was nonetheless an important addition to the store of impressions that were taken to Honolulu. By now Khanh was forthright in urging that some military attacks be carried out beyond the boundaries of South Vietnam. He wanted the bulk of these to be against Laos, but also spoke of selective attacks against North Vietnam itself. Pressed as to the scale he had in mind, he made clear that it was small, principally for fear that the Communist side might retaliate by sabotage or even air attacks against Saigon. The implication that his own control was not firm was inescapable. Doubtless feeling (as I certainly did) that there was a trace of whining in Khanh's plea and certainly an element of urging the US to take over responsibility for his country, Rusk responded with a stern lecture. If wider action led to a bigger war, including possible Chinese intervention, only the US would have the capacity to act, and the risks could at some point approach the nuclear level. In short, this was a grave matter and, by unmistakable implication, Khanh was being too simple and cavalier about it. It was

(cont.) having been considered in May and June of 1964--see below, pp. _____ and _____.)

a reminder that Khanh had better not try to force the US hand, and I am sure also an ~~honest~~ reflection of the Secretary's acute sense of the gravity and complexity of the issue.

And so to Honolulu, arriving the afternoon (?) of June 1st. It was a full gathering of the clans. From Saigon came Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland, from Bangkok Ambassador Martin, and from Washington Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, John McCone, John McNaughton, and William Sullivan. The meeting on June 2 was held, as usual, initially in the main map room of Admiral ~~Stamps~~^{Felt}'s ~~head~~ Pacific Headquarters, thereafter in smaller groups. Unlike the many meetings almost wholly on Vietnam, this one embraced all of Indochina and Thailand as well, a return to the format of the July 1962 meeting at that same spot. Whereas the mood then had been hopeful, this time it was apprehensive-to-gloomy. We had thought we were on the right track, but the experience of two years had been in the end disillusioning. Could an answer now be found?

As always, the greatest part of the time and effort went into a detailed look at the situation in Vietnam, and a review of the March programs, which by now had been supplemented in many ways. Laos too was gone into in detail, with the feeling that the Communist push seemed to be slowing up, and might not after all be aimed at reaching the Mekong or the vital cities of Luang Prabang and Vientiane. The T-28's seemed to be having a particularly useful effect; professional jet airmen did not know whether to cheer or look bemused.

So, an intensive morning of discussion left the feeling

that perhaps after all there was material to work with in Laos, and clearly much that could be done in South Vietnam, ~~with~~ Lodge continuing to believe that things should be better over the next few months. It was a useful prelude to the key policy discussion, which came on the afternoon of June 2 in a group comprised of those I have named above, plus of course Rusk and myself. After discussion of Laos and Thailand, the group turned to a general action plan that had been prepared in Washington after the intense EXCOM meetings the previous week. Its opening moves included a Congressional REsolution and communication with Hanoi; ^{Then} it led on through a series of military pressures that culminated in selected air attacks on North Vietnam, to be carried out by the South Vietnamese to the greatest possible extent. It was an intricate program, relying for its effect on a demonstration of total US firmness, but equally a clear showing at every stage that our objectives were limited to bringing an end to North Vietnamese aggression. A formal intelligence judgment had by this time concluded that there was a reasonable chance that such a program could in time bring Hanoi to pull back and await another chance, although then, as always, intelligence pointed to the substantial chance that Hanoi would hold on.

My notes record four points, in particular. First, the South Vietnamese were not ready, either to handle any riposte against Saigon or to fly bomber aircraft, and would not be for some months. Second, the possibility of Chinese intervention seemed to call for prudent deployment of substantial elements of the several divisions thought to be needed if the Chinese did come in with ground forces. Yet, how could this be done with-

out confusing the intended signal of limited objectives? Third, the American public was far from convinced of the importance of Southeast Asia and of the stakes there; more needed to be said. And fourth, it was generally felt that the plan for a Congressional Resolution made sense, as a way of showing basic firmness and educating the country at the same time.

~~From these four points, and the~~ ^{WITH THE} rays of hope that had appeared in the earlier discussion, ~~it followed that~~ the general consensus by the close of the afternoon was that more planning was needed, ^(AND) ~~but~~ above all that the situation was not so crucial as to call for the initiation of a course of action that was obviously both delicate and risky. Thirty days was a period mentioned before that course of action should again be taken up.

On this note the group broke up, incidentally just as the news came in that Senator Goldwater had beaten Governor Rockefeller in the California primary election that day. It was a cruel blow to Ambassador Lodge, whose personal prospects had been ended in the Oregon primary of mid-May, but who cared deeply about the nomination of a progressive Republican like Rockefeller rather than an arch-Conservative like Goldwater. I can still recall the look of pain on the Ambassador's face. One sensed that, with this development, he must inevitably resign to do what he could to head off Goldwater--and so he did three weeks later. Politics, I am convinced, had played no part in his initial decision to accept the Embassy (he of all men could

not have been nominated to oppose John Kennedy) nor had it influenced his advice from Saigon. Whatever his political ambitions, they hinged on the best possible course of events in South Vietnam, and thus to this point there had been no possible sense of conflicting interest. Nor, to those who knew his instinctive patriotism, could there have been conflict thereafter. Yet, his mind and heart would have been divided, and he would have been in an impossible position had he continued. To the other uncertainties of the situation was now added the choice and breaking in of a new Ambassador. Never mentioned in the deliberations of June, it may have been a background factor.

I dwell at length on this afternoon meeting in Honolulu because it seemed to me the closest to the edge that the government got during this period, and the beginning of a drawing back. As with so much else in this period and later, it was almost impossible to separate out whose voice was decisive. Views were stated on both sides of almost every issue. In particular, there were military voices concerned lest the difficulties lead us to inaction. In the end, the consensus ~~that the time just~~ ~~was not ripe~~ seemed both universal and sincere.

The next day, June 3rd, the President met with his senior advisors. (I was not present, but did a long summary of the Honolulu highlights for Secretary Rusk's use.) So far as I could tell, the President accepted the Honolulu group's clear conclusion without hesitation. A keynote of the meeting was that, since we were not going to take stronger military action, it was essential to find ways that would visibly show all in Southeast Asia that the US was determined to stand firm. The Honolulu

meeting had aroused considerable speculation in the US, and even more in Asia. Now we had the problem of meeting what might be a letdown.

This particular problem was quickly eased by events in Laos. There, low-level reconnaissance at Souvanna's request had continued since the 21st of May, without incident. Suddenly, however, on June 6th and 7th, two Navy planes were shot down in quick succession. The President then directed a limited reprisal, and on June 9th a Communist gun position in north-central Laos was attacked.* The Communist protest was so shrill that for a moment Souvanna wavered, but by June 11 he had come back to agreeing that the reconnaissance flights should continue. The military orders now called for their having escorts and firing if fired upon--"armed reconnaissance"* as it was called. On this basis the flights went on without further incident, on a diminishing scale.

In military terms the incident and the change of orders were small matters, but President Johnson had taken the occasion to make a gesture of firmness, hoping that it would be so interpreted in Hanoi. Over the next two weeks, other measures were taken, some with deliberate publicity, such as the move to Thailand of additional equipment to be stockpiled for a ground force brigade. Rusk in a speech at Amherst on June 14 hit hard at

*This target was the ~~identical~~ site that had downed the US plane lost on June 7. However, through pilot error another site of almost identical appearance was hit, losing some of the intended effect.

* discuss how meaning of armed reconnaissance
 much additional tactical opportunities

Communist activity in Laos, and a number of background briefings were held by myself and others to convey how important we believed the issues in Southeast Asia to be, and to get across that the government remained in a high state of readiness and concern.*

It was hard to tell what the public mood was at this time; it did not seem to be stirred up either way about events in Southeast Asia, and a government that had not made up its mind what to do obviously had to tread warily in seeking to arouse public opinion. In fact, a cautious^{US} and measured effort was made under the guidance of ASSISTANT SECRETARY Robert Manning of the State Department, who was active up to the time of his leaving government at the end of July.

Within the policy circle, there remained one critical issue. Whether to seek a Congressional Resolution was debated in successive meetings, without the President, on June 10th and 15th. In the end the project was put to one side. The case for a Resolution seemed to many, including myself, strong. The country was heading into an election campaign, in which the Congress would be away much of the time till early January of 1965. Yet there might at any time be some development in Southeast Asia that would call for quick action of a directly military character. Moreover, the strongest possible deterrent to Hanoi's pressing its local advantages in Laos and South Vietnam would surely be a Congressional expression of US steadiness and willingness to go further if need be. No longer, of course, was a Congressional Resolution being put forward in the context of a

*Citations.

Did you explain why the US had to go forward

sequential plan to get Hanoi to pull back, but even without such a plan there seemed much that it could accomplish. Many of us harked back to the Middle East Resolution the Congress had adopted in March of 1957, at a time when there was no drastic or immediate threat in the area, but when the US posture was felt to need definition. The parallel was far from exact, but it did seem to have weight.

So a draft resolution and accompanying explanatory material, for possible use with the Congress, were carefully prepared. This was done by the staffs of State, Defense, and the White House, and in the end reviewed with care by a group of ~~myself~~, McGeorge Bundy, Douglass Cater of the White House staff, ^{MYSELF, AND} ~~and~~ James C. Thomson, ~~then (I believe) working with me for special projects of this sort.~~ The actual text of the resolution was much re-worked from an earlier May draft, largely by Abram Chayes, who served as Legal Advisor in the State Department until the end of June.

Yet in the end the case against the resolution seemed overwhelming. On the 10th, the general consensus was that in the absence of a considered decision for a sustained course of action, the need for a resolution was impossible to explain adequately to the Congress and the public. ^(IT WAS ALSO) ~~General~~ argued that the existence of a resolution, ^(WOULD) ~~in itself~~ tended to determine the decision in the direction of military force. In addition, there were practical considerations. The Senate had been tied up on the vital Civil Rights Bill (which was to pass finally on

June 19), and when this was completed all the rest of business would flood in, before and after the Republican Convention of mid-July. The time was short, and ~~clearly~~ inadequate for any proper debate.

Such were the arguments. Despite a further major effort by myself and others to marshall the arguments for, a final meeting on June 15 disposed of the issue summarily and turned itself to an action paper, by McGeorge Bundy, on what we were going to be doing over the next few months assuming that we did not have a supporting Congressional Resolution.

In essence, the policy embodied in that paper--which must surely have reflected the President's guidance--was one of holding strongly through the coming months to the middle of the road, avoiding both weakness and widening the war. Only a drastic change for the worse in Laos or Vietnam would change this course. Specifically, it called for:

- pursuit of the Polish negotiating track on Laos;
- cautious support for Lao efforts to get the ~~ground~~ military situation back into balance;
- the fullest possible gingering up of Khanh, on all action lines;
- modest preparatory actions, such as the build-up in Thailand (actually announced on June 20);
- further planning for military action against the North, but a limiting of approved actions to the covert program being done by the South Vietnamese with US support.

At this point, no mention was made of destroyer patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. The authority for these already existed, and had

since 1962 (?) The last one had been at the end of March, and the renewal was treated as a matter for recommendation by Secretary McNamara, with review in the White House and State Department. The major guideline of avoiding risk and provocation was applicable to these and any other military operation that might come up. Intelligence judgments in May and June had considered the possible Communist reaction to a large number of possible actions, including outright air attacks on the North. Such activity as the covert program and destroyer patrols had been given only glancing attention, with the conclusion that Hanoi would be most unlikely to react sharply to actions in this category.

In short, the whole thrust of thinking at this June 15 meeting--in effect the wind-up of the crisis that had begun on May 17--was in the direction of actions aimed at the situations within Laos and Vietnam. ^(Of) ~~the~~ the ambitious scenarios on which the staffs in State and the Pentagon had labored so long since March, all that remained were moderate preparations, small approved actions, and the idea of initiating communication with Hanoi. Bluntly, what was rejected seemed much more significant at the time than what was undertaken.

Appropriately, the approach to Hanoi was in the end in low key. Carried by Seaborn on June 18th, the message was a general one indeed. (Summarize.)

Finally, to round out the events of the period, Ambassador Lodge's resignation was announced on June 23 (?), simultaneously

with the announcement that he would be succeeded by Maxwell D. Taylor. The President had obviously sought a man who had prestige, a non-partisan background, and enough experience with the situation to require no long break-in. These basic qualifications were reasonably obvious, and behind the scenes it was reported with high plausibility that several members of the cabinet, including Rusk, McNamara, and Robert Kennedy, had made it clear that they were available if the President had wished. It was one measure of the felt sense of crisis, ~~of the importance of the position,~~ and of the need for ~~the greatest possible~~ unity, that pervaded Washington and the Administration.

Although Taylor was not lacking in experience with a high political content--in Berlin, Korea, and Japan--he himself requested as his right-hand man a senior civilian, U. Alexis Johnson, who as Deputy Under Secretary of State had been deeply involved at every stage of Southeast Asian policy since 1961. Before that he had been Ambassador in Thailand for three years, and in the 1930's he and Taylor had studied Japanese together near Tokyo. For the occasion, the title of Deputy Ambassador was created, and thereafter maintained.

As he prepared to depart, Taylor received no new instructions, nor was there any attempt to re-define policy. All hands felt that both its certainties and uncertainties had been fully aired and understood in the series of discussions that ended on June 15. Taylor did ask for, and get, a Presidential letter defining his authority in the most categorical terms. He was aware that Lodge and General Harkins had had minor disagreements,

although none bearing on the supremacy of the Ambassador, and wished to avoid any future misunderstanding. Moreover, he intended to make the senior heads of all agencies in the Mission into a tight and effective working group under his command. The Mission Council, as it was called, had been intended to serve this purpose, but under Nolting had had a federal and loose character and under Lodge had become formal and superficial.

* * * * *

What did it all prove?

If the reader has found the foregoing account a little breathless and confusing, this has not been without intent. So the months of May and June seemed at the time, and so even more do they seem at a distance of seven years, with my own voluminous record before me.

In retrospect, the significance of the period still seems less in what was done than in what was not. Up to the Honolulu Conference of June 1-2, the President's senior advisors had moved very close indeed to a recommendation for the initiation of a program that would have combined military pressure with inducements, both aimed at North Vietnam. Such a program was not the work of obscure or devious planning minds, ~~at any level of government~~, nor so far as I could tell did it derive any significant part of its impetus from the continued firm advocacy of Walt Rostow, whose part was confined to the sending of memoranda at fairly frequent intervals, ~~even~~ at a time when he was extensively and directly engaged in Latin American matters. As any reader of the press

1) His the Two Viet Nam. (Revised 1964 & assumes his original 1962
edition is late 1963. The second edition is 1964. 29 pages.
by deliberate commitment design Co. 11/12/64 is more liberal
and magazines of the period can readily verify, the idea of some-

how bringing the war home to North Vietnam was in the air and in a host of speculative discussions. One of its most strident advocates, indeed, was the late Bernard Fall, whose first-hand knowledge of Vietnam was very extensive indeed. Writing in the magazine, The Reporter, on March 12, 1964, Fall said that bombing of North Vietnam could fairly readily bring Hanoi to terms, and that it would pull back and leave the South alone.* As it happened, I myself had met Fall in May, on an occasion when both of us debated Vietnam in a small group of liberal Democratic Senators. Somewhat to my surprise, and I am sure to the surprise of the sponsors of the gathering, he began by producing a wealth of evidence that Hanoi's backing of action to overthrow Diem went back to 1957 (not 1959, as I was arguing). His remedy, it then appeared, was ~~the idea of~~ an ultimatum threatening sharp and destructive bombing of Hanoi's factories. I responded by saying simply that a great power like the US could hardly make threats it was not prepared to carry out--at which point he waffled.**

FN *As my description may convey, I never had much regard for the advice of Mr. Fall on major policy. With others in government, I valued his first-hand observations and made a real effort to see him whenever he had been on the scene. His tactical perceptions were often acute, and--as conveyed to me--moderate in tone. Like many men one instinctively likes in public life,

*Fall had suggested the effectiveness of bombing as far back as 1962. See his article in the Saturday Evening Post, November 24, 1962.

he had a tendency to respond to the audience of the moment. The audience for his writings was, as I am sure he saw it, more and more critical of the war as time went on, and his writings changed accordingly. Compare, for example, the first and second editions of The Two Vietnams (selected comparisons). *END FN*

But this is a digression. Neither Fall's voice without, nor Rostow's within, were at the core of a thought process within government that embraced virtually all concerned with the problem. If there were men who thought it plainly wrong to plan in the direction of stronger action, they took no pains to bring their views forward. If there were men who thought the course of stronger action offered any quick or ready solution, they too were silent. What ^(UT) ~~was going on~~ seemed to all of us a direction we must look, and ^{ONE} ~~on~~ which ~~one~~ might achieve results if, but only if, it were taken with a judicious mixture of firmness and moderation, and maintained over a considerable period. This would have to be done, it was judged, in the face of what would surely be a major outcry from Communist opponents, non-aligned countries, and many of America's own allies or at least their public opinion.

Why, then, was it not attempted? Here one must take pains to keep within the perspective of 1964, and thus to leave out the evidence of what actually happened from 1965 onward. As seen in the spring of 1964, the course had plenty of difficulties and pitfalls, and the outcome was not seen to be at all clear. Moreover, and this surely of cardinal importance, the situation

simply was not at crisis level in a visible way. It might have become so if the Communist forces in Laos had pushed further, but as of early June nothing in Laos or Vietnam was at the point where a wholly convincing case of actual (as opposed to impending) crisis could have been made.

On the other hand, the arguments for going ahead in some fashion were also strong, and in hindsight loom stronger still. In South Vietnam especially, there was at this stage a government that seemed to be doing some sort of job. In terms of giving that government encouragement, easing the visible areas of doubt, and giving things a chance to move forward, WELL HAVE BEEN this could ~~be seen at the time~~ as a reasonable time to move.

Most particularly, if Hanoi was uncertain whether it could press all the way--as intelligence judged that it was--this might have been the time for a convincing showing that the US meant to stay the course no matter what it took. ~~Even then, one could surmise that Hanoi knew better than any American what the trends were in the South, from every visible evidence, the North Vietnamese leaders saw themselves making gains hand over fist.~~ One might well have sensed that the winter and spring had seen the playing out, to great effect, of cards laboriously accumulated in the years of apparent adversity, or placed in their hands by the confusion of the November and January coups. Now Hanoi might be deciding just how much further it could ^{Go.} ~~press~~.

These points were all made within the Administration, in one degree or another. That they did not carry the day may have been simply the balance of the argument.

Yet I doubt that this was the whole explanation. I do not see how one can escape the intangible weight of the American political situation at this period. Not only was it an election year, but one charged with a very special atmosphere, first and foremost from the death of John Kennedy, second from the Republican candidacy of Barry Goldwater, and third from the growing realization through the whole broad center of American politics that it was time to do something big and lasting about the problems of race, the cities, and poverty.

Theodore H. White, more than anyone, has caught the atmosphere of that year. For much if not most of it, and for most if not all Americans, it was as if the United States were a bereaved family, looking for leadership (and finding it), anxious to draw together, eager to act on those things that had been the particular projects of the dead member. Above all, like a family, the United States simply wanted to get through the year, or until the shock of the assassination fully wore off. It was not a mood in which major new projects could readily be launched; as it was, most Americans thought it a tremendous achievement to get major tax and civil rights legislation, and to avoid serious trouble abroad.

Translated into the terms of the Vietnam problem, what this meant was that the felt pressures of domestic opinion were much reinforced. As many have pointed out, those pressures in their normal form were dual and conflicting: don't lose any

confrontation with hostile forces, especially Communist ones, and don't get into risky courses involving heavy cost or loss of life. (Cite Ellsberg.) Such a conflict of pressures is hardly peculiar to the United States, or in American history to policy over Asia. How else, if one thinks a moment, would one expect public opinion to operate in any country, on any serious external issue?

The point, though, is that in an election year the weight of these forces is doubled and that in 1964 the sense of national mourning for John Kennedy made the multiplier treble.

Part of what I am saying here is, of course, that Lyndon Johnson at this period did not have the full freedom of the Presidency. The least part of this was the feeling among the Kennedy family and their devoted followers: the American people did not share their sense that Johnson's title was flawed.* Nor, as to Vietnam, was there any discernible difference at this stage between Johnson and Robert Kennedy. More important by far was that no man who attains the Presidency through death can, for some time, be thought to have a mandate. Like Harry Truman between 1945 and 1948, Lyndon Johnson was inevitably in large part a trustee to run the country.

To all these factors the candidacy of Goldwater added still a further element. When it became clear ~~on June 2~~ that ON JUNE 2 Goldwater would be the Republican candidate--as it surely did to as astute a politician as Lyndon Johnson--it was at once apparent that this would be that rarity in American politics, an

ideological or polar election. All that Goldwater stood for, abroad and at home, must be not only beaten but so decisively defeated that no party for years could think of putting forward such a candidate. Here of course I do not speak of a national mood: Goldwater in the end had the hearts of perhaps 25% of Americans, and the party support of another 15%. But a very large majority of Americans, and certainly those at the top levels of advice to President Johnson, did feel as I describe. In Vietnam terms, the desire not to play into Goldwater's hands became a felt background factor from June onward, although chronology alone negates its having played any part in the decisive Honolulu meeting.

The third factor I have mentioned was the felt need to deal with critical domestic issues. In concrete terms, what this meant was that the Senate of the United States virtually gave up its 1964 session to the Civil Rights bill. Its passage remains a historic watershed in American policy on its most grievous problem. It was the last stand of the older South, and its crushing defeat. (White.) The result, quite simply, was to foreclose other business and interpose a crucial obstacle to any course of action that envisaged a careful and considered expression of Congressional support through a Congressional Resolution.

But there was more to the weight of the domestic ^(issues) ~~concerns~~ than that. It played a big part in the desire to trounce Goldwater, whose domestic program was to set the clock back. And it meant that through 1964 the quiet planning of the White House

was toward a major legislative program in 1965. The ideas of the Great Society had been born, and were being fleshed out under the President's orders, even though a full array of experts was not to be brought to bear till the campaign and then, in broader groups, after the election. More and more, the hope built up that nothing should interfere with the mandate for domestic change, or with its carrying out.

So much for the special factors that were then a part of the ever-present felt sense of domestic opinion and domestic need. I cannot calibrate their weight in the May-June policy discussions, or for that matter at any other time in the campaign period. Public opinion in the broad sense did figure, as I have already brought out in the earlier account, with the general assumption being that with proper presentation the Congress and public would support a Congressional Resolution and a firm posture generally. But never in my hearing was it discussed whether a particular decision would help or hurt the President's chances or margin of election. What I do know, second-hand, is that on one occasion, perhaps in early June, the President made it emphatically clear to a small circle that if he had to decide on any stronger action, he would do his duty as President and let the consequences for his election fall where they might. Those present believed him fully.

Did the President or his advisors then change any judgment they would otherwise have reached? This is the crux of the question, and of this perhaps lengthy digression--warranted only

by the importance of the relation between American foreign policy and domestic elections. I would conclude with four sentences:

1. Had the crisis been clear, President Johnson would have accepted advice to act, and that advice would have been given.

2. In the balance of argument as it lay, and of honest professional judgment, the result might well have been as it actually was, at a normal equivalent time in a non-election year.

3. Nonetheless, the felt sense of domestic political factors weighed at this stage heavily on the side of not taking action. What might well have been rejected in any event became out of the question, and so accepted throughout the civilian ranks in government.

So it was in June, as I saw it. We shall return to the impact of the election at later points in the account of 1964. We must, for the contemporary and prospective effect of American elections is a vital thread in the whole Vietnam story. It is a simple fact that what a democracy gains in popular understanding and support it may also lose in terms of flexibility during election periods, and in terms of judgments or misjudgments made by other nations acting in ways that affect it.

How did Hanoi see all this?

One of the judgments expressed in the June decision papers, specifically for the June 15 meeting, was that it was the general tendency of nations abroad to believe that the US

was less capable of acting forcefully in an election year than at other times. This was advanced as one argument for a Congressional Resolution. Was it true at this stage as to Hanoi?

One can only speculate on this particular aspect. Later, in 1967, it became a common view that Hanoi would do anything to hold on through the 1968 election period in America. But this was in the light of the total experience of 1964, not the small fragment through June.

Rather, it seems possible that Hanoi was initially startled by the sharp American reaction to its Laos offensive. From the American side, the T-28's and low-level reconnaissance by American jets seemed small and stopgap measures, in a situation where greater measures raised serious problems. To Hanoi, the willingness of the US to become directly engaged, even in a very limited way, must have been a sign that the American position was becoming stiffer.

The other principal signal from Washington was, of course, the message carried by Seaborn. Here one encounters the riddle of how the North Vietnamese construed American communications, or we theirs. To judge from later Hanoi actions, the act of initiating talks is to them a sign of weakness unless it takes place in a psychological situation that is otherwise extremely strong for one's side. Did this outweigh the actual content of the American message, so that Hanoi's net impression was that the US was looking for a way out, although perhaps still

capable of a nasty set of actions before it left?*

One can only speculate. The guess within government at the end of June, on broad factors that did not include the closely held Seaborn project, was that Hanoi might be a little cautious about stirring up further American responses, but was unaffected in its basic determination to gain its ends in Laos and South Vietnam. Both sides were in a new state of alert, and the struggle went on.

*As good Communists, the leaders in Hanoi were surely aware of that major rubric of classic Communist doctrine, that imperialists, if placed in a hopeless position, would lash ^{out} in a final orgy of destruction nonetheless. (Citations.)

Chapter 14: The Tonkin Gulf Incidents and the Congressional Resolution

a. Up to August of 1964, the handling of South Vietnam was a far more intense problem within the Executive Branch than in the Congress or with the American public. Congress through its committees had kept abreast of the situation and by repeated action on appropriations supported the assisting effort in both South Vietnam and Laos, with almost no dispute or serious debate. In the 1961 and 1963 Diem decisions, Congress had not been intimately involved or, so far as I can tell, consulted in any serious way, but in the mood of those periods there had been no recrimination or feeling that the Executive had acted high-handedly. Similarly, the general public had followed Vietnam only in moderate degree, shocked during the Buddhist incidents of 1963, and, in the case of serious followers of the news from abroad, well aware since late 1963 that the situation was serious and the government considering stronger steps at some point. In June, the shooting down of American reconnaissance planes over Laos had been front-page news, and there had of course been deaths of American servicemen in Vietnam (____ by this time).

But Tonkin was a major breakpoint in the sense of crisis (CRISIS?) in the country as a whole. The incidents and the Congressional Resolution brought home the possibility of major war as never before. Moreover, the Congressional Resolution had immense twofold importance. In immediate terms, it expressed a

congressional posture and put the Congress for the first time categorically on record concerning the war. In the longer terms, the Resolution was invoked by the Administration to support both the substance and the constitutionality of actions from 1965 onward. ^{Presumably,} Many in both Congress and public became convinced that this was improper, and in the process argued that the facts had not been honestly presented in August 1964, and ~~that the sense of the Resolution had been distorted.~~

→ These are two separate controversies. The question of later distortion, or undue reliance, involved complex legal questions best put off to a much later section of this book. This chapter can discuss what the sense of the Resolution seemed at the time to be, and can above all examine in reasonable detail whether the facts were honestly and fairly communicated. Finally, it is possible in hindsight to look back and try to assess what North Vietnam may have actually intended, and how the episode may have appeared to Hanoi. Controversy has focused overwhelmingly on the interplay of one Western set of minds (the Administration) with another Western set of minds (the Congress). My conclusion, to anticipate, is that any misunderstandings or confusion in this interplay were of no great consequence and almost certainly did not affect the result. Congress was not deceived, but acted on a picture of events and Presidential intentions that did not differ materially from what the President and Administration thought. On the other hand, there may have been major misunderstandings between Washington and Hanoi—between a rational Western set of minds and an impressionistic Asian set.

b. First, though, a quick account of July on the Indochina front. The account of Vietnam in Chapter 13 ended with the appointment of Maxwell Taylor as Ambassador. He and Alexis Johnson arrived in Saigon on July 4/57, bringing with them a new economic team. James Killen, its head, had started life as a labor organizer; he had entered the "aid business" in the early 1950's, and had eventually headed the economic aid mission in Pakistan from ^{4/57 to 8/61 (See Reg.)} (1958) to (1962). Thereafter, as economic aid chief in South Korea, he had compiled an outstanding record both in tightening the operation and persuading the Koreans to take tough but essential measures. He was now picked for Saigon as the best man available worldwide. To balance him and to add a special element of experience with insurgency situations, George K. Tanham was made his deputy for countryside operations. The pair seemed a strong addition to the Mission's capacity.

The new Mission proceeded, in effect, to make a fresh appraisal of the situation. By (date), Taylor had reported their conclusions to Washington. (Highlights). The report did not change the early June conclusion: things just might be slowly getting better, though not at all at a pace that was either unmistakeable or grounds for increased hope. Clearly, Khanh continued to be impatient for the US to permit air attacks against the North. He stated his feelings frankly to Taylor in their very first conversations, and on July 19 -- the anniversary of the 1954 Geneva Accords and observed as a day of mourning in the South--he spoke in public, urging a "March North." Promptly, Taylor rebuked him privately, while Rusk (?) was moved

in a press conference to concede that there might be differences between the two governments, but that in any case the Administration had no such intent as Khanh was urging. Within the Administration the episode did give rise to a round of thought and an abortive action. Assessing Khanh's motives, Taylor reported in a series of cables that Khanh and others were beginning to have doubts whether the US would act even if the situation clearly demanded it. His readers did not need reminding that Khanh, with others elsewhere, might have got a strong impression of US intentions in May and June, and now might feel in real doubt. In any case, Taylor thought the problem of confidence sufficiently serious to propose that a few top Vietnamese military men be drawn into secret discussions of possible South Vietnamese air strike targets in the North. The exercise would be intended to be kept secret, though the danger of accidental or even deliberate leak was mentioned. That the discussions were entirely in the realm of future contingency planning was to be emphasized -- particularly by noting that the South Vietnamese Air Force had no planes adequate for this purpose, and would not have at least until a planned increase in A1H propeller-driven planes was delivered in (date). In short, the project was small in scale, seeking a psychological lift more than practical results, avoiding any express change in the US position. In essence, the US would be saying to the South Vietnamese: "Since you feel so strongly about 'going North,' we will sit down with you and go over what you might try to do -- when and if."

In any event, the discussions back and forth between Wash-

Washington and Taylor on this project dragged on into early August. Although he was in the end given a very guarded form of authority to make the proposal, he had not used it, or mentioned the topic, by August 2nd. Thereafter, both its implications and the South Vietnamese attitude had changed. It would then have become a much more serious step than it had been considered to be in late July, and it was not pursued. What happened eventually in February of 1965 involved South Vietnamese aircraft, but without any advance joint planning.

In Washington, this minor dust-up with Khanh -- for so it appeared -- caused a headline or two. In terms of government attention, however, Vietnam took up much less time during July than events concerning Laos, military and above all diplomatic.

Militarily, in late June, the Lao government forces launched a limited offensive, called "Operation Triangle," to retake the road junction of Routes 7 and 13 and the surrounding area extending along Route 7 to the east. After the experience of years with the fighting ability of Lao soldiers, Washington was profoundly skeptical of this operation. It was conceived and planned by the Lao generals themselves, who early persuaded Souvanna Phouma that it could be brought off. Ambassador Unger and his able military attache, Colonel William ^{LAW} ~~Lae~~, likewise became persuaded, and were directly involved in undertaking to furnish not only supplies and especially more artillery but enlarged air support and (men in accompanying capacity). It was going to the outer edge of what Americans could do in the situation,

under a policy to stay well short of US combat involvement on the ground or, ~~indeed,~~ apart from the armed reconnaissance, in the air.* The American military personnel in Laos were at this stage not more than (20 - 25): eight of these accompanied the Lao forces as observers and to assist in communications. Fear of their capture was one of Washington's worries; the other was simply that the operation would be a bust. Telecons flew back and forth, ^(L. H. T.) Unger stuck to his advocacy of the operation, and the end Washington went along.

The ~~operation~~ ^{offensive} turned out to be a great success. Whether or not some of the North Vietnamese had been pulled out with the onset of the rainy season in June (a later Laos pattern), the Communist forces seemed ineffectual. Over about (three) weeks, Route 13 was completely cleared so that traffic could move again between Vientiane and Luang Prabang, and Route 7 and the area south of it were cleared right over to the ^{PLAINE} ~~Plaine~~ des Jarres. The Communist side was left with only the western area of the Plaine des Jarres to show for all the nibbling of the winter and the big push of May.

This remnant of the May gains remained, however, crucial to Souvanna in his handling of the diplomatic track concerning Laos. In early June, he had laid down as a flat condition that he would never consent to the reconvening of the 1962 Conference unless the Communist side first withdrew to the approximate

* All told, the number of armed reconnaissance missions flown in 1964 was 20 in Laos. Symington Hearings, _____.

boundary line of 1962 between the Communist and neutralist forces--in effect, gave up the area gained in May in the Plaine des Jarres. His position seemed reasonable and was fully supported by the US and many others, including the British--though it was surmised that if all other obstacles were cleared away these others might urge Souvanna Phouma not to insist on this.

Through June and July, the point became more and more central. Consultations under Article 4 of the 1962 Accords wound to an inconclusive close in late June, and at the same time the Poles asked the British to postpone action on their own Polish proposal for the five nations and the three Lao factions to meet first. Peking in mid-June endorsed the French proposal for a full-scale conference, and it was not hard to surmise that Hanoi was hostile to the Polish track. This opposition must have communicated itself to Moscow, which on July 25 came out flatly for a full ^(Laos) conference on Laos, even threatening to resign as co-chairman if this were not accepted. To complete the picture, de Gaulle on July 23 proposed reconvening the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam itself. This was wholly consistent with his having reiterated ^(ON JUNE 12) the theme of neutralizing all of Indochina. ~~on June 12~~. In effect, he had now dropped the other shoe. ~~An eager~~ ^{2012 4,} France and China, ~~a willing~~ ^{willingly,} North Vietnam, and ~~a reluctant~~ ^{reluctant,} Soviet Union ^{11,} were by the end of July in surface unison, in urging at least a 14-nation conference on Laos.

Why did Souvanna and the US resist? The reasons were deeply felt, and seemed thoroughly sound. Both Souvanna and

the US were strongly opposed to the French idea of neutralization of Indochina, believing that it meant in simplest terms that the US would be forced to pull out completely, and leave the field to a North Vietnam ^{no hand} bound, it at all, only by paper undertakings. By this time, the bitter experience of two years had totally persuaded Souvanna that "les Annamites"--as he always referred to the North Vietnamese--were bent on the conquest of the Lao territory and people, with no possible qualification other than being willing to take their time about it. As for the French, their influence with him had been great till roughly mid-1963, but waned rapidly after the departure of Ambassador Falaize in November 1963. Souvanna had no confidence in their intentions for Indochina as a whole, and certainly no belief that they would act to help him when North Vietnam started to apply pressure in a "neutralist" situation. The Russians were by now plainly without influence in Hanoi; the threat of dropping the co-chairman's role might indeed be symbolic of Moscow's total disillusionment with Southeast Asia. In the visible state of high hostility between Moscow and Peking, underlined by this time by the most personal polemics between Mao and Khrushchev, what were the Russians doing in Southeast Asia, they must have wondered, that did not simply soften up situations to the greater gain and glory of Peking? I recall thinking at the time that Khrushchev must be wishing the whole area would sink under ten feet of water.

So, for Souvanna, his true friends had shrunk to one major supporting power, the US, one major power cooperating in the diplomatic sphere, Britain, and the Australians, New

Zealanders and Thai in lesser fashion. As he saw it, they alone seemed to care about preserving his neutralist government and indeed his very nation. He was a beleaguered man, under great pressure[#] and feeling it.

Thus Souvanna's reluctance to see any conference unless the Communist side first disgorged its gains was genuine and needed little American encouragement. At the same time, the US was more conscious than Souvanna that a conference would mean a French field day on neutralization of all Indochina. While ~~it~~^{this} might have little impact on remote Laos, this would be dynamite in the disturbed political situation in Saigon. ⁽¹⁶⁶⁶⁾ It might also put the US on a delicate diplomatic spot in the middle of the campaign, but the effect in Saigon was the key factor. A conference on Laos would not necessarily be bad in a matter of some months--in fact, some forum for side conversations concerning Vietnam might by then be useful. But first both Souvanna and Khanh would have to be in better shape. In essence, the Administration shared the view that Senator Fulbright had expressed in his March speech: (in the existing military balance, there is nothing that can be achieved by negotiation.)

So these diplomatic maneuvers were for what seemed high stakes. It is of course possible in hindsight to say that almost any diplomatic avenue would have been preferable to what unfolded in 1965, and that the French idea was not hopeless. Let us come back to that set of questions in a later section of this book. For purposes of this telling of the story, the simple fact is

that in the whole period after August of 1963, when de Gaulle first enigmatically suggested neutralization, both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and their advisors rejected it completely, at least in the sense that de Gaulle clearly meant it. (See chapter on March to see if reasons properly spelled out there). In July and August 1964, this position of opposing neutralization as an answer in substance was a major factor in the procedural maneuvering of the period. The tangled July phase culminated in a British initiative to bring the three Lao factions together for talks in Paris under the aegis of the ICC. It was a stopgap, designed to keep communication up. As we shall see, the talks became in September the setting for what was perhaps the strongest French intervention in diplomacy throughout the whole period of the 1960's.

Laos diplomacy, the visit of Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia, watching the Goldwater nomination with fascination and a little horror, following the reports from Vietnam--such was my personal diet during July. In terms of any serious policy deliberations concerning Vietnam, the month was a blank. Those working on policy toward Indochina now accepted it as firm policy that President Johnson would not make any new major decision, or again seriously consider expanding the war, at least until after the election. With the campaign of 1964 just getting under way, many of us saw that there would be a problem of presenting the Administration position so that bombing the North--which we supposed Goldwater would continue to advocate--appeared

clearly less attractive than the Administration's approach, "but at the same time not so unattractive that we are tying our hands if we should ever decide we had to do it."

The quotations ^{are} from my file entry in July, a memorandum of July 31 to my brother in the White House. In its drafting, I had been joined by Michael Forrestal, who had just moved over from the White House staff to take William Sullivan's place as the full-time senior man on Vietnam. Our draft was ~~intended~~ intended to pose the problem of the campaign, and to suggest material from which guidance would be prepared, in the White House, for Democratic speakers in the campaign. Since my memorandum shows so clearly what Administration thinking was just before the Tonkin incidents, I reproduce it in full:

"Position Paper on Expanding US Action in
South Vietnam to the North
Possible Courses of Action

Various proposals have been made for military action outside the boundaries of South Vietnam in order to help bring about the defeat of the Viet Cong insurgency directed and supported from North Vietnam. The principal proposal has been for military action against North Vietnam itself, usually advocated in the form of air attacks.

Present US Policy

The Administration has repeatedly made clear that it is pursuing a policy of maximum assistance to the government of South Vietnam to assist in defeating the insurgency. This policy recognizes that the primary problem in South Vietnam lies inside the borders of that country, where the government is confronted with guerrilla forces totaling somewhat more than 100,000 men, who employ every tactic of terror and coercion against government officials in particular. On its side, the government has about 400,000 forces, and these, with the aid of

at the end of 63 the estimate was 125,000 - 150,000

superior firepower and mobility, have been able in recent months to prevent significant further Communist gains although it [sic!] has yet to make major headway in crushing the insurgency.

The US policy has been to assist the government of Vietnam itself to become strong enough to withstand this new type of aggression. Under this policy this Administration has furnished military advisors, logistic and support elements such as helicopters and combat aircraft, and extensive economic assistance and advice reaching down into the rural areas of the country..

The Administration has demonstrated that it will spare no effort within this framework, and has recently joined with General Khanh in announcing a substantial increase in the number of US military and economic advisors and support personnel to be carried out over the next several months. With the intensified US supporting effort, including the appointment of a first-rate US team under General Maxwell Taylor as Ambassador there is a strong possibility that the situation will improve substantially in the coming months.

The Administration has emphasized that the war must be won by the Vietnamese themselves and that the introduction of combat units or the taking over of command by US representatives is not desirable and would tend to weaken rather than strengthen the necessary effort by the South Vietnamese. The adversary in Vietnam has said repeatedly that he has the patience to see it through and that he is relying for ultimate victory on the failure of our will and our patience.

Basic US Objectives

The Administration has repeatedly made clear that its object is peace, which can be brought about at any time by the withdrawal of the subversive and aggressive effort coming from North Vietnam and Communist China. Peace cannot be brought about by withdrawal or by negotiations for any form of "neutralization" under present circumstances. These options would be tantamount to surrendering the country to Communist domination and abandoning a US commitment to a free people.

As the President has stated:

"First, America keeps her word.

Second, the issue is the future of Southeast Asia as a whole.

Third, our purpose is peace.

Fourth, this is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity." *

* Statement read by the President at his news conference on June 2, printed in DOS Bulletin, June 22, 1964.

Finally, the Administration has not excluded the options of military actions outside Vietnam directed against the North. As the President said on June 23, 1964:

'The United States intends no rashness and seeks no wider war, but the United States is determined to use its strength to help those who are defending themselves against terror and aggression. We are a people of peace-- but not of weakness or timidity.'

In short, the Administration's position is that the conflict within South Vietnam must in any case be pursued with the greatest possible vigor and with all possible US support, that wider action is not excluded, but that such wider action must proceed alongside progress within South Vietnam itself if it is undertaken.

Considerations Affecting Wider Military Action:

I. Wider action against North Vietnam would involve the virtual certainty of some form of military resistance and retaliation by North Vietnam. Whether or not US forces were initially involved, it is virtually inevitable that major US participation would at some point be required involving substantial increases in US military personnel in the area. US combat deaths in South Vietnam over the past have amounted to approximately 170 in the last three years. It is at once apparent that action outside South Vietnam would produce significantly higher casualty figures.

There is the further possibility that military conflict with North Vietnam might at some point involve intervention by Communist China. Although no confident prediction could be made whether this would in fact occur, no sober Administration could make the decision to support wider military operations without taking this possibility into account and making the necessary military deployments to deal with it if it should occur.

These considerations do not argue against wider action if it becomes necessary. Preventing Communist domination of South Vietnam is of the highest importance to US national security, and it is clear that the loss of this area to Communism would have extremely serious consequences for the preservation of non-Communist governments in the rest of Southeast Asia and would increase the Communist threat to such important and related areas as Burma and India to the west and the Philippines to the east.

However, the decision to initiate or support wider action would necessarily be a grave one and should not be impatiently undertaken. Our present policy is to resolve the conflict in the best and most effective way without resort to wider action--to attain US objectives with the least possible loss of life either by Americans or Vietnamese.

There can be no question that the conflict is a stern test of US patience and continued resolve. The American people have shown a ~~ix~~ clear understanding of the policy being pursued by the Administration as the wisest course under present circumstances."

Such was the state of thinking as July ended. On August 1, I took my family to New England, expecting to stay ten days and to enjoy the first Break in nearly a year of intense work. I am sure that my own state of mind was a full reflection of the general feeling in the Washington policy circle. Trouble was the last thing we expected. We were muddling through with our fingers crossed.

The Tonkin Gulf Incidents

c. By late July, the "covert operations" program begun in February had reached a point where the South Vietnamese were trained to operate small high-speed motor boats with modest gunpower.* After a few minor forays just north of the 17th parallel, the units had reached the point where they could attempt quick in-and-out shelling operations against military areas along the coast, and in the progressive Washington review of the operation these had been authorized at the discretion of General Westmoreland's command (MACV). Admiral Ulysses S. G. Sharp had in July replaced Admiral Felt as Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC, pronounced "sink-pack") Honolulu. He was kept posted on the general areas of operation of the covert operations, which bore the label "34-A" after the plan number under which they had originally been devised. By this time, these South Vietnamese operations had already had a certain amount of publicity, both from Hanoi broadcasts and from US news media. Both had reported correctly that there had been many air drops, almost without success. The naval operations, however, were a new wrinkle, which had not been unveiled at any time through ^(fill) the latter part of July. Labelled "covert" in normal Administration usage, they were not in the same strict covert vs. "unacknowledged."

* Note on "covert" vs. "unacknowledged."

category of operations that the US (or Saigon) hoped never to see publicized. On the contrary, it was recognized as inevitable that Hanoi would detect almost all of them, certainly any naval shelling forays, and would correctly identify them as South Vietnamese operations conducted with American support.

No American had at this time been in or over North Vietnamese territory, nor was any to be until the bombing began in February 1965. Hanoi of course knew this, and it was thus not thought in the least likely that they would attribute the operations to direct American participation. Thus, the sole purpose of keeping the operations in the "covert" category was to indicate that they were not to be acknowledged in public, thus in effect responding in kind, in a small way, to the large array of secret and unacknowledged operations which North Vietnam had conducted in the South for years. Why, if Hanoi was getting the benefits of lack of acknowledgement as it obviously was, was it necessary for Saigon to announce its own modest replies? Such was the feeling especially in the Saigon government, and the Americans accepted it. Actual secrecy of the operations would, of course, have been a normal military need in any event, but especially acute in this case.

American destroyer patrols fell in an entirely different category of action, at least as Washington saw them. Such patrols, under the code name "DESOTO", had been originally authorized as far back as 1962, principally to get a feel for the maritime traffic that seemed to be carrying much of the men and military equipment from North Vietnam to the South at that time. Patrols

What time of night or infiltration can be observed

Planned
in the morning
as well
as well
accidents
bombs
trace
loss

Cardington
To
explain
B. K. S. S.
Unofficial
of rank
in public
relation

Why
did
patrol
go
etc

had been conducted ~~as~~ uneventfully on (dates in 1962 and 1963) and most recently in ^{Feb. March say Pentagon paper} early April of 1964, always without incident. In the normal planning process, CINCPAC would submit plans, the JCS would approve them provisionally, and they would be reviewed and cleared for political factors by a high-level group in which the State Department was represented. The most basic scrutiny came, however, from Secretary McNamara's office, which generally orchestrated all forms of military action outside South Vietnam under the mid-June guidelines of avoiding provocation.

This process was duly followed in June and July, 1964, and on July 17 Sharp's recommendation was approved, for a patrol to take place between July 31 and August (4 or 5?), starting from the south and proceeding along the coast of North Vietnam roughly 8 miles offshore, reaching a northernmost point well short of China and doubling back along the same general track. *(Special factors - or routine periodic?)*

In the meantime, on the night of July 30-31, Vietnam time, the 34-A operations involved a hit-and-run attack on two islands off the coast, which were thought to support infiltration operations against the South. The fast motor boats involved immediately withdrew to the South, and were back at their base in Da Nang by the morning of July 31. *Four said in memo on Feb 29, 68* Two ~~craft~~ (?) had been involved, and they reported minor damage to the two islands. It was a small affair in every way, though the psychological effect of simply doing it and getting away with it was perhaps greater, both for attacker and attacked.

Did check

*why
within
12 miles
about*

*this
was
first
from
sea
Wintchey
Pyt*

On that same morning of July 31, the destroyer Maddox set out alone and unescorted on the DESOTO patrol. At the time of the 34-A attack, the Maddox had been 130 miles to the south-east. She proceeded up the coast and did not reach the area of the two ^(Vietnam) islands ^(of July 31) until early in the morning of August 2. The time-distance separation between the 34-A operation and the patrol had been worked out by the naval commands, which were aware of the specific schedule of 34-A operations. The Maddox's skipper, Captain HERRICK on the other hand, did not know that a specific attack had taken place on the night of the 30th-31st, although her commander did know what the 34-A operations were, and indeed on the 1st and 2nd orders to the Maddox authorized deviations in course if it appeared that she was being confused with such operations. Until the morning of the 2nd, the Maddox seemed to be proceeding without incident.

Suddenly, in mid-afternoon of the 2nd (Vietnam time), the Maddox was attacked. She had had advance warning of the attack through the intercepting by her own ~~standard~~ radio receivers, of North Vietnamese orders to attack, sent (it appears) in the clear.* Hence, when the attack came, the Maddox was moving away from the coast. The attackers were three PT, or torpedo, boats. They launched at least three torpedoes, as well as directing machine-gun fire. In reply, the destroyer had the help of aircraft from a carrier stationed out in the Gulf, well to the south and east. Two of the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ attacking ships were sunk, and the

* 1968 Hearings, p. 10. The reference to "an intelligence source" clearly refers to this type of information, the nature of which is spelled out at later points in the hearing.

third damaged and left burning. All this in full daylight, photographed, beyond question.

Such was the news as it reached Washington in the early morning of Sunday, August 2, and as it was made public early that afternoon (?). A series of meetings took place during that day, directed in the first place to trying to determine North Vietnamese motives. Intelligence officers soon presented among many hypotheses the idea that the North Vietnamese had become agitated by the 34-A operation--which was the first real naval attack even though only a pinprick in military terms--and mightst somehow have confused the Maddox with the operation. More likely, it seemed to almost all concerned, the North Vietnamese had decided to put on a show of force against the destroyer patrols, hoping thereby to get the US to call them off.

Above all, Washington waited for Hanoi to say something. The evening of Sunday, the 2nd, in Washington was the morning of Monday, the 3rd, in Hanoi. Surely Hanoi would speak by then, if the attack reflected some serious policy motive or perhaps some argument that the destroyer patrols were illegal or aggressive. Yet, through the entire day of the 3rd, Hanoi was silent, not admitting the attacks at all or making any comment, despite the fact that they had by then been made fully public in releases from Washington (check.) It was puzzling, and tended to move minds in the direction of concluding that the attack might have been a local initiative by a subordinate commander.

By Sunday night in Washington, a tentative action plan had evolved, on which decision was delayed till Monday to complete drafting, check operational details, and await more information--also, to permit a careful briefing of Senate Foreign Relations Committee members (check whether limited to that) on Monday. The reaction was certainly not hasty.

When it came, it was twofold, and followed the Sunday plan. A protest note was sent to Hanoi (channel ?), and its contents announced in public at _____ on Monday. It warned, in firm tones, of "grave consequences" if there should be "any further unprovoked offensive military action against US forces." * Simultaneously, the President made public the orders to the Navy to continue the patrol, with the Maddox now to be accompanied by a second destroyer. ^{Not in} ~~the~~ the public statement, but included in the orders, were directions that the two destroyers should have constant air support ("air cap" as it was called) in the form of patrols always overhead, in relays from the carriers in the area. The carriers themselves, however, were not moved closer.

In essence, the President took and made public a clear decision that the US believed the patrol action to be legal and proper, proposed to continue it, and was taking precautionary steps to deter any further attack or to protect the patrol fully if one did occur. The alternative of having the single

* 1968 Hearing, p. 10. Get primary source.

*This was announced on Aug 3 in LBJ's Concluding 27-6
DO-E
Aug 3 1968
P 3:47
apparently
announced
you are
referring
to*

destroyer continue without added protective measures had been rejected because of the greater risk this seemed to present, both of a second attack and of real damage in it. And similarly, the alternative of simply calling off the patrol was rejected. The nature of the choice was abundantly clear to any reader of the evening newspapers on Monday, August 3..

Moreover, in the briefings of the Senate members that Monday afternoon, the question of the 34-A operations was carefully gone into, apparently in greater detail than in the later hearing of August 6.* The general reaction was that the operations were entirely proper. Nonetheless, as was made clear in these meetings (?), the orders for the continued (or resumed) patrol were specifically designed to remove the patrol further north and thus away from the area that might be ~~hit~~ hit by 34-A operations. These orders alone made clear that all levels in Washington and the Pacific were aware that the North Vietnamese might conceivably have confused the Maddox with the 34-A attack of July 30-31, despite what appeared rationally to be ample geographic separation as well as a tremendous difference in the type of vessel, the Maddox being many times larger than any South Vietnamese craft. In fact, by the late afternoon of

* 1968 Hearings, p. 14 (McNamara)

*one Admiral thought this
might draw NVN vessels away from
area of 34A ops*

See line 10 p. 10 of [unclear] that it was not an attack order but an order to make military preparations. 14-22 Austin 328

August 3, in Washington, several top civilians had become convinced that such confusion was the most likely explanation, whether the decision had been local or at the top. Yet, with the new and added degree of separation, the resumed patrol was not believed likely to encounter trouble, so that the idea of standing down 34-A operations did not come up. Discussion by Monday night, all testimony agrees, was calm and measured. No planning was set under way for the contingency of a new attack, no working groups were set up, and the general supposition was that this had been a one-shot event most unlikely to be repeated in the face of the clear and firm US posture. Military watches were, of course, fully alert; the top civilian leaders tended to relax.

The calm was short. At 9:40 the following morning a message was received from the Maddox herself, that her radio receivers had intercepted a North Vietnamese order to attack the patrol with a force of two Swatow ^{gunboats} ~~boats~~ and if possible a single PT boat. (Footnote.) The order sounded exactly the same as that which had been intercepted on the 2nd. The conclusion was inescapable: contrary to all expectations, Hanoi was going to attack again.

Following the first message, a second was intercepted, directing the North Vietnamese boats to prepare for attack. The two American destroyers then radioed that they were under attack, and twelve minutes later came a third intercepted message that an "enemy" (i.e., American) aircraft was falling. Then came

a series of further reports from the American destroyers, and interspersed with these a fourth intercept reporting that the North Vietnamese attacking force had shot down two aircraft and lost two ships, with further details. This was the flood of traffic that came from the Gulf of Tonkin to Honolulu to Washington during the night of August 4, Vietnam time, which was the day of August 4, Washington time.

By 12:30, Washington time, the President and his chief advisers were gathered for a brief meeting followed by lunch and a more formal NSC meeting. In the course of these successive discussions, a tentative decision was reached to carry out a measured reprisal action in the form of bombing the naval base and facilities from which the attacking North Vietnamese vessels had come on both August 2 and, it was believed, on August 4. Secretary McNamara was instructed to send out alerting orders, particularly for the necessary movement of an aircraft carrier to the north--which required several hours of steaming and positioning. No final attack order was given.

The second part of the decision was that key members of Congress should be consulted that evening--not so late as to make it difficult to reach them, but not so early as to provide a long interval between the meeting and the contemplated military action. All through that afternoon and evening, there was acute sensitivity lest the impending attack be revealed to the North Vietnamese before it took place, so that they would be prepared at the target spot. (It was assumed that they would be on general

alert, so that this would not have been any "strategic" surprise, rather what was sought was simply to avert total tactical preparation.)

The intended military action would be presented to the Congressional group for its approval, which of course must have seemed inevitable in the circumstances. In addition, a genuine consultation would be held on the idea of a Congressional Resolution. For this purpose, Secretary Rusk was given the task of preparing a draft, so that key points could be mentioned at the meeting with the Congressional leaders.

When McNamara returned to his office at 3 that afternoon, he learned almost at once that the Commander of the Maddox, who was also the Commander of the "Task Force Group" of both destroyers, had developed doubts concerning the accuracy of many of the eye-witness reports he had relayed in the preceding two and one-half hours.* McNamara communicated several times in the course of the afternoon with Admiral Sharp in Honolulu, seeking to make absolutely sure that the evidence that an attack had actually taken place was in fact conclusive. In the end, first at 5:30 and then shortly after 6 that evening, Washington time, Sharp twice reassured McNamara that the evidence was in fact firm.

*

I don't find fault for this.

Message said "no actual visual sighting by Maddox"

Hence, the scheduled meeting with Congressional leaders went ahead at 6:45 on the evening of August 4th. As expected, these leaders concurred in the carrying out of retaliatory military action. They also agreed unanimously on the prompt presentation and (so far as they could promise) passage of a Congressional Resolution outlined to them by Secretary Rusk.. Almost simultaneously, Khanh in Saigon was being informed of the intended American action: since South Vietnamese actions were not proposed, and since the attack had been solely against the US and on the high seas, there was no true consultation. As expected again, his reaction was total approval. Other governments were informed only after the event. (Check.)

Militarily, the planning of an appropriate response had presented no serious problems. McNamara had at once recommended that the targets be directly associated with the offending naval operations, and so far as possible strictly military and separated from civilian population centers. In the routine course of contingency planning, and in fact long before the crisis of May and June, the Honolulu command had put a close watch on North Vietnamese naval installations, ~~examining~~ examining all available intelligence and considering it from many standpoints including (a normal practice for any country potentially hostile) possible bombing targets. Moreover, in the serious planning directed in late March, naval installations had figured specifically as an obvious and early targetting possibility if any bombing program were undertaken. They were, after all, directly

associated with the sending of ships to the South, laden with arms and men; both their military character and their direct association with Hanoi's effort against the South were clear. Two of these were quickly recommended and accepted as the targets for the retaliatory attack on the night of August 4th. The orders sent tentatively in the early afternoon were confirmed shortly after 6 PM Washington time, following McNamara's talk with Sharp, and the aircraft were dispatched from their carriers about _____ Washington time.

For the balance of the evening in Washington the President and his advisers were focussed on what should be said to the American people, and when. After a series of exchanges on just when the attacking aircraft would reach their targets, and when their approach would be detected, the President made the decision that if he was to reach the American public effectively to explain his decision, he would have to speak before the targets had actually been hit, although after their approach would surely have been detected. In the event, all aircraft got through to their targets and bombed with apparent success, although ~~one was lost on the return flight~~ *two were white already Wrecked 234*. The President's decision led to a brief flurry of criticism on the following day, which quickly died out, and the balance struck between tactical security and full information for the public was not later seriously attacked.

Such was the first sequence of events, through the night of August 4th. In reaching his decision, and announcing it to the public, the President stated and believed that the two

attacks had taken place, on August 2 and 4, and that the US vessels had been operating rightfully on the high seas. He therefore concluded that the attacks were not only contrary to international law, but once repeated of such importance as to warrant "limited and fitting" American military action against the sources of the North Vietnamese action. As the President thus conveyed the basic facts and reasons for his decision, he was supported almost unanimously by the Congress, and by vast and again almost unanimous expressions from the news media and the public.

This was the situation in 1964, apparently simple and straightforward. Subsequently, however, as the war grew in size and cost (both of life and treasure), as the Administration relied overwhelmingly on the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as the most important demonstration of Congressional authority and attitude, and as further evidence in due course came to light, a number of serious issues have been raised. These concern whether the evidence for the second attack was in fact conclusive, whether there were unrevealed provocative elements in the mission of the destroyers, and whether the Administration was honest in its stated judgments of Hanoi's behavior. With these three essentially factual questions go two that^{are} in the nature of hindsight speculation and judgment -- what may Hanoi's real motives and assessments have been, and how should US foresight and planning of the operations be judged?

These are difficult questions, involving a discussion in detail of a large body of evidence. Thus, I have put their

examination into a special Appendix at the rear of the book. In essence, my conclusion is that the evidence of the second attack has at all times been conclusive, that there was no material element of unrevealed provocation in the destroyer's mission, and that the Administration honestly stated its judgment of Hanoi. In short, on the key counts of an overall charge of deception or undue haste, I believe the record sustains the Administration. As to the hindsight parts of the examination, however, my verdict is more qualified. The only plausible hypotheses for Hanoi's motives involve what a Western mind might regard as irrational responses, including a special sensitivity to operations against North Vietnam much smaller than those Hanoi itself was conducting against the South. If these hypotheses are correct, the fullest measure of hindsight must conclude that the Administration--determined as it then was to avoid serious incidents--did not exercise sufficient precautions in directing the sum total of American and South Vietnamese operations. No one in the American Administration planned, wanted, or anticipated the incidents, and in terms of international law it was North Vietnam, ~~clearly~~ that acted the more harshly and aggressively. Yet, as is so often the case at the bottom of such matters, irrationality and miscalculation were not sufficiently allowed for, in the planning and execution of operations that seemed inherently small and unimportant.

There are lessons for the future here. Let us come back to the sequence of events in 1964, when things were honestly seen in a clearer light than history allows them today.

*twice in short order SVNess under V.I. command attacked
Hanoi and killed on 2 successive days planes*

d. The Congressional Resolution

The decision to seek a Congressional Resolution was an almost instantaneous result of the news of the second attack of August 4th, Made at or around the 12:30 White House lunch, the decision was natural and easy, almost instinctive for the President and his advisors alike.

This was ~~so~~ not merely because there now existed what had been lacking in May and June -- dramatic proof of the danger and of Hanoi's aggressiveness -- but because of the whole pattern of Executive-Legislative relations that had developed over a decade for just this sort of crisis. Beginning with the Offshore Islands Crisis of 1954, and thereafter in the Middle East Crisis of 1957, and the Cuba Crisis of 1962, the Executive had used Congressional Resolutions for two purposes: to demonstrate Congressional support for action the Executive had already taken and might have to resume or increase, and to lay out a Congressional posture of firmness so as to deter others from bringing on a potentially dangerous situation. Sometimes this had been done with reference to dramatic military events just past (the Offshore Islands original case), sometimes in a situation that had not yet erupted but seemed likely to do so (the Middle East case). In all three of these historical cases anticipated dangers had materialized and been met, and the Resolutions had seemed helpful, both in keeping the crisis manageable and in freeing the Executive to act effectively. In May and June, the Laos/Vietnam

*There was evidence of the fact that
was a doubt that the Congress would
unopposed attacks on its ships and that the
Senators had need for any Resolution*

14-30

case had been similar only to the Middle East situation in 1957, when there had been no immediate crisis and when the Congress had acted diffidently and taken more than a month to pass what President Eisenhower asked (check). Now, the elements of immediate crisis and of grave future uncertainty had been added by the attacks on American ships -- incidents involving American forces more seriously than anything that had taken place in the Offshore Islands or Cuba cases, or even in the 1958 Lebanon landing that flowed in the end from the 1957 Middle East Resolution.

So, at both ends of Capitol Hill, the reaction "This calls for a Resolution" must have been almost instinctive, to men in the Congress like Fulbright and Russell who had been in the forefront of the earlier situations, and to a President who was also a Senate veteran and, in 1964 at least, deeply dedicated to the fullest possible cooperation with the Congress. Obviously, this feeling on the part of President Johnson changed over the following years, for many reasons. In 1964, I think all fair contemporary observers would agree, it was a reality -- honestly and deeply felt, perhaps in part because the very "trustee" status to which I have earlier referred.

Thus, when the President put the idea before the Congressional leaders on the evening of August 4th, the reaction was unanimously and strongly favorable. Rusk outlined a resolution that would be in two parts, endorsing the retaliation and supporting its repetition if required, and stating the policy

of the Congress toward the possibility of wider hostilities in Southeast Asia. Indeed, Rusk must have given a fairly detailed summary, for it appears that Senator Russell at that first meeting proposed one change -- that instead of terminating when the President determined that peace in the area was "reasonably assured," the Resolution might be repealed at any time by the Congress itself. ✓ The power to repeal is probably inherent, but this underscored the point. (Goulden, 51).

I cannot determine whether Rusk at that point had a preliminary draft with him. In any case, the task of preparing a careful text and checking it out fully with Senator Fulbright was assumed that afternoon by George Ball, who in turn summoned from Massachusetts the just-departed Legal Adviser of the Department, Abram Chayes. My recollection is that Ball and members of the Legal office had already begun work before I returned to Washington (at 3:00 in the afternoon), and that one of my first acts was to turn over my May-June file to them.* Thereafter, Chayes arrived, and he and Ball produced a finished draft that night. It was a wholly different text from any that had been prepared in May or June, and in the end had only about two sentences in common with the June 15th draft (p. _____ above) and hardly a phrase in common with the May 25th draft. (H-32,33). Now, the nature of the situation

* My responsibility that evening was to prepare notification cables to key capitals.

hardly seemed to need spelling out, the "whereas" clauses were drastically shortened, and the first operative clause referred newly to the "armed attack" that had already taken place. The second and crucial paragraph on future policy relied, ~~like the June draft~~, heavily on the SEATO Treaty, and required specifically a request for assistance under SEATO as a basis for action. The draft was new in describing the US national interest in peace and security in SEA as "vital," while the central declaration that the US was prepared to "take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force" came straight both from the 1957 Middle East Resolution and from the June draft.

On the morning of August 5th, the Ball/Chayes draft was conveyed to Senator Fulbright and to his opposite number on the House Foreign Relations Committee, Congressman Morgan. (Check). Both were in direct touch with Ball, and a few minor changes were made in the morning, before the final text was sent to the Hill at noon that day. As Senator Fulbright later said on the floor of the Senate, (quotation -- sense was that he had participated fully in the drafting). While the language had in essence been proposed by the Executive, the discussions that started Tuesday night came into firm focus Wednesday morning, and continued in the hearings of Thursday and the debate of Friday, were surely sufficient for the Congress to review what it was being asked to endorse.

As for the meaning of the resolution, Rusk made three key points in opening the Senate hearings of Thursday, August 6th,

held jointly by the Committees on Foreign Relations and Armed Services.* His first point was that the Resolution was designed to declare Congressional support for "whatever steps may become necessary to assist the free nations covered by the Southeast Asia Treaty." Saying plainly that he could not tell what steps might be required, he made clear that the declaration of support and of policy was without limit.

Secondly, Rusk stated as a major purpose of such a declaration of support that: "The unity and determination of the American people, through their Congress, should be declared in terms so firm that they cannot possibly be mistaken by other nations." The hope was that such a declaration would serve to deter and dissuade "other nations" from steps of their own that could require the Administration to act to the full.

Thirdly, while not specifically promising what the form or content of future consultations with the Congress would be, Rusk said flatly that the Resolution was far from being the last contact between the Executive and Legislative Branches. On the contrary:

"There will continue to be regular consultations not only with Committees but between the President and the Congressional leaders, and on a bipartisan basis. This has been the practice of Presidents in

* These hearings were published only in November 1966, and with some security deletions. They appear, however, to contain all the discussion on the meaning of the resolution.)

this post-war period. Therefore, as the South-east Asia situation develops, and if it develops, in ways in (sic?) which we cannot now anticipate, of course there will be close and continuous consultation between the President and the leaders of the Congress."

The trilogy of central points finds a clear echo on the floor of the Senate. In one exchange after another, Fulbright made clear that the reach of the Resolution covered even the sending of ground forces. (Citations.) At the same time, he made clear his personal hope that it would never come to this, and indeed his present opposition to such action, arguing that the resolution would hopefully deter the hostile nations from bringing matters to this point. Finally, he said over and over that he expected the Congress to be fully consulted if and when any more serious actions had to be taken in future. (Citations.)

Setting the Rusk testimony ^{against} ~~against~~ the Fulbright explanations on the floor, one must conclude that there was a thorough meeting of minds as to the intent of the Resolution. Speaking as of August 1964, as one must on this issue, there could have been deception only if:

1. The Administration already had in mind, on more than a contingency basis, stronger actions of a kind it did not foreshadow to the Congress, and of which the Congress was not already aware as contingent possibilities, or
2. The Administration did not put the hope of deterrence high, or

3. The Administration did not intend to consult in the normal manner.

To me, the first two of these points present little difficulty. Obviously, the Administration shared the hope of deterrence: it had been a major argument whenever the subject of a Congressional Resolution was considered in internal deliberations in 1964. Equally clearly, the Administration had nothing up its sleeve in August 1964: there had been a lot of planning and some JCS recommendations (and rumors of both in the papers), a small number of unacknowledged operations against the North (essentially disclosed to the Congress and debated in that August week), and there continued to be grave concern for the future. But Congress knew all this in essence.

Rather, it is the third point that causes difficulty, and was the real root of the future trouble. I do not believe for a moment that as of August 1964 President Johnson and his advisors had any intent other than to do exactly as Rusk said -- that is, to follow the normal consulting practice of the post-war period. The difficulty came in 1965, in the way the decisions arose -- suddenly and in a complex of Vietnamese, other Communist, and domestic factors that could not well have been foreseen in August of 1964. We shall come to these periods, and to the effect of these difficulties on the way "consultation" was interpreted and carried out. Above all, we shall come to the question of a "great debate", in connection

with the sending of large numbers of ground forces. Here again I would say flatly that, whatever anyone in the Administration may have thought could become necessary under the general heading of pressure on North Vietnam, none in mid-1964 thought in terms of large ground forces.

The problem, as it developed in 1965, was one where the authority and support evidenced by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution were used to limits that fell within their terms but were not truly in anyone's mind when the Resolution was adopted, and in circumstances that made true consultation more difficult than in most past situations. Yet in 1964 no one from President Johnson down foresaw what would unfold in 1965, or had in mind other than a simply literal application of consultation. There was not deception, although there patently was an open-ended grant of authority and support, both in scope and time, that the Congress is unlikely soon to repeat.

So much, briefly, for the intent of the Resolution, and whether Congress was deceived as to what it meant. A distinguished senior Senator some years later put the essence of the matter to me in the following terms (I paraphrase, not remembering the exact words): "We all knew in our hearts that we were giving the President unlimited authority and backing, but we did expect that we would be involved more closely in the later decisions." Thus understood and acted upon, the Resolution could have been as lastingly right and proper as it seemed at the time to the American people. I am even heretic enough to think that similar resolutions, perhaps specifically

limited in time and procedural requirements, will prove of continuing use in the conduct of American foreign policy. There are times when ^{an} American Congress must make its position clear, and times, such as in an election year, when Congress cannot be on top of a situation. Is there a better answer to such problems?

If not, was there nonetheless real need for the haste with which the Resolution was presented and passed? Here again, one must look honestly at the contemporary mood and situation. To both President and Congress, as to the public, the over-riding fact was that North Vietnam, quite probably with direct Chinese backing, had made an aggressive attack on American naval vessels. To delay, or to load down the Resolution with careful qualifying clauses, would mean quite possibly that Hanoi might be tempted to act again. *and get stung again?* At both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, men were imbued with the belief that a strong American posture operates to deter conflict or challenge. Even in a clear legislative setting, without the pressures of an election, the cases of Cuba in 1962 and the *Collective pressures were involved* Offshore Islands in 1954 had shown that Congress believed in fast and decisive action in such situations. Obviously, the Congress in August 1964 was under the special added pressures of an election year; more than usually the men and women in the Congress may have felt that any action that could be accused of lack of patriotism would cost them heavily at the polls -- and without time to explain. In a closer situation, one might argue that such pressures played a real part. But the Tonkin Gulf ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ situation -- as seen and felt at the time --

was not close, but as nearly self-evident in appearance and intent as any situation could possibly be. The fact that the President urged rapid action was, of course, part of what happened, but there can be little doubt that the overwhelming mood of the Congress was for rapid action also. Again, no one deceived any one on this aspect. It was a straight case of following honorable precedents and habits. That these precedents and habits are now likely to be sharply changed cannot affect an honest account of what happened in August 1964, or the contemporary reasons for it.

Finally, let us take note of one key element of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In invoking the SEATO Treaty, it broke new ground in the basic American position. Within the Administration, curiously, SEATO had not been mentioned in the May 25th draft resolution, but had been inserted in the June 10th draft. Past diffidence, particularly the lawyers' concern whether "armed attack" could be conclusively and publicly proved in Vietnam or Laos, had been over-ridden by another lawyer's argument, that the SEATO Treaty was after all a solemn action by the Congress itself, much more weighty than, for example, the statements of Under Secretary Bedell Smith at the close of the 1954 Geneva Conference. In August 1964, as Rusk testified to the joint hearings of August 6th, the US was not yet "acting specifically under the SEATO Treaty" but did regard the Treaty as "a substantiating basis for our presence there and our effort there." Rusk also stated that the Treaty obligation was "both joint and several," echoing the Rusk-Thanas Communiqué

of 1962.

Altogether then, in both language and side explanations, the Resolution was by far the strongest reference that had been made to SEATO, and could only be construed as a strong reaffirmation of the SEATO obligation. *

This aspect, self-evident to any member of the Congress and especially to the senior Senators who had participated in the ratification of SEATO, must be deemed one of the most important and deliberate parts of the Resolution. In domestic constitutional terms, the reference to the SEATO Treaty fortified the position of the Executive. Perhaps even more important, the fact that SEATO was invoked in support of a grant of authority and support for military actions without limit could only be taken to mean that the Congress read the SEATO obligation in this sense. Absent totally was the suggestion, later to be aired even by George Ball, that the obligation, under Article 4(1) of the Treaty (see page ___ above), did not necessarily call for military action ~~or~~ might not arise in the absence of attack on one of the signers; the Resolution Ball had drafted referred specifically to a request by a "member or protocol state." (Citations.) Absent totally, also, was any reference to the original John Foster Dulles² idea -- presented to many of these same Senators in 1954 -- that the US might play its part under the Treaty purely by its deterrent nuclear posture and by sea and air power. Massive retaliation, and the corrolary of obligations carried out from afar, was as dead on the Hill as it had been for years in the

only to a few who may have thought of it

Congress doesn't read

Executive. It is part, again, of the temper of the times, and a mark of one significant respect in which views toward America's role and military posture had evolved over the years. Indeed, even though no one envisaged large American ground forces, how could one limit the US to the use of air and sea power (which would have been a simple amendment to the Resolution) when there were already thousands of American soldiers on the ground?

In any event, the reference to SEATO looms large in the Resolution. I cannot find that all its implications were thought through, either by the State Department draftsmen or by the Senators who looked hardest at the text. In looking for the most solemn and effective statement of a firm Congressional stance, it was probably inevitable that SEATO would be invoked, simply because it was the act of the Congress itself. The invocation was, I am sure, sober and deliberate. Like the rest of the Resolution, it probably was not meant to bear the weight later placed on it.

e. Major Accompanying Actions

The decisions to retaliate and to seek a Congressional Resolution were the most important and immediate elements of policy following the Tonkin Gulf incidents. There were, however, many accompanying actions -- public except for two private diplomatic moves -- that rounded out the overall American reaction.

The first area for action was that of public explanation and diplomacy. At the UN, Ambassador Stevensnn reported promptly on the retaliatory action, to a meeting of the Security Council held at American request on Wednesday, August 5th. In describing the incidents, he linked them specifically to Hanoi's role in the wider VC campaign of terror and infiltration.

(NYT, 8/6, H-21) (Check what reaction.) The response was favorable, and the matter remained before the Security Council for the month of August. In the course of these deliberations, invitations were extended for both North Vietnam and South Vietnam to participate in the Security Council discussions. Saigon promptly accepted (check) and had indeed maintained an observer at the UN since (date). Hanoi, on the other hand, at once denounced the UN deliberations, and refused to attend. Then, and consistently thereafter, North Vietnam denied the competence of the UN to act in any way whatever respecting Vietnam. In ~~XXXXXX~~ mid-1964, the Hanoi position was that matters relating to Vietnam should be before a reassembled Geneva Conference of 1954, although Hanoi had left the running on this to DeGaulle's proposal of July _____, and had not ^{then} specifically endorsed the idea. (C.)

Concurrently, it might be noted that the Security Council was wrestling with the report of its three-nation commission to examine the Cambodian border problem, dating from the proceeding initiated by Cambodia in May and the resulting resolution of early June (pp. _____ above). The three nations -- Brazil, the Ivory Coast, and Morocco (check) ^{re}recommended on _____ that a border patrol force of about _____ men be created. The proposal was at once endorsed by the US and several others (Saigon, Bangkok?). However, by this time the Prince had cooled, and on _____ he denounced the proposal totally. At the time and now one can only speculate as to his motives. Perhaps he was judging even more than before that Hanoi would win out, and thus must not be offended. Perhaps he was advised by Peking, or Hanoi, or both, that the whole idea of involving the UN in the area was a mistake. Perhaps he thought the problem would go away, for under tight and carefully enforced ground rules for South Vietnamese military action near the border, there had been no further incidents since May (check). In any case, having himself invoked the UN, Sihanouk himself now proceeded to rule it out.

All in all, it was a discouraging period for UN action. Perhaps sensing the difficulties of formal UN involvement, Secretary General U Thant's mind was moving in a different and more private direction. On August 7th, the Friday of that hectic week, he came to Washington on a long-scheduled visit, to allow him to pay his respects to President Johnson personally and for the first time. At a quiet lunch in the State Department,

there was general discussion of negotiating avenues concerning Vietnam. In the course of the conversation (unnoticed, I might add, by almost all the Americans present) U Thant asked whether the US would welcome direct contact with North Vietnam. Secretary Rusk had approved that morning a further approach through the Canadian channel. ^{He said} Not wishing to tell U Thant this (footnote on reasons) ^{but would he say it} and perhaps ^{then to} above all not wishing to discourage ^{another effort} another effort, Rusk replied in a generally affirmative sense. He supposed that if U Thant had specific ideas, he would hear further, and the whole exchange was hardly noted or considered important by Rusk or other Americans present.

The UN was, however, the principal world forum for the presentation of the American position. On a lesser scale, the President at the end of that first week of action asked Henry Cabot Lodge to visit European capitals for the stated purpose of explaining the situation and American actions. This main purpose was accompanied by quiet urging for the major NATO allies to contribute greater help, in some fashion, to South Vietnam. The results in this respect were, unfortunately, meager, although there were some modest undertakings. In a sense, it was a difficult time to ask, since the chances of much increased US military involvement were obviously greater than before, but at the same time the US was not changing its express policy. To do much more must have appeared likely to involve ^(NATO allies) them in whatever the US might decide to do in the future, at a time when Lodge could not tell them what that might be. Yet I suspect that this difficulty was merely an additional problem: the fact was -- as

Why not mention your opposition to this

14-44

the trip helped to demonstrate -- that America's major NATO allies were sympathetic in principle but skeptical in practice on the basic South Vietnamese cause, totally unprepared to consider any military form of help, and reluctant even to get into large economic or humanitarian forms of help. It was a disappointment to the President, who with Secretary Rusk never ceased to hope for much more concrete help, as well as firm moral support, from the NATO circle.*

Such was the public diplomacy, the first area of action. Secondly, on the military front, there was an immediate series of broader actions -- linked directly with the decision to retaliate but with implications going beyond it. On August 4th itself, part of the President's immediate decisions had been to move significant air units into South Vietnam itself and much closer to it. The most striking of these moves was the sending of 36 B-57 aircraft from the Philippines to South Vietnam. *←* the B-57 was the British Canberra, the lightest bomber aircraft in the American inventory, but a formidable weapon in Vietnamese terms. In addition, a dozen F-102 advanced fighters were sent to South Vietnam for defensive purposes, while substantial

* An incidental result of the trip was, of course to identify Lodge in domestic political terms with the President and his approach. No doubt the former Ambassador was delighted to find this quiet way of dissociating himself from Goldwater, whom he had opposed to the very end at the July Republican Convention. The August trip was an important step in the chain of events that was to bring Lodge back to Saigon in the following year. Essentially, President Johnson had come to trust him. Whatever worry he had had during the spring, that Lodge might try to make political capital out of some proposal for different action, had long been laid to rest. Now it was clear that Lodge, a shining leader of progressive Republicans, cared far more about Vietnam and Johnson's steady policy there than he did about Republican fortunes under Goldwater. (Refs. in 64-118, get NYT also.)

fighter-bomber deployments were also made to Thailand.

14-45

All these moves were announced publicly by McNamara at a press conference on August 5th, without any attempt to spell out their meaning. (Check transcripts, also NYT of 8/6.) On their face, the moves were in part immediate precautions in case North Vietnam had decided to embark on a stronger program of attacks on the South as well as US vessels. In part, of course, the moves were seen generally to represent a warning to Hanoi not to press further, and were applauded in this sense. (Citations.) Both within the government and in the public presentation, the duration of the new deployments was left uncertain, to be decided as events unfolded. Like so much else in the handling of the Tonking incidents, the immediate reasons for action seemed obvious, without trying to anticipate cases for the future. Only at the end of the month was it to be decided whether to retain the deployments, especially that of the B-57's. (List of A/C is in 1968 Hearings, Part II, p. 3)

Almost at once, intelligence revealed that North Vietnam too was moving to strengthen its air position, bringing in aircraft tentatively identified as MIG-15's and MIG-17's. (64-118, my broadcast of August 14 in DSB, 9/7; check if better source.) As AMIE American intelligence saw ~~them~~^{the}, the movement and type of aircraft (fighters of limited range) were not threatening in themselves, but rather precautionary in the light of the US attack of August 4th.

The ~~net~~^{effect} of these movements was, of course, to bring possible jet air combat and bombing much more to the fore in the calculations of both sides. Moreover, since jet aircraft were

at 13-10 you refer to a communication
over Laos in May by U.S. jet from SVN. When did they
come in? 14-46

an item specifically forbidden to be introduced into either Vietnam, under the 1954 Accords, both North and South Vietnam were now in violation of this provision, with the US the first and major actor. Yet at this stage the point -- evident to any one who knew the Accords -- was not more than momentarily raised. Essentially, the Johnson Administration relied on the general Kennedy reasoning of 1961, that the massive North Vietnamese violations of the central non-interference provisions of the Accords justified measured breaches, on the Saigon side, of its more technical provisions at least. General public and Congressional acceptance of this rationale can at least be inferred from the total absence of comment on the point at the time. (Check).

The third action area after August 4th was, for what seemed excellent reason, not revealed at the time. This was the diplomatic sphere, and particularly the renewed communication with Hanoi carried out through Seaborn of Canada.

Prior to the incidents, there had been no plan to ask Seaborn to return to Hanoi specifically in US interests. The June trip had been his inaugural one, and in the normal course of his ICC duties he would travel to Hanoi every 2-3 months. The expectation in Ottawa and Washington was that there would be consultation as the timing and message for the next visit, but as of August 4th nothing had been set under way.

As the picture of events sorted itself out in the week of August 4th, it seemed clear that Hanoi was not taking any further threatening action. Following the August 4th attack, the patrol of the two destroyers was sent back at some distance from the

when
noticed
it?
Silence
in the
cont.
I do
not
think
imp.
a day

Wendy 2/6
14-47

coast, purely to show that the US would not be frightened out of the area. The patrol was completed on August 8th, and when Hanoi did not react, it seemed clear that the immediate danger ^{escalated} of an ~~escalated~~ conflict was past. Concurrently, Congress approved the Resolution on August 7th. Hence, the idea of communicating at once with Hanoi -- always in the background through the first hectic days -- moved to the point of final ^{were} decision. The Canadians/asked on August 7th (?), through Washington, whether Seaborn would be willing to make his next trip in the immediate future and to carry a new message on behalf of the US. The response was quickly affirmative, and the trip was set for the following week. (My calendar: Ritchie on 8/7).

Accordingly, on August 8th, the Canadians in Washington were handed the proposed message, drafted back and forth between John McNaughton in Defense and my office in State, and cleared with care at the top level. The message was to be read in full by Seaborn, ^{and} without the faint veil used in June, that he was speaking merely from great familiarity with American thinking. It started with a frank statement that the US was baffled by North Vietnamese actions in the Tonkin Gulf but saw no alternative to viewing them as threatening and aggressive: two of the hypotheses current at the time (specify?) were mentioned and rejected, in the hope that this might draw Hanoi's representative into clarifying what the purpose and justification had been. The message then went on to describe the military deployments the US had carried out, saying that these were "precautionary" and brought about by the North Vietnamese actions

and American uncertainty whether these portended some further direct military conflict.

From this relatively mild beginning the message moved to a firm, even tough, central note. The Tonkin Gulf events demonstrated that "US public and official patience" was wearing thin. The Congressional Resolution reaffirmed US determination "to continue to oppose firmly, by all necessary means, DRV efforts to subvert and conquer South Vietnam and Laos." While the US did not wish grave events, "if the DRV persists in its present course, it can expect to suffer the consequences." (Check cites H-21 (14-15), and especially from original whether DRV was a new nomenclature, designed to have its own effect, as compared with the June message.)

The Canadians raised no problems on this text, and on August ____ Seaborn delivered the message. In reply, ____ offered no explanation of Hanoi's actions, but turned at once to the offensive, attacking what the US had done in terms directly copying Hanoi's propaganda and asserting in the strongest terms that Hanoi would not be intimidated, nor would the patriotic South Vietnamese people. (Check).

What Hanoi actually thought of the message can only be speculated. The hope of the framers of the American message had been that it would draw out the Hanoi representative and throw some much-wanted light on the whole series of events. The failure to achieve even this was disappointing. It seemed hardly surprising, though, that the broad line from Hanoi was tough. If, as seemed likely, Hanoi regarded itself as militarily humiliated, this was the least likely period for any sign

of "give" to show itself. In the end, all that Washington could see from the effort was that just possibly Hanoi understood better the American position and the firmness of American resolve. Seaborn might now be regarded categorically as an American messenger, with any chance of serving as a mediator or interlocutor reduced from small to zero. But at least the channel had been kept open.

f. Conclusion

On Monday, August 10th, President Johnson signed the Congressional Resolution, which had passed the Senate and House by votes of 88-2 and 416-0, on Friday the 7th. As events proved, that signing brought to a close the Tonkin Gulf incident.

In terms of domestic support for his Vietnam policy, and even more in terms of his Presidential candidacy, the President had gained enormously. To the Congress, the public, and I might add to his subordinates within government, the President's performance had throughout seemed superb -- in what was after all the first authentic crisis of his service as President. From mid-August on, his strength in the country had a depth it had lacked before, and it seemed a virtual certainty that he would win the election handsomely.

From the standpoint of Vietnam policy, the outcome was more ambiguous. On the one hand, there had been a showing of American firmness and a crucially important statement of the Congressional posture toward the conflict. On the other hand, the question of future action had not been resolved in any way, nor had the situation been basically affected at its roots in South Vietnam. Within the Administration, there was a feeling of

satisfaction that a difficult situation had been handled honestly and well, but with this went a clear sense that Hanoi was even tougher than had been supposed and that there was much more to do than had been done. August 10th closed a special chapter, but opened a new and yet unknown volume of complexities and difficulties.

APPENDIX

14A-1

The Areas of Controversy Concerning the Tankin Gulf Incidents

Note on Sources

The open literature on this subject is so voluminous as to warrant a special introductory note. The primary source material on the incidents is in three sets of hearings:

1) a Joint Hearing of August 6, 1964, before the Committees on Foreign Relations and Armed Services, U.S. Senate -- although not published until 1966, I have naturally called this the "1964 Hearings;" 2) an executive hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 24, 1966--this was never published, but pertinent excerpts were later quoted in other published material; it is called the "1966 Hearings;" and 3) a special hearing of February 20, 1968, also before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee ("1968 Hearings") with a Part II, Supplementary Documents, published in December 1968.

Among secondary sources, Joseph C. Goulden's Truth is the First Casualty (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1969), is full, and inspired a lengthy review by Peter Dale Scott in the New York Review of Books, January 29, 1970. Other material is in a CBS (NBC?) program of February _____, 1971, narrated by Morley Safer. *Just in Wmky*

The Key Questions

The key questions raised by Goulden and others can be summarized as follows:

1. Did a second attack on the destroyers in fact take place? Was there uncertainty about it at the time, and thus a lack of candor by the Administration? Even if it did not seem uncertain at the time, has later evidence cast doubt on it? If so, did the Administration act hastily and without giving all the evidence a chance to be sifted?
2. Was there a pattern of provocation, in the destroyer patrol and all surrounding circumstances, that affected the North Vietnamese response? If so, in what respects? Were these respects known to the Administration, or surmised by its senior members at the time? Was Congress adequately informed, and through Congress the public?
3. Basically, what did the Administration think had happened, as the basis for the decision to retaliate and to seek a Congressional Resolution? Was the inner thinking of the Administration consistent with what it said to the Congress and the public in all essential respects?
4. What, with the advantage of hindsight, can one say about Hanoi's motives?
5. How, again in hindsight, should the Administration's handling be assessed?

These are tough questions. Let us start with the first -- the evidence concerning a second attack on August 4th. It is by far the most important question in the literature and in the statements of Senator Fulbright and others. If the second attack did not take place, or even if there was uncommunicated doubt

about it within the Administration, the charge that the Congress was deceived into passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution is sustained for most people, and with good reason.

1. The evidence of the second attack.

As the narrative has already made clear, the evidence that flowed into Washington on the morning of August 4th was of two sorts: intercepted North Vietnamese messages from a naval command to vessels under that command, and action reports from the destroyers. Of the two, the intercepts were -- and remain -- of greater importance. They came first, and were at once judged almost conclusive, from the 9:40 message on. This I can evidence by a single personal fact. Having heard nothing since my departure Friday night, I was on a tennis court in New England at 10:20 that Tuesday morning when I was called to receive a phone call from Secretary Rusk, directing me to return at once. This was well before any reports of actual engagement were received from the destroyers. Obviously Rusk had made up his mind at once, from the first intercept, that this was a full-fledged crisis.

At this point, one must talk frankly about the nature of this intercept evidence. As late as 1968, Secretary McNamara felt unable to discuss it frankly before Senator Fulbright's Committee. He made the intercepted messages available to members of the Committee only, but excluded the committee staff from the room and heavily deleted the testimony as it appeared in the Record. At the same time, since his cleared testimony

Then why were there still heavy leaks

14A-4

still summarizes the messages*, it seems self-evident that Hanoi knows that its messages were read. In the story of Tonkin, the intercepts are in fact as central as the typewriter to any student of the Alger Hiss case, and as conclusive as to the fact of the second attack. What are the fundamental points about this kind of evidence? **

First, assuming electronic accuracy and accurate communication of what has been heard, it is generally considered the most reliable form of evidence one can have. To this there are only two caveats: the possibility of deliberate deception (as was done from the Allied side before the Normandy invasion of 1944), and the necessity at all times of precision in describing the purpose of an intercepted message. That is, if a message from A tells B to do something, this does not in itself prove categorically that B did what he was told to do. The evidence that B acted is strong, not conclusive.

Second, the value of the evidence depends heavily on the intercepted party not knowing that his messages are subject to electronic interception and translation into clear, or understandable, text. For this reason, not merely must a single

* 1968 Hearings, p. 92.

** On this subject, I write with some claim to professional competence. From 1941 to the end of World War II, my military service was in cryptanalytic work (that is, the breaking of codes and ciphers). From 1951 onward I was exposed fully to such material, for ten years from the standpoint of what it meant for intelligence evaluation alone, and for more than eight from the additional standpoint of whether it could be used for operational purposes.

message be protected, but the whole category of intercepted messages as they relate to a particular party. *That is, The reason is that,* ^{well} if a nation or military force finds that any one of its messages, in any form, has been successfully "broken," it may ~~well~~ revise not only this but all other communication and cryptographic systems at all levels of difficulty. For this reason, all types of intercepted traffic are covered under a security structure that is ^{generally} both strict and ^{highly organized} ~~apart~~ from the structure for material that is "top secret" or at any other level of sensitivity from other standpoints. Within the intercept security system, there may be minor gradations, but key rules extend to all types of traffic--however simple it might be to read, taken by itself.

Third, under the security system for intercepted traffic, the routine precautions are ~~of course~~ extremely tight, in terms of physical handling, mention on the telephone, or use in discussion with outsiders.

A. Those who have access to such material, who are "cleared" for it, are an extremely small number at any given time, a small fraction of those "cleared" for top secret. This fraction may discuss the material only with each other, and then only with respect to traffic it is perfectly clear that all present know about. To others, the very existence of this type of material is not mentioned, by word or wink.

B. The material may not be used as the basis for action, in any way whatever, without a clear judgment that other types of information fully support the action. That is, the reasons for taking the action must be capable of being fully supported and explained, in and out of government, without any kind of reference to the intercept material. In the harsh terms of warfare, as my own experience in World War II had brought home to me, this may mean that available warning is not given and lives are lost--lest the disclosure of the source imperil many more lives over a much longer time.

The summary of these points is not in itself a disclosure by me. All are well known not only to hundreds of thousands of men and women in governments throughout the world, but in a formal literature on the subject.* What is astounding to me is that books can still be written about such episodes as Tonkin without making these points clear, and then using them to judge the evidence of what was done.

Such, ~~at any rate~~, were the security considerations that surrounded the intercept evidence as it was received on August 4th. The record is clear that the greatest possible weight was attached to these particular intercepts, that they were distributed electronically to the White House, the State

* Kahn and other citations.

Department, the Pentagon, and CIA, and that they were then conveyed at once, in hand-carried copies, to the top policy circle--all of whom were routinely cleared for intercept material and familiar with its characteristics. Usually the intelligence offices had a single man detailed for this purpose to each senior policy maker, down roughly to the level of Assistant Secretary, and this man would phone ahead for an immediate appointment, his very name being an indication of what he had and his seeking the appointment a clear sign of its urgency. This was the custom, not often invoked in this 1964 period, but unmistakable, and well recalled, when it was.

So the intercepts and action reports came one after the other during the day on August 4th. What, then, of the exchanges between McNamara and Admiral Sharp, from which it was finally concluded that the evidence was conclusive and warranted the decisions? Here one must go back to the security structure for intercepts, and particularly to the requirement that no action be taken on the basis of intercept evidence unless there is other evidence adequate to support the event relied on.

Indeed, because of this factor, it is entirely possible that there was a certain amount of shadow play in the McNamara-Sharp exchanges. Both men were, of course, fully aware of the intercept evidence, and they and all who knew of this evidence never for a moment doubted that the attack had taken place, in some degree and with clear intent to damage US vessels if possible. Had it not been for the security requirements governing intercepts, this alone would have been basis enough for the decision the

*(Note: 2 legends for
+ sightings / intercept evidence)*

I4A-8

President had tentatively made. The question, however, was whether the evidence for the attack, apart from the intercepts, stood up adequately to support the decision. In effect, communicating through channels that involved many people not in the circle of those cleared for the intercept evidence, both men were saying to each other: "We know this happened, but can we prove it to the Congress and others?" Behind this essential point undoubtedly lay the thought that, if the eyewitness accounts could not be relied on, there would be the dire choice whether to carry out the attack or to put it off--with clear risks that the extent of the intercept evidence would in some fashion be revealed either way.*

Fortunately, although there might have been doubt about many of the sonar and torpedo reports, there were also reports that members of the crews of both vessels, particularly the Turner Joy (not covered in Herrick's message) had actually seen hostile vessels. Moreover, the evidence that the Maddox and Turner Joy had been shadowed for several hours prior to the attack was of a constant radar type not subject to combat jitters.

* If the attack had been put off, the "small fraction" familiar with the intercept evidence would still have numbered perhaps 50-100 people. With the best security and intent in the world, one or more of these--in sheer cursed human nature--would surely have tipped off some outsider that "we really did know, but we couldn't act on what we had." From there to disclosure would have been a short step.

*the books make this evidence
appear very weak*

Maddox reported

11/11/41

① Routine patrols aren't approved at levels 11 present by
 the 1st patrol in order. ② The same patrol
 in 3 years ③ U2 + increasing surveillance by the
 and this is enough to get the public but no
 such flight would be needed as situation
 ④ who didn't see the seeds under the

The second major question concerns the degree of participation for the unions, and whether this was in fact least respect misrepresentation by the Administration at the

I say "degree of provocation," because to some extent of a destroyer patrol off the coast of another nation sailing close quarters, is provocative regardless of distance, or relation to other operations. Obviously, in 1964, there was a state of grave tension between Vietnam and the US, and this could only increase what we call the "inherent provocation" of the patrol.

But, equally obviously, neither the Congress nor the public for a moment deceived on this point. For twenty years or more, the informed American public had heard of incidents involving aircraft for the most part, where the Soviet Union and the US had patrolled in close proximity to each other's territory. Off New England, to take but one example, Soviet bombers with advanced electronic gear had become an institution and remain so today. When Secretary McNamara described the above Patrol of late July as "routine," any informed member of the public--and surely any member of Congress--would have constructed the words to mean the kind of patrol that had been going on for years. The Administration believed that such patrols were justified, so did the Congress, so did the public -- even in a state of tension known to all three.

Did the mission of the patrol, its course, or its relation to other operations, however, contain any special elements, then unknown to the public or Congress, that made the patrol more

...Herrick ...
...to Sharp, that ... ambush ...
...McNamara, Sharp, and their staffs in effect concluded
the end of the afternoon that there was ample support for
for the conclusion that an attack had been attempted and
Obviously, the North Vietnamese intercepts were themselves
inaccurate in claiming that any American aircraft had been
downed, although the report of their own losses could have
be attributed to boastfulness and had the ring of truth.
any case, even though the complete reports of both sides
to partake of exaggeration and inaccuracy, the residue, from
the American side alone, seemed conclusive, and adequate to
support the decision without mention of the crucial intercept.

Such was the situation as it appeared that afternoon. To
buttress the case, and to carry out the fullest possible investi-
gation of how such eyewitness reports might be right or wrong,
McNamara did not let the matter drop with the conclusion he had
reached on the evening of August 4. Careful further investi-
gation at the level of naval command was directed as well as a
special inquiry by Alfred Friedman, a deputy to John McNaughton
in ISA. In the end, the voluminous reports leave much testimony
doubtful, but a considerable residue of fact still appears to
remain. Much later, in 1966 (?), a North Vietnamese PT crew,
which had actually participated in the August 2 attack, was
captured and interrogated, revealing that its crew had not
been present on August 4 and indeed claiming that there had been
no second attack. Still later, however, another captured North

211
I don't think so. If it is possible
Vietnamese naval officer, interrogated in 1967, referred to
the possibility that a separate PT squadron had joined in
carrying out the second attack. The name of the commander and
the number of the squadron fitted precisely with the intercept
evidence of August 4 itself. Yet, all the interrogations and
resulting investigations, carried out as they necessarily were
by large numbers of men who could not be told anything about
the intercept evidence, were enough to arouse honest suspicions
in some such men whether the government had had adequate evi-
dence in 1964.*

off
he denied
any PT
squad
could
have
been
involved
but
left
open
possibility
of sabotage
(Saboteur)
attest

Hence, when through such a suspicious naval officer Senator
Fulbright's Committee in 1967 came into possession particularly
of the 1966 North Vietnamese interrogation and resulting inves-
tigation, it was natural that the issue should have been re-
opened. It was at that time, in late 1967, that the Johnson
Administration decided that the intercept material must be made
available to the Committee. This was done by Paul H. Nitze,
Deputy Secretary of Defense in 1967-68, who had been Secretary
of the Navy as of August 1964. In consultation with me, repre-
senting the State Department, he prepared and submitted the case
to Senator Fulbright and Senator Russell. Although Nitze pointed
out the danger of revelation of this type of material and in
effect urged that the Committee members themselves examine the

* Throughout the 1968 Hearings, Senator Morse made use of
material from an unnamed informant within the Pentagon. Goulden
citations. I have no doubt that this informant was not privy
to the intercept evidence, but solely to other secondary material.

military intercept, could become an action that would cost a great many lives, and possibly at some point disastrous reverses. In not using the evidence of the intercepts, McNamara may have made the eyewitness evidence sound firmer at the Hearings than it would have been judged alone, but the decision to stick to that evidence alone was certainly understandable and in my judgment correct.

Thus, the first major question raised in the literature can be categorically answered in both its aspects. I believe any group of scholars would today conclude that the second attack did take place in some fashion, and that the Johnson Administration at all levels, but particularly those aware of the intercept materials, was convinced that it had. *

* It is noteworthy that in all the revisionist uproar about the incidents, now seven years ago, not one man within the Administration has come forward to say that he did not believe the evidence at the time. One outside scholar, conscientious enough to weigh the intercept evidence properly but still wishing to argue that the Administration did not have a valid basis for acting, has advanced the hypothesis that the intercept evidence was concocted by the CIA. (Peter Dale Scott, NYRB, citation). I have not tried to inquire into this idea: on its face, the notion of such deception seems to me utterly incredible. First, CIA did not have responsibility for intercepts. To carry out a fabrication from within the organization that was responsible would have been a monstrous undertaking, in both senses of the word. Second, if one tries to figure a way of injecting dummy messages from outside the intercept structure, how could the CIA or anyone else have known enough to concoct messages with correct unit numbers and call signs, fitting the corroborative 1967 evidence? ~~alone?~~ Surely (one must conclude that the charge is a measure of the mood by 1970 in certain quarters typified by the New York Review of Books, I remain somewhat amazed at the standard of scholarship that permits a serious teacher of history to advance such a hypothesis, without a scintilla of evidence.

provocative than in the "routine" type of case to which
Korematsu referred? Take the mission first. Here, despite many
confused charges, the evidence is clear: the destroyers did
engage in intensive "eyeball" observation of North Vietnamese
ship activity, did carry passive ¹² detection equipment with which
they could identify North Vietnamese radar installations that
might "lock on" to them, and did carry finally an extra passive
radio receiver or receivers, of normal type, but in fact designed
to pick up, not friendly instructions or signals, but the radio
transmissions of the North Vietnamese.

Of the three, the first seems obvious to anyone, and was
by all testimony the primary mission. The second was, and is,
standard practice for any naval vessel in any waters anywhere
in the world, as was in 1964 well known to many, if not most,
members of Congress and to many informed citizens as well. Ever
since World War II it has been a commonplace of electronic
military operations that aircraft or vessels should be used for
this purpose. This is ^{usually} usually done passively, [as was the case
with these destroyers.] On occasion, equipment is included which
may deliberately stimulate the other nation's radar system.

Without arguing whether such "active" equipment might in a partic-
ular case be provocative, the fact is that the destroyers involved
in the Tonkin incidents did not carry it. In this respect, too,
they were truly "routine." *I'd put back deleted material*

This leaves the question of the radio receiver(s). In the
later context of early 1968, following the seizing of the highly
sophisticated intercept-specialty ship, Pueblo, off North Korea,

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100-1

it was a natural thing to claim that the Tonkin destroyers were essentially similar. A suitable air of mystery was added in the 1968 Hearings (?) by the revelation that "black boxes" had been put aboard the Maddox in a call at Taiwan just before the start of the mission. Obviously, it had become known to American intercept services that North Vietnamese naval traffic could be intercepted by a vessel operating near the coast, and hence a receiver capacity was installed in the Maddox. But whereas the Pueblo was a specialty ship with no other mission, the Maddox' intercept capability was wholly incidental--and ^{wholly} invisible. Whereas the North Koreans in 1968 could well have surmised what the Pueblo was doing--for Communist nations are, in general, highly sophisticated in this area--North Vietnam in 1964 would have had no reason to know of the receiver(s) or, if it did guess, to find it any more than a minor addition to the basic picture of an American patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin. Thus, while the Administration did know of the receivers and did withhold this information from the Congress--for security reasons already explained in detail--there is no reason to suppose that their entirely passive presence played any part in North Vietnamese motivations..

In summary, though, one element of the destroyer's mission was not revealed to the Congress for security reasons, the general picture that Congress, as well as the informed public, would have had was in accord with that of the Administration. There was no deception here.

Fullbright started in his discussion that the US went within 12 miles to show that we did not respect NVN's claim of 12 miles

In the case of the patrol's distance from the coast, the position is slightly different. As of the first of August, North Vietnam had never claimed the 12-mile limit in any public manner whatever, much less through the formal announcements that had been used by most maritime nations for this purpose. During the course of the incidents, Hanoi Radio did claim violations of its territorial waters, and these broadcasts were known to intelligence circles in Washington, though it is not clear whether they were brought to the attention of senior policy makers. Probably they were, for by the end of the week, August 8th, Cyrus Vance, then Deputy Secretary of Defense, said on TV that he believed NVN did claim the 12-mile limit. Between the time the patrol was authorized, on July 17th, and the time when on August 3rd it was directed to resume after the first attack, some awareness of possible North Vietnamese sensitivity can be inferred--for the orders were changed from "8 and 4" (eight miles from the mainland, four miles from any islands) to "11 and ____." Again, in September, orders for a brief renewed patrol at that time called for courses wholly beyond the 12-mile limit.

Perhaps, then, the Administration erred in not taking note that North Vietnam might be claiming the 12-mile limit, and in not taking immediate note of what Hanoi Radio said on August _____. Clearly, the Administration did not convey to the Congress that there might be doubt of North Vietnam's position, or report to Congress the Hanoi Radio statement. Thus, there were failures both of understanding and communication.

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14A-17

But were they material? For one thing, the customary international law remedy for an intrusion into territorial waters is to warn the intruder and then, if he persists, to threaten him. In 1964, tension was hardly at the point where such procedures were impractical, and the Maddox was wholly visible for a long time during July 31 - August 2. Failure even to attempt a warning procedure suggests strongly that the question of incursion was no significant part of North Vietnam's feelings about the patrol. By the same token, in the planning and authorizing of the patrol, the possibility of a technical incursion might have been assessed as likely to lead to a protest by North Vietnam, but hardly to a surprise attack-- which in both cases came ^(after) ~~after~~ the American destroyers ^(had) ~~had~~ withdrawn ^(at) ~~to~~ substantial distances from the coast. Why, if it was territorial waters they cared about, did not the North Vietnamese announce that American destroyers had intruded, been warned off, and retreated? The prestige advantages would seem enormous, and the failure to pursue this course seems to confirm that this was not a material part of what caused, or could readily have been expected to cause, a North Vietnamese response of deliberate attack.

What, then, of the destroyer patrol's relation to the South Vietnamese attacks under Plan 34A? I have already described how the 34A attack of the night of July 30 related, in time and distance as well as in command consideration, to the

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in interview with 34A that jet had been downed
by NV & he was isolated with 14A-18 Austin
204

initiation of the patrol and its conduct until attacked the first time on August 2nd. Remote as the time/distance factors appeared to be, the possibility of confusion in North Vietnamese minds was sufficient to cause the renewed patrol's course to be altered to the north and away from the area in which 34A operations were conducted.

So far as Washington could tell, on the morning of August 4th and throughout the period of presentation to the Congress, the second attack could have had nothing to do with any confusion with 34A operations. The distance from the general area of the 34A attacks was substantially more than on July 30-August 2, and Washington did not have notice of any ~~particular~~ ^{second} 34A attacks in the period of August 2 through August 4~~th~~.

Hence, the assumption throughout the period of the decision (August 4) and presentation to Congress (August 5-6 for the presentation, August 7 for the final Congressional debate, and August 10 for the Presidential approval of the Resolution) was that the second attack could have had nothing to do with 34A operations. This conclusion, in turn, affected the conjectures of possible confusion that had existed on ^{Monday} ~~Monday~~, August 3rd. ^{Why was} ~~Why was~~ there any longer reason to believe that such confusion had moved Hanoi to make the first attack, when a second attack had now been boldly ordered and carried out without any such factor? The argument seemed conclusive, and led McNamara and me, among others, heavily to discount in public and in hearings the idea that even the first attack had been caused in any way by confusion. After all, not only were the 34A attacks militarily

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trivial, but the time and distance separation was very great indeed: on any rational view, a military command that was in the least on its toes--as Hanoi's seemed clearly to be--could not seriously have made the mistake.* (Footnote: Citation and excerpts from McN and from my broadcast.)

Before proceeding on to discuss facts not known in Washington at the time, let me pause here to make one further point. The knowledge that existed in the Administration on this subject was, in fact, almost wholly communicated to the Congress, and much of it in turn to the public. In particular, as I have already noted, on the afternoon of August 3rd--after the first attack, before the second--McNamara had met informally with key members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and had there discussed the 34A operations at some length.* Unfortunately, there is no record of this meeting (?), nor is there a record (?) of what was said about 34A operations on the evening of August 4th, when the President met with a Congressional leadership group some of whom had been at the McNamara meeting the previous day. What is a matter of written record is that the operations were explained in some detail at the formal Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing of August 6th, and were again discussed in several colloquies during the Senate debate on August 7th. The record of the Hearings shows McNamara defending the existence of the operations, and their justification

* The source here in McNamara in the 1968 Hearings, speaking before the very men he had met with on that August 3. ~~()~~

by referring to the massive ship traffic from North Vietnam south and also to the large junk fleet that the US had helped South Vietnam to mount against North Vietnamese naval incursions. Far from being deliberately confusing, as some extreme critics have claimed, the reference was entirely relevant. The major focus of the South Vietnamese attacks was a series of islands associated with the assembly and equipping of ships to go south. Moreover, North Vietnamese ship movements carrying men and weapons to the South to conduct attacks of all sorts, were a clear justification in themselves for retaliation by the South Vietnamese--each was a form of attack, and the latter in fact far less ^{destructive} destructive. (FN with citations.)

The McNamara point seemed straightforward enough, and was so taken by virtually all Senators who heard him, or who later discussed the 34A operations on the Senate floor. The exception was Senator Wayne Morse. He had been at the informal meeting on Monday, and was obviously primed on the subject at the hearing of Thursday, August 6th. Again and again, the public record shows him questioning the justification for the ^(34A) operations, and wondering whether they had not triggered the North Vietnamese attacks. ^(1st 1st) But ~~equally, again and again,~~ no other Senator joined in the discussion at the hearings, and when the matter came up on the floor of the Senate the reaction was clear. In crisp exchanges, Senator Fulbright and Senator Russell specifically defended the 34A operations, as being entirely justified, and denied that there had been any connection. (Citations to go in text with footnote references.)

In short--a point alas entirely overlooked in the June 1971 period of the Times articles--the Congress had full notice of the 34A operations throughout the period of its debate, and also knew essentially all that the Administration knew in Washington about the exact operations conducted during the period of the attacks.* (FN on exception of Herrick statements of doubt, and why these not treated seriously after the second attack--if known at the time at senior levels.)

Yet at this point, one must shift gears completely, and take account of two facts not known in Washington through August 10th. Only on _____, did Washington learn, from post-operation reports sent routinely to Washington, that there had been in fact a small 34A operation, an attack on _____ (map), on the night of August 3rd, Vietnam time. In other words, almost at the time ^(to August 2d) that President Johnson was announcing the American response to the first attack, warning Hanoi and ordering renewal of the patrol, ~~on the morning of August 3rd Washington time,~~ Hanoi was experiencing a second 34A small-craft shelling.

Moreover, at a later time I cannot determine, Washington ^{Broadcast by Hanoi in Aug 12, 1964} learned of a Hanoi claim that on August 1 and 2, T-28 aircraft conducting bombing missions against the Route 7 supply line in Laos had strayed over the North Vietnamese border. If these were noted at the time in Washington, those who read Hanoi's broadcasts made no connection to the Tonkin incidents. Nonetheless, it is clear from a later memorandum of November 1964 (Pentagon Papers, published by NYT) that the charge was noted

picked up by this PP. As a result knowledge limited by [unclear]

Concluding 25

as part of the Laos warfare, and was in due course investigated and found to have been probably well founded. All I can say with assurance, after checking the file, is that the claim was not known in Washington during the August crisis period (?) (or that it was not connected by anyone with sea events so far distant). As to whether it should have been, these T-28 operations had then been conducted for more than two months. Their targets and objectives were well known to Hanoi (which also knew how important the supply route was for its own operation in Laos). The straying over the border, assuming it occurred, was in a rural area on Route 7, about as far removed from the vitals of NVN as possible. How any government could have construed the straying as ~~xxx~~ other than an accident escapes me, and it seems extraordinarily difficult to suppose that Hanoi read into it any change in US purpose or action.

Back, then, to the August 3rd 34A attack. Why was it carried out, why was its existence not known in Washington till _____, what was its possible significance in Hanoi's conduct?

It was carried out because it was not forbidden and because this was a normal continuation of a class of operation that had been begun and, for once, carried out successfully by the South Vietnamese on July 30. To the men on the ground, these must surely have been reasons enough, without imputing high political motives to relatively junior officers. As for the higher military commands, they thought and reported to their superiors that the general separation of the new patrol course

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It could have been

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before noting charges in Hanoi's white paper 21 Sept 69 that according to Austin describes patrol with other sub... in a house which...

*Sanley the patrol, air cap. warning &
keeping the distance further from shore*

14A-23

from the area of possible 34A operations had done all that needed doing. But what, finally, of the failure of the topmost levels to intervene and stand down 34A operations for the time being, particularly in light of the high-level surmise of Monday, August 3rd, that perhaps the first attack had been due to confusion in Hanoi?

It is a hard question, with no clear answer in the record or personal recollection. The mood of August 2d and 3d -- that Hanoi must not be allowed to stop the US from doing what it had a right to do -- hardly extended to going on for this reason with these small South Vietnamese operations. Nor was there a trace, I am absolutely sure, of deliberate desire to ~~xxxx~~^{court} an incident. The terms of renewal of the patrol were designed, on the contrary, to deter North Vietnam from repeating its action. (Spell this out a little more somewhere?)

The answer, I think, lies in ²time factors and the failure of hard-pressed men to think about every conceivable loose end. The time factor is that any order to stand down 34A operations, in such a way as to forestall the attack of August 3d, would have had to go out on the evening of August 2d, Washington time, and early in the evening at that in view of the distance the South Vietnamese craft had to travel. Yet during the day of August 2d, a Sunday when despite the presence of all senior level officials not every junior man was in or every file on tap, the hypothesis of possible confusion with 34A operations does not seem to have taken hold. It appears only in discussions on Monday, the 3d,

and then only in a small civilian circle whose views were becoming clearer only toward evening on that day. By then, they could not have prevented the new 34A operation which had already taken place. That they did not nonetheless urge a freeze henceforth is, I think, simply that they did not take the possibility of further incident that seriously. On the contrary, the dominant motive in discussing the hypothesis was, the record is clear, to find a persuasive motive for Hanoi's first attack, which could honestly be presented on background to key journalists, and thus reduce, rather than increase, the total tension to which the attack of August 2 might give rise. To repeat, on the evening of August 3d, it seemed most unlikely, indeed next to incredible, that Hanoi would attack again. Thus, every last conceivable precaution was not taken into account -- and specifically the idea of standing down the whole of the 34A naval operations for the time being, or of actively checking whether any attacks had taken place since the 2d.

Why, however, was not the attack of August 3d reported currently to Washington, or for that matter authorized in advance in specific terms? As to the latter point, the fact is that the Saigon command had authority to conduct certain types of operations, so many per month, without reference to specific dates. (To require specific date clearance would have been nearly impossible, since the timing of operations of this sort depended overwhelmingly on weather factors that could only be judged on the spot and usually on the day of the operation.) Thus, the

number and type of proposed operations were known in Washington, but not the dates they would take place. Washington had the knowledge required for a broad veto ~~the point discussed in earlier paragraphs~~ but not more.

As for reporting procedures, the failure to report in /S inexplicable. (?) Very likely, the local American military authorities working with the South Vietnamese would not have got the reports clear and sorted out before late on the 4th Vietnam time, but surely they must then have sent them in summary form to Saigon. Saigon in turn should then have sent them to interested offices in Honolulu and Washington, where both the Pacific headquarters and the Pentagon had staffs that were following the progress of Plan 34A very closely. I see no answer to why these procedures were not followed, so that the Pentagon would have known at the latest by the 5th. The fact is, according to all records and recollections, that it did not.

There is, however, still another and equally puzzling circumstance. Why was Hanoi, which had been strident in publicizing and protesting the ^(34A) attack of July 30, silent on the attack of August 3d? Any Hanoi mention of another attack would have been immediately picked up by American monitoring of all Hanoi's radio output, and would have been seized upon by the American intelligence offices, State's in particular, that had developed the confusion hypothesis on the Sunday and Monday. Hanoi Radio, indeed, is picked up and reported by many sources other than the US. Yet there is no trace in Hanoi's radio output, in any fashion, of mention of the August 3d attack.

*What about call from
Maddox saying 70 up at time
his patrol involved - 11/10/68*
14A-26

The point is not merely that Hanoi Radio might have taken the place of the missing American action reports, in the period through August 10th. Its deeper bearing came later, when the action reports had come in and there was reason to ask if the August 3d attack might be the missing piece that explained Hanoi's actions. Here Hanoi's failure ever to mention it must surely have seemed a strong negative piece of evidence: after all, if the August 4th attack had been triggered by the August 3d 34A operation, to announce both and link them would surely have been immensely attractive to Hanoi. ~~It is another aspect of the most-puzzling element in the whole story, Hanoi's failure ever to admit the second attack.~~ *The failure was to connect with the 34A* It also serves to explain why in late August 1964, and right through the testimony of 1968, McNamara and others believed there was no connection between the two events. We shall see in the fourth section of this Appendix what a 1971 guess might be on this point.

In summary, the judgment at top levels in allowing the 34A operation to proceed can be debated, although time reasons alone explain why this would not have headed off the August 3d 34A operation. Moreover, the failure to report the August 3d operation simply cannot be explained. Yet there is, as we shall see in a moment, little reason to assign real weight to the August 3d operation in any hypothesis of Hanoi's behavior. Above all, given the simple if inexplicable fact that Washington did not know through August 10th of the August 3d operation, there is no question of deception as between the Administration and ^{top levels knew of the} Congress. Nobody at ~~the event~~ event at the time, and nobody later had strong reason to make a connection in hindsight.

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3. Was the Administration's basic picture of events honestly conveyed to the Congress?

As the preceding sections have, I hope, made clear, the top policy circle in the Administration believed in August 1964 (and at all times since, I might add) that

- the second attack had indeed taken place,
- and that it had been essentially unprovoked, i.e., that there had been no special element in the patrol or its relation to the 34A operations that could reasonably have led Hanoi to consider attack on the destroyers justified.

To repeat, if there was any provocation in the fact of the patrol, this seemed to the Administration, as to the Congress and public, a fact, if you will, of cold war life -- and especially a fact likely to arise in a tense area situation. It did not seem to any Americans in positions of responsibility, in either executive or legislative, that the patrol, in itself, called for attack by North Vietnam. As simply stated at the time, American ships had a right to go anywhere on the high seas, and any deliberate attack on them was proper grounds for protest and, if repeated, for appropriate offensive or retaliatory action. ~~It is the most elementary matter of public record that~~ the President's decision to retaliate was applauded at the time by all but a handful both of Congress and of the American public.

But what did the Administration think Hanoi's actual motives were? Here the internal record and the public testimony seem to coincide completely. ~~Their thrust is simply that the~~ Administration, ^{and} had no clear theory at all, did not know what to

make of the attacks, and in default of any coherent motive could only conclude that Hanoi wished to make a gesture of how strong and tough it was. Perhaps, it was surmised, Hanoi had thought it might sink an American vessel and that the prestige gain from this would outweigh any retaliation the US was likely to carry out in an election year. Perhaps there was some ^{desire} ~~motive~~ to implicate the diffident Russians and the willing Chinese in more active support for a "Socialist state under attack."

Perhaps some local commander had simply taken the bit in his teeth, although this did not seem likely to have happened twice. None of the ^{specific} ~~specific~~ hypotheses, ~~in fact,~~ made much sense or carried any group to the point of belief. The "best guesses" came together only on the proposition that Hanoi must have meant to defy the US and thus score a general prestige gain, or warn off the US from any further military operations near North Vietnam.

In essence, in the test of will that the Administration had ^(confronted) ~~seen~~ growing since early in the year, this seemed to be a case of Hanoi trying to score a cheap point, and being thwarted in the attempt--first by failure to damage any US ship and then by being subjected to sharp retaliation. This ² theory of Hanoi being humiliated was ~~widely believed,~~ and seemed to explain the most surprising single element in Hanoi's behavior, the failure ever to refer to the ^{Aug. 1965} ~~second~~ attack. Conceivably, it was thought, Hanoi hoped to establish to the world that it had been a wholly innocent party. More likely, it seemed to some Communist experts, the North Vietnamese leaders had thought it was too much to

explain to their public both the naval failure and the American air attacks, whereas the latter, treated alone and as if out of the blue, could be used to build up domestic indignation and war spirit. This idea, that the North Vietnamese domestic audience was the key, was on the whole predominant in the final retrospective explanations.

Not all these finespun theories were, it is true, shared with the Congress or the public. Here the explanations of the President, Rusk, and McNamara were simple: for reasons that could not be precisely determined, (1) US ships had been attacked in locations where they had a right to be; (2) Hanoi was being tough and challenging. It was an honest statement of what was thought at the time within the Administration.

4: What, in hindsight, may Hanoi's motives have been?

Seven years after the event, I confess I remain baffled by Hanoi's behavior in the period of the Tonkin Gulf attacks. Particularly is this true of the Hanoi propaganda treatment, waiting some time before noting the first ^(-the sinking) attack and then never acknowledging the second at all.

Start, perhaps, with the two extreme hypotheses. At one extreme is the idea of a headstrong naval command taking steps without any orders from the Politburo; this seems incredible to any student of North Vietnam's incredibly tight and disciplined system, even once, let alone twice after a warning. At the other extreme is the idea that the Politburo really wanted on both occasions to pick a fight, to score a prestige success by sinking or damaging a US destroyer that dared to come close to

North Vietnam. This too I find incredible, or at least so wholly out of keeping with Hanoi's usual caution as to be a total aberration. That caution had been evident in the spring and early summer of 1964, most notably in the refusal to press forward in Laos in late May. True, in late June Hanoi had been warned through Seaborn, and then there had been minor further US or US-sponsored actions. Yet, as of late July, the latest US noises had been Rusk's pointed rebuke^(c) of Khanh's July 19 remarks about "going North." The tension was not that high. Nor, conversely, could Hanoi have supposed that the US would not respond to an outright attack on a destroyer, particularly if--as was militarily quite possible--the first torpedo boat attack, in daylight, had sunk or heavily damaged the Maddox. Thus, to attack US vessels in cold blood and deliberately, to teach the US a lesson, seems too far-fetched to be plausible.

What, then, lies between the two extremes of total deliberation and local initiative? The hypothesis that appeals to me is one that assigns different motives to the two attacks--that the first was honest confusion with the 34A operations, and that the second was in revenge for the failure of the first. Though each half of this hypothesis strains the imagination, only such a two-part theory comes close to explaining the evidence, particularly of the key broadcasts and lack of them.*

but see map printed at Goldhamer 228 from Hanoi white paper which purports Maddox "provocation" & does not

* This two-part hypothesis was originated, not by me, but by the anonymous author or authors of the volume in the Pentagon Papers on this subject. The reader may examine how the theory is developed there, which differs from my treatment in the comparatively less weight given to the need to make the broadcasts intelligible.

we mention attacks on vessels

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On this theory, local naval commanders both mistook the Maddox for a South Vietnamese vessel, and believed that the Maddox had been somehow involved in the attack on the night of July 30. After all, that attack had been at night and had achieved tactical and perhaps even strategic surprise, being the first of its kind. The local naval command must have had very confused action reports, and may initially have found it hard to believe that very small vessels could shell in this fashion. (The South Vietnamese craft carried _____ guns.) Moreover, the Maddox being in fact far away (130 miles) at the time ^{130 miles} meant not that the North Vietnamese navy would clearly dissociate her, but rather that they simply did not know where she had been at the time, hence were the more likely to assume an association and a failure of detection on their part. One must assume that they did pick up the Maddox on the morning of the 31st, but may have supposed that she had simply pulled back and then come north again. Thus, the idea that the North Vietnamese thought the Maddox had been involved in the attack can, with some strain, be made credible.

Did the North Vietnamese, then, think that the Maddox was an American ship, and by extension that the US had been directly involved in the July 30 shelling? Here the broadcasts come in directly. If this had been the basis of decision, all experience both before and after 1964 makes clear that the decision ^{to attack on August 2nd} would have been accompanied by a plan for immediate propaganda exploitation. Pinning the July 30 ^(shell) attack squarely on the US and then claiming the Maddox was involved would have been a propaganda

"natural" for Hanoi, irrespective of the outcome of the engagement with the Maddox. Yet Hanoi Radio was at first silent, and then confused in its treatment of the first attack. The point seems conclusive, leaving only the idea that Hanoi thought the Maddox was South Vietnamese and involved.

To any naval man, this was at the time an even more incredible theory. Given the Maddox' size and clear outline, one must assume a whole series of sightings and erroneous identifications, perhaps from non-naval craft, through the day of August 1 and the morning of August 2. And one must assume that naval commands, discomfited by their failure to detect and fend off the July 30 attack, exaggerated these into a picture that reached Hanoi, of a new South Vietnamese vessel blatantly exploiting the success of the July 30 attack. Again, the mind tends to boggle, but naval inexperience seems at least more plausible than naval initiative.

Then, ^{like} Hanoi ^{did} ordered the first attack, and of course the results were ^(a waste) disastrous, quickly revealing that the vessel was American and supported by American planes. ^(No doubt) A cheap sinking of a South Vietnamese vessel had turned into a hornets' nest with the Americans. The propaganda apparatus took 24 hours to absorb this and ^{then} ~~then~~ came out with (what, when), not even linking the Maddox to the July 30 attack. But the leaders may have felt that they had had a humiliation that was the more severe because they had acted on wrong information and did not even have a propaganda counter at hand.

Then, on the night of August 3d Hanoi time, the humiliation was compounded by a second 34A attack, small but successful and without loss. Simultaneously, to Hanoi, the US announced its protest and the resumption of the patrol. The tone of these announcements was to Western ears measured, firm but not provocative, and was so described and acclaimed at the time, in the American and world press alike. But, to many in Hanoi already burdened with shame and humiliation, in a culture and political system peculiarly sensitive to these emotions, the announcements from Washington may have had a different ring. Hanoi's leaders may have come to feel that their humiliation, already great, would be intolerable if they permitted the destroyer patrol to be completed without molestation.

One may add a further element. The North Vietnamese were not experienced with any naval vessel of size. Their Swatows and PT boats were fairly recently acquired (check) and had never been used in proximity to any larger vessel. Quite possibly, the Chinese and Soviets -- respective donors of the Swatows and PT's -- had built up the capabilities of these vessels and claimed that they could actually sink destroyers in the right circumstances. There is no evidence to link either Moscow or Peking with any of Hanoi's decisions--and perhaps there is a whole field for speculation here, ~~although I cannot even see the outline of a path in that field.~~ But without supposing that the governments were aware of anything, local military advisors from China or the Soviet Union would have shared in the humiliation of August 3d and may conceivably have tried to explain the failure

on the ground of the attempt having been in daylight. Thus, their voices may have been urging a renewed attempt, only this time at night and with real tactical surprise.

The theory of a night attack would perhaps have had special appeal to Hanoi for another reason. If it did not succeed, it could be disavowed. Thus, the order for the second attack may have had as its propaganda annex a decision that the attack would be exploited to the fullest if it succeeded, but there would be silence if it failed. Alternatively, that there would be silence in either event, perhaps to leave the US guessing helplessly whether the attackers had been North Vietnamese or Chinese.

Yet the lack of any announcement continues to suggest that the August 3d 34A operation, the piece of the puzzle that was missing in Washington, had at most irritant and not decisive effect. As of August 4th, did Hanoi believe the US was involved directly in these operations? The affirmative case is that Hanoi now knew that the Maddox had been American, and may still have connected the Maddox to the July 30 34A attack. On the other hand, if Hanoi seriously thought the US was directly involved in the 34A operations -- or even that it could make a plausible case of US involvement -- I have already noted that it would have been a propagandist's dream to link the two and use the 34A operation of August 3d as the justification for the second attack of August 4th. Weighing the evidence in each direction, the net judgment must be that Hanoi did not believe that, either through the destroyers or otherwise, the US was in fact directly engaged in the 34A operations. At most, then, the 34A shelling of August 3d

assumes a minor contributing role in Hanoi's hypothesized framework of decision.

Such are the elements that add up, barely, to a plausible hypothesis. Hanoi never thereafter behaved in this way--either in terms of military recklessness or in terms of propaganda ineptitude. Perhaps the whole thing was more inexperience than anything else.

5. An Assessment of the American Administration's Handling of the Events

Over and over, in the preceding analysis, I have concluded that the Administration did not deceive the Congress, and that on every material point the facts and judgment of the Administration concerning the events were honestly presented. As one looks back at the record, only three things were left out, and in my judgment ^{they} ~~and~~ tend to cancel each other out. They were:

1. The intercepts and the passive radio receivers on the Maddox that produced them. If known the intercepts would have removed all doubt of the second attack and would, moreover, have made it appear even more clearly deliberate than it was depicted by the Administration. Would the existence of passive radio receivers, unknown to the North Vietnamese, have seemed important or provocative to a 1964 member of Congress? Hardly. In any case, it would be a (bold) (cold) man who would argue against the security reasons for not revealing these.

2. Hanoi's broadcast of August ____ claiming that there had been incursion into territorial waters. Although it did not specify the 12-mile limit, by the end of the week,

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the positions of the alleged incursion had been assessed and it had been concluded that Hanoi must be assuming a 12-mile limit. Here, the Administration took time to come to this conclusion, and even then did not believe -- for reasons that still seem strong -- that the point was important in judging what Hanoi had done.

3. The August 3d 34A operation, which Washington simply did not know about.

Thus, with only these three points to go on, the case for concealment or deception is very weak indeed. Congress knew all the essential facts, and how the Administration judged them. The evidence is overwhelming that Congress shared that judgment, as well as approving the actions that flowed from it.

Similarly, the case on any Administration intent to provoke the incidents is not simply weak, it is non-existent. Not at any level of command is there a scintilla of evidence, after exhaustive internal and external searches, that points to any anticipation by the Administration of the incidents, much less any intent to provoke them. As I have said over and over, the Administration in late July expected to go through the election period without any further change in its lines of military action. The desire to do this was, indeed, particularly strong at the top levels concerned directly with the outcome of the election. The way to beat Goldwater was hardly to play with fire, and anyone courting the Tonkin incidents could have seen that he was running a serious risk of losing a US ship and then finding himself in a

situation that would have played right into Goldwater's hands. When the incidents came, President Johnson was able to turn them to his great political advantage -- because the North Vietnamese failed to ~~inflict such damage that a stronger response had to be made~~ ^{but the damage was not done} -- but any man who ran such risks deliberately would have been a fool as well as a knave. A host of wise commentators have made all these points. I simply endorse them with the fervor of one who knew the atmosphere and the men of the time.

Yet, to say there was neither deception of the Congress nor intent to provoke the incidents can only be an introduction. The mere fact that Hanoi did react compels the conclusion that the Administration miscalculated in some degree.

To me, the miscalculation was of two sorts -- if you will, strategic and tactical. The strategic miscalculation can be fairly well documented: in June, when the CIA and the intelligence community were asked to assess the likely Hanoi reaction to a range of stronger actions, they gave the judgment that Hanoi would be most unlikely to take seriously, or react specifically, to a broad category of actions that included the destroyer patrols and covert incursions. In the ^{deliberation} consideration and rejection of much stronger action at this time, no one went back over the relatively unimportant paragraphs dealing with these "pinprick" actions as they were regarded. The subsequent reviewing groups had been through the May-June process; it doubtless left them with the feeling that patrols and raids were indeed pretty small stuff,

*... to ... 12a" ... the ...
... of policy ...
... of ...
... 14A-38*

not to be taken seriously either by Americans or North Vietnamese in the wider picture.

Above all, the intelligence estimate -- and the others made in review groups -- failed to take account of that old bug-aboo of intelligence forecasts, miscalculation. Through the eight years I worked on such estimates, hardly one on Soviet or other Communist behavior was without its cautionary note on the loose variable of miscalculation in both directions, that might lead on to war or tension. This was the element not adequately considered in the view of these operations that prevailed in June and July, 1964.

14A-38
~~For it was miscalculation that was,~~ in the end, at the root of the best hindsight hypothesis of Hanoi's behavior, and ~~tactical judgments by the US contributed to the miscalculations by Hanoi.~~ In simple terms, it was a mistake, for an Administration sincerely resolved to keep its risks low, to have the 34A operations and the destroyer patrol take place even in the same time period. Rational minds could not readily have foreseen that Hanoi might confuse them, at least to the point of incredible misidentification of the Maddox, but rational calculations should have taken account of the irrational -- and the cost of adjusting to the irrational, in the form of a few days' postponement of the patrol, would not have been serious or significant from anyone's standpoint..

Of course, all this is 14-karat hindsight. The fact of history is that both the US and North Vietnam were, at this stage,

*So does V.I. We ~~have~~ regarded as outrageous
attack on ~~main~~ ~~institutions~~ & institutions in a
war zone engaged in supplying the war 14A-39*

inexperienced in the exact interpretation of actions which, on both sides, had an element of signalling firmness. To Western minds, Hanoi's reaction to the South Vietnamese covert operations seems hardest to understand. After all, Hanoi had been for years conducting massive "covert" operations on land and sea against the South. Yet, here there is a fact confirmed by long experience, that most totalitarian regimes tend to have a double standard in this area. It is quite honest, and arises from the same sensitivities that go with being totalitarian in the first place. In a word, they can dish it out, but they react sharply to even a pinch of their own medicine.

This was one element the calculations of June did not consider. The other was that what was "routine" next to the Soviet Union would not, even on a much smaller scale, be "routine" next to North Vietnam. A destroyer is to Americans the smallest naval vessel of any consequence. To Hanoi, it was a big thing, at least in close proximity to their ~~shxz~~ borders. ~~The reaction doubtless ran deep, including in it elements of the envy and resentment of Western superior technology generally.~~ In short, even the most ordinary destroyer patrol was in itself bound to be ~~just a bit~~ more irritating than ~~xxxx~~ the US policy makers really took into account.

Later in the war that followed, the reactions on both sides were very different. Hanoi came to understand what US military

effort meant as to US underlying intentions. In 1964, though, there was clearly a major element of straight misunderstanding in what took place. Washington did not want an incident, and it seems doubtful that Hanoi did either. Yet each misread the other, and the incidents happened.

Chapter 15: The Grandeur and the Misery of Apparent Success

Summary

a. Clemenceau's title for his Memoirs has at least superficial application to the period from mid-August through ^{1 October} ~~late September~~ of 1964. The grandeur was short-lived, and has already been described, particularly on the domestic front and in the President's prestige. The misery was lasting, partly writ large for all to see in a new and profound political collapse within South Vietnam, partly within the policy councils of the Administration as it wrestled with where to go from the apparent plateau of the Tonkin Gulf actions. By late September, as the American political campaign took over the public stage, the situation was much worse than it had appeared in June and July, and the prospective avenues of action looked darker than ever. The holding action decided on in June had seemed hopeful then. By October it had become fairly desperate.

Plans and Portents

b. Take first the planning process within the Administration. Even during the exhilarating week of Tonkin, Ambassador Taylor had said that while the US action was having a lifting effect for Khanh and the political atmosphere generally, this would only be temporary. His reports, especially on August 9 (H-9), made it abundantly clear that he considered the political situation in Saigon basically shaky, and this judgment was a prime reason for his rejecting strongly a Washington suggestion to ease American opposition to a fairly early conference concerning Laos. (Cite Taylor cables of early August.) In particular, Taylor thought the problem of infiltration was more serious, with North Vietnamese natives reported since July (check). Broadly, he thought we had to show by action that the rules of the game had changed. At the very least, this meant continued reprisals for any special

Hanoi actions. Basically, the US should be thinking in terms of a possible program of sustained military actions starting in early 1965.

With these first reactions in hand, I was directed to frame a possible set of actions that could carry at least through the election period in such a way as to help morale in South Vietnam, put some pressure on North Vietnam, and yet present minimum risks of the war becoming more serious. It was a tall order, and the drafts and exchanges of the month read strangely today. President Kennedy once said of the policy process:

"There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision-making process -- mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved. . . ." (Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p. 13.)

It is a good summary of how this period seemed to me at the time, and even more how it looks in hindsight on re-reading the papers. It was making bricks without straw, and without any clear idea whether straw would ever commend itself to the policy-makers themselves, let alone to the President.

My first effort was a long memorandum of August 11th, based on prior talks with both Rusk and McNamara. This was then extensively re-worked into a cable that went to the key Ambassadors on August 14th with a request for comment, over the next week.

The starting point for this cable was that Hanoi would not make further moves, and that the US wished to avoid any steps for about two weeks, so as not to change the picture of Hanoi as the aggressive party in the Tonkin incidents. (Any mention of UN?) Beyond that time, however, Saigon morale would

sag back if we did nothing further, and Hanoi was not persuaded we would act against their infiltration.

Looking further down the ~~pipe~~, the cable thought the ultimate solution required a combination of military action and communication with both Hanoi and Paiping. For the present there was no hope of successful negotiation (by this time we had the Seaborn reading?), in the absence of continued military action that amounted to real pressure on Hanoi. (Cite NYT Editorial, 8/17) Only with a pattern of pressure recognized by Hanoi and reassuring in Saigon could we accept, for example, discussion of Vietnam issues at a conference on Laos. As to a conference confined to Laos, however, the cable noted that Souvanna with his military successes might go ahead and accept one, and that our control was limited.

For the near future, thus, we should put together the best combination of actions that, while they would not in themselves go far to change Hanoi's basic actions, would ~~xxx~~ show some firmness and "could be such as to foreshadow stronger measures." The specific list includes (1) continued 34-A operations and a shift to Saigon's publicly acknowledging these, (2) joint air planning with the GVN for operations against the North and training of the South Vietnamese in jets (both rejected by September), (3) limited ground and air operations into the trail area of Laos by South Vietnamese with American advisors, (4) new DESOTO patrols at some point, and (5) a continued readiness for tit-for-tat actions in the event action by North Vietnam warranted them. (64-117) The list did not comprise, the cable thought, a "coherent program" for pressure, but was "limited and controllable."

Finally, as to "more serious pressures," these could become necessary at any time because of major new developments. In the absence of such developments, "we should be thinking of a contingency date for planning purposes, as suggested by Ambassador Taylor, of 1 January 1965."

I quote this cable at length because it conveys, as well as any single document, the feel of this period. In the month that followed, stronger alternatives were urged from many quarters, and some of the elements of this program were dropped. But this states as ~~clearly as anything~~ what the planners were trying to come up with. The contingency date for planning purposes was just that: over and over, this and other papers of the period spoke of later decisions that "might" become necessary.

And A Political Swamp

c. Between August 14th, when the cable was sent and I went back to New England, and the 24th, when I returned with the replied sorted out, the political situation in Saigon came apart with a vengeance. As often, the briefest of my personal leaves (there was no other kind from this point on) managed to coincide with a period of important underlying change.

The fundamental cause of the tragedy -- for such it was -- lay in Khanh himself. The Tonkin incidents might have given him a more solid base of confidence and power. Instead he dissipated both by recklessly using the occasion to consolidate his personal position and to impose a Constitution terribly contrary to the mood of the people. Up to August, Khanh had a chance to emerge as a real leader. During that month and after it, his influence was disruptive and often poisonous.

The first sign of Khanh's response to Tonkin came as early as August 7th, when he proclaimed himself President, displacing Duong Van ("Big") Minh. (H-9 and F-38, check other accounts.) For some time, Khanh had chafed at

working with Minh, and in July had complained strongly to Taylor about him.* Now he acted on the basis of a declaration of emergency, and claimed for himself virtual dictatorial powers. At the same time he directed the immediate preparation of a new Constitution, there having been no such formal charter since the overthrow of Diem in the previous November .

Taylor and Alexis Johnson went along with these first moves, and were not alarmed even when Khanh shuffled leading generals on the 10th and convened a top military fathering for Sunday, the 16th, at the resort town of Vung Tau, on the sea not far from Saigon. Khanh had discussed his general plans with the Embassy and left the clear impression that there would be consultation as the drafts of the new Constitution were considered. However, this undertaking was totally neglected, and only on the 14th did two Embassy officers, searching out Khanh at Vung Tau, get a glimpse of the draft. They immediately made suggestions to soften its tone and language, but this was all that any American had to do with it.

The Vung Tau Charter, as it was called when actually proclaimed on Sunday, the 16th, was not only highly authoritarian in character but even returned specifically to some of the most hated wording and clauses of the Diem period. Moreover, the timing of its introduction was a masterpiece of ineptitude, coming in the week that was the anniversary of Diem's pagoda raids of the previous year.

Robert Shaplen has written brilliantly of the ten days that followed the promulgation of the Vung Tau Charter. (Citation). It was the first real display of the new power that had been built up by the militant Buddhists, led * Over the years, Taylor had had a tennis friendship with Minh, which may have been a marginal factor. If it was more, ~~than this~~, the fact would be evidence of the morbid suspicions to which Khanh, like too many of his countrymen, was prone.

by the strange figure of Thich Tri Quang. The year before, Tri Quang had fled from the pagoda raids, and taken refuge in the American Embassy, where Lodge had given him political asylum and lodging in one of the Embassy offices right through to the overthrow of Diem. Yet then and thereafter no American, private or official, ever really came to know Tri Quang. He remained a mysterious figure, his eyes burning as he jumped from the most vivid and specific denunciations of what was to the most vague and verbally meaningless prescriptions of what should be. To read, as one did, endless careful memoranda of talks with this man was to feel that by comparison Communist internal propaganda was a triumph of clarity and conciseness.

This August was his baptism of power. His Buddhist followers, then fairly well united, were at once aroused to action by the Diem-like parts of the Charter. They were, moreover, joined by the ever-restless students, and by a number of civilian political figures operating behind the scenes. For a swirling ten days, the climax was a physical siege of Khanh in the old Palace, on August 25th. Threatened with a mob invasion, he appeared on a platform and capitulated in abject terms, unctuously agreeing to withdraw the Constitution ~~and driving off that night to take refuge in the resort town of Dalat.~~ It was an ignominious performance in every respect, without even the ~~redeeming virtue of some~~ show of physical courage.

Thus, by August 25th, there was in effect no government in Saigon. A further week of confusion, too complicated and essentially insignificant to recount, ~~led finally to the installation of a~~ ^{there was set up a} three-man governing group composed of Khanh, Big Minh, and General Tran Thinh Khiem, an inscrutable figure who had been Chief of Staff under Khanh but had seemed to break away from him during the crisis. (Check). It was a caretaker government at most. However, a plan was announced, with quiet American urging, to convene a

true civilian Council of Notables (an ancient Vietnamese institution) at the end of September, which was then to write a ^{new} Constitution ~~entirely~~ and install a civilian government under it.

In the doldrums of an American late August, all of this -- though reasonably well reported -- probably hardly sank in to the American public as the gloomy sequence it was; the headlines that week went to Goldwater's remarks on the general use of nuclear weapons. Within the American Administration, however, the impact was severe. To be sure, in his appraisal of the future written just after the Tonkin week, Taylor had given Khanh only a 50-50 chance of lasting the rest of the year. But this denouement was more than a change of government, it was almost a declaration of political bankruptcy. Plainly, there were popular forces that had the power to resist and overthrow would-be governments, ~~then and later, at least until the struggle movement of 1966, with no significant Communist or VC role.~~ Equally plainly those who could ^{arouse} popular feelings and actions in a cause, ^{above all} Tri Quang [—] were much better spoilers than builders. For the time being, as the composition of the September triumvirate showed, the military had to be in charge. Whether they could be united was doubtful. Whether any serious civilian leadership could now be found was more doubtful still. It was a deeply discouraging period, the first time when many, in both Washington and Saigon, came to suspect that there simply might not be, in a beset and history-ridden South Vietnam, the kind of capacity for rejuvenation that had appeared in the Philippines in 1953 and in Korea from 1961 onward. (Quote NYT).

Back to Plans

d. For the planning process that had been set under way on August 11th, these events were a grim backdrop. As the political crisis dragged on into September, the plan to have Taylor return to work out the next moves had to

be postponed so that he did not finally arrive till September 7th.

In the meantime, the line of thought contained in the cable of August 14th had gone through a gauntlet of criticism and comment. As early as the 14th itself, the JCS had urged generally that strikes against the north be ~~continued~~ ^{resumed}. Admiral Sharp joined in urging that momentum be maintained, and on August 26th the Joint Chiefs formally proposed a continuous and steadily rising air campaign against the North. To this was annexed, a couple of days later, a full list of 94 key targets ~~in~~ in North Vietnam, to be struck under the proposed xpg program. The JCS program went from a first phase of reprisals to a "Phase II" of systematic attack. It also included the idea of limited ground forces to protect air bases in SVN. (15 B)

Finally, on September 3, John McNaughton in Defense produced a paper that referred to the same types of limited action as the August 14th cable, but advocated doing these in a way calculated to arouse a North Vietnamese response. The thesis of deliberate provocation had been outright in the JCS recommendation of August 26th; its thrust had been that action against the North was absolutely required to save South Vietnam, hence that the US could not limit itself to reprisals. The McNaughton paper had a significantly different approach. While retaining the verbal formula of "deliberate provocation," its proposal spoke of only occasional retaliation through attack on the North - not at all "continuous" - and of keeping the risks under control at every stage. In essence, the US would do things it had a right to do but to which North Vietnam was likely to react.

In hindsight the McNaughton paper reads like a reductio ad absurdum of the planner's art, combining realpolitik with the hyper-nationalist belief in control of the most refined American "think tank." The Tonkin Gulf events

Use just scribbled British papers to
show that F.B.I. hoped to show how
Rohr pieced this

15-9

had been unplanned but had turned out favorably; this paper can be read as an attempt to devise more Tonkin Gulf's to order. In the whole experience of the Vietnam war, the proposal was perhaps the most extreme attempt to plan systematically.

I do not think Lyndon Johnson or any other President would have thought such a program could be carried through in practice in 1964.* Yet, while hardly recalling it before my researches, I am sure it was an honest attempt to square the circle. Somehow, Hanoi had to be held off and Saigon encouraged; without too much upsetting the American public or committing the President to major decisions. The complexity of the plan was a measure of the complexity ~~of the complexity~~ of the problem and the narrowness of the confining factors, as they were seen and sensed in early September.

At any rate, when Taylor returned, both the Joint Chiefs' outright proposal and the McNaughton one came before the senior group, meeting without the President (?) on Monday, September 7th, the Labor Day holiday. My memorandum summarizing that meeting makes clear that the JCS program was rejected outright, and the McNaughton proposal shelved, although with the lingering thought that something along these lines might conceivably be needed by

* Not that I believe, even today, that forcing the issue in this manner is necessarily or in itself immoral in a war situation, although it is certainly not morally appealing. History abounds in such cases, some American, many applauded by later generations. Compare, for example, President Roosevelt's decision, without the consent of Congress, to use American destroyers to escort convoys in the Atlantic in the summer of 1941. That action actually produced attacks on two destroyers and heavy loss of American life. (Burns). Only a minority then attacked what Roosevelt had done, and hindsight opinion has been generally favorable. This 1941 action was of course as much within technical American rights as destroyer patrols of a challenging nature would have been in September 1964.

Yet, of course, the 1964 situation concerning Vietnam was basically different. Induced incidents would have been sharply criticized at once, and the effect would have been intensely divisive, tending also to force the President's hand one way or the other, which was exactly what he did not want. Thus, to the element of moral unattractiveness would have been added potent practical arguments against acting. It just was not "on." To generalize, I do not believe "deliberate provocation" by the United States is ever again likely to be adopted in any situation less total than Hitler.

October. (The idea was, in fact, never revived?) In both cases, the stated reason at the meeting was the judgment, shared by State and CIA representatives, that the South's political structure was too weak to stand the intensification of the warthere that seemed sure to result if the US escalated. Rejecting systematic or deliberately challenging measures for the time being, the group went on to recommend, in various forms, action under the headings developed in the August 14th cable. These recommendations formed the basis of the President's decisions formulated in NSAM 314, issued September 10th, after he had met with Taylor and others in a smaller group.

NSAM 314 amounted to an apparently stronger program of selected actions, with a clear statement that the US expected to retaliate against the North in the event of "any attack on U.S. units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN." ^(p. 314) The specific actions were:

1. Resumption of naval patrols, separated from 34-A and outside the 12-mile limit.
2. Continued 34-A operations, with Saigon to be urged to acknowledge these publicly.
3. ~~Initiation of limited air and ground operations into the~~ ^{Initiation of limited air and ground operations into the} corridor areas of Laos, ~~subject to discussion of the political aspects with the Lao Government and final approval from Secretary Rusk.~~ ^(Or was it merely discussion in the final decision?)

Such was the outcome of the policy debate. In the process, the President's senior advisors had indeed tried to come to grips with the ultimate stakes in Vietnam. In one exchange at the meeting of September 7th, General Wheeler said that "if the US loses in South Vietnam it will lose all of Southeast Asia" and that the American position throughout Asia would be damaged. Secretary Rusk expressed agreement, and so (perhaps notably in view of the June opinion of his own Board of National Estimates) did John McCone

of CIA. The tone of the recorded discussion on this point was strong, though in broad and shorthand terms that did not follow up, or perhaps go beyond many similar exchanges among these men.

Was there, then, at the September 7th meeting a fateful "consensus" of senior advisors that an eventual systematic program of bombing the North was "inevitable?" The question has been given emphasis by the conclusion to this effect drawn by the writer of this volume of the Pentagon Papers and highlighted by the 1971 New York Times series. (Citations.) (Use both Times articles, including first summary.) *Use first page of "Review of the Week" section the first week after publication began*

The first thing to note is that neither the anonymous writer of that volume, nor the Times, ^(HSC) claimed for a moment that the President was party to such an alleged "consensus." He was not even present, on September 7th, nor is there claim or evidence that he had at all made up his mind at this time.

The second thing to note is that the written record of the meeting records no such consensus. It is specific on much else, but avoids this topic altogether, save as one that calls for continued planning -- as of course it had since March. Even the contingency planning date of January 1, 1965, which had gone back and forth in cables, is conspicuously missing both from the summary of the September 7th meeting and from the text of NSAM 314.

Thirdly, no participant at the meeting (check) recalls any such consensus, either at this meeting or at this time. Obviously everyone at the meeting thought that at some point the issue of systematic bombing of the North might have to be faced. But this is far short of what is now claimed.

Finally, there is the very nature of such a meeting. Any gathering of the President's advisors, without him, is of course totally without Executive power under the American system. The President alone decides any

Critical issue for the Executive Branch, and there are never votes at the Cabinet² level or any other level or grouping of his advisors. This lack of power washes over to the nature of discussion. Like a strict Court, such a meeting decides what it must decide, i.e., the form of a recommendation to the President. All else is dicta -- usually avoided but in any event understood by all involved to have no standing or precedent value.

All told, the evidence against any consensus of senior advisors seems to me overwhelming ~~and conclusive~~. Again, since the President himself was not involved, I am not sure what the importance of the point really is. No one in Lyndon Johnson's Presidency had any doubt that the reality of ultimate power corresponded with its Constitutional location. His advisors would have laughed at the very idea of a consensus being meaningful without him. But those who think that the point weighs on the general issue of deception of the public must somehow learn to live without it, ^{for} it is not true.

The Growth of Doubt

a. Perhaps the best history, and incidentally the best refutation of the idea of consensus, is to follow up on the events of September and early October. To present these events in orderly fashion requires some jumping back and forth in the chronology. The central point is that, even if September 7th ~~evening~~ was a high point in internal Administration thinking, the events of September both brought about and reflected a drop in firmness and clarity.

Take first the actions approved on September 10th. Each in turn was diluted and deferred, through combinations of accident, objection, or growing caution.

The most striking was the resumed DESOTO patrol. It got under way on September 12th, and operated without incident until the night of

September 18th. On that night, the commander sent in a series of frantic action reports reminiscent of the night of August 4th -- but this time without the vital intercept evidence from North Vietnamese sources. Alarmed by the past uncertainties, McNamara on September 18th treated these reports with great skepticism and finally concluded, as indeed did the several layers of naval command, that there had been no firm basis for them. Accordingly it was formally announced that though the reports had been received the US did not believe there had been any attack. (NYT _____).

It was a straightforward and honest conclusion from the evidence. At the same time, the incident drove home the possibilities of ambiguity, and the danger of a case where evidence would be called valid by some but not certain enough for action. The only answer seemed to be to call off the patrols for the time being, and this was done by the President's order, on McNamara's recommendation. They were resumed only in mid-February 1965, after much else had happened.

As for the 34-A operations, the suggestion that Saigon acknowledge then hung fire for two weeks because of the political turmoil there. In late September, preliminary soundings indicated there would be difficulty in getting agreement, and the idea was dropped. Saigon leaders, like Souvanna Phouma in Laos, hated to admit something when Hanoi never did. The operations themselves continued, but on a very tight rein, with specific clearance on each occasion. (Cite.) As before they were very minor in nature.

The third action item, air and ground raids into the corridor areas of Laos, ran almost at once into objections within the US family. A meeting was held in Saigon on September 11th to bring together the Ambassadors in South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos, along with military commanders and the

military attache's office from Laos. This meeting, the first of many held to coordinate operations and exchange ideas, aired fully the proposed "cross-border" operations. Ambassador Unger from Vientiane at once objected that they might endanger the virtual cease-fire that had obtained since early August. He pointed out that Souvanna was already playing a difficult diplomatic hand in Paris and would not appreciate complications. (See Chapter 16 below).

Thus, what had been envisaged as fairly substantial strikes at the trail complex were watered down to extremely small and limited forays by South

Vietnamese, essentially to gather information. *By mid-October, as Taylor reported, the South Vietnamese found it was too hard to permit any operations at all in Laos. The same thing happened in the end to the proposed air operations in Laos did not make any sense, but only on a technical basis.* In mid-October, agreement was reached with Souvanna that the T-28's of his

Lao Air Force should strike selected targets in the corridor, or Panhandle, area. *(Bunker's "The War in Laos" - 1961) (JCS 4/20/61, 19/12/61)* Despite military urging that US aircraft join in the strikes, the *Richardson Decision* *General Will* expansion of operations in October included only US air cover for the T-28's, a step which the Lao regarded as essential in view of Hanoi's extended MIG capability.*

The T-28's were the only aircraft in Laos, and the operations against the Hanoi trail In sum, what might have appeared from NSAM 314 to be a somewhat stronger pattern of "action at the margin" turned out to be very little change indeed. In essence, the American Administration accepted a military *letdown*

by late September, and this remained the case through October. This was *(not still)* ~~hardly~~ the possible foreshadowing of stronger measures of which the August 14th cable had spoken.

Partly, the *Richardson* military caution reflected still another adverse turn in the most central element of the problem -- the ability of the South Vietnamese

* In fact, Hanoi after a few small incursions never did send its MIG's into action in Laos. ~~The Lao T-28 operations were generally considered effective, both in damaging the trail and dealing with occasional North Vietnamese threats to Lao government areas.~~

to run their country. If late August and early September had seemed a tragedy, the mid-September abortive coup of two disgruntled military officers was outright farce. On September (13th), before Taylor had even returned ^(Saigon?) to Washington, General Phat and Colonel Duc moved with a small military force to take over the government in Saigon. Essentially they and the elements who rallied to them were aroused by the way Khanh had yielded to the militant Buddhists; the political complexion of coup supporters ranged from Northern Catholic refugees to organized labor groups.

The Phat-Duc coup succeeded in briefly taking over the radio station and military headquarters near the Tan Son Nhut airport. Khanh and the rump government did not react rapidly, although they ~~were~~ were at once reassured by Alexis Johnson that the US continued to support the existing government and was opposed to change by coup. The ^{decision} returned out to be the attitude of slightly junior officers in the Army and Air Force, notably the head of the Air Force, then Colonel Nguyen Cao Ky, and of the Army, General Cao Van Vien. These two rallied their military forces in Saigon, surrounding the coup forces in the airport area and threatening them ^{to bomb} with bombing attack. In the end, these threats were effective, and on the 14th the coup perished out.

In Washington the immediate reaction was relief, and appreciation of the cool reporting and discreet intervention of Alexis Johnson. But the incident nailed down, if it still needed nailing, how terribly weak the Saigon political structure was. The policy review of late August and early September had come near to addressing the question whether a program of military pressure in the North could possibly work without an effective Saigon government. Discussion had gone just far enough for all to be sure that this would be a last-gasp case indeed. Yet more and more this drastic and unthought-through contingency seemed a likely forecast. (Cf. NYT comment of 8/9)

The effect of the coup episode is most vividly apparent in what President Johnson himself said in the campaign, as we shall see in a moment. All through the top of the Administration, the episode seemed to bring all thinking on the future to a stop. Whatever the feeling had been on September 7th, by September 15th the top policy circle was back at "square one," knowing that after the election the next policy review would have to start from scratch with the hardest questions.*

Thus, in the reaction to the political debacle of the attempted coup, and in the dilution of the early September decisions, there is clear evidence of a trend to greater caution and uncertainty, both present and future. Essentially, a mood of deep uncertainty and perplexity had established itself by late September.

Laos Diplomacy

f. Meanwhile, almost unnoticed in the world press and indeed known by only a few American officials, a quiet struggle was taking place in Paris, for the future of Laos. In essence, the French in September joined with the Pathet Lao in placing heavy pressure on Souvanna to move to an early Geneva Conference on Laos. Yet, Souvanna resisted these pressures, and the negotiating deadlock continued.

The forum in Paris was the meeting of the three Lao princes, Prince Souvanna for the Center and the Government of National Union, Prince Souphannouvong of the Pathet Lao, and Prince Boun Oum for the Rightist elements.

* Possible appendix

/es

Their meeting, it may be recalled, had been proposed by the British in early August, with a view to seeing whether satisfactory conditions could not be created for a conference.

The first issue before the three Princes was the attempt to restore the original cease-fire situation of 1962, which had been ruptured in the spring of 1963 and drastically in May of 1964 -- in both cases from the Communist side. As a practical matter, the fighting in Laos had ~~virtually~~ died down by mid-August, with the successful conclusion of the government's offensive. On the issuing of a formal cease-fire, Souvanna took the position, at the start of the Paris meeting in late August and early September, that the Communists must withdraw from the areas seized in May, and also that the Plain of Jars must be neutralized under ICC supervision. It was a position on which he had conferred with Ambassador Unger, but which he himself had reached and fully believed in.

Countering this, on September 15, Prince Souphannouvong made his major move. It was to offer Communist withdrawal from the May gains in return for the convening of a 14-nation conference. It was on its face a considerable concession, and the proposal had many attractions ^{lacking} -- ~~missing~~ only the element of future insurance that Souvanna sought to achieve by having the ICC truly installed in the crucial Plain of Jars to prevent further hostilities there.

For several days, the issue hung in the balance whether Souvanna might accept. The French went to incredible lengths to persuade him, entertaining him and subjecting him to a series of interviews with Frenchmen at many levels, in a combination ~~best~~ best designed to persuade him. Witnessing this process at the time, the American correspondent, Cyrus Sulaberger, comments that it was the talk of Paris, that the French appeared to be doing the work of the Chinese utterly, and that the Soviet observers were distinctly put off by the whole performance. A similar appraisal was held in Washington.

However, with some quiet American advice to stand firm, Souvanna in the end countered the Pathet Lao proposal by proposing an immediate cease-fire on August 1, to be followed by agreement on ICC supervision of the withdrawal of the pro-Communist forces and their replacement by what he regarded as neutralists. It was a stiff, but by no means unreasonable position. The introduction almost at once precipitated an impasse, and on September 11 the three leaders agreed that further meetings should be held at a lower level to discuss the issues of a cease-fire and preliminary conditions.

This in effect wound up an intense phase of preliminary negotiation. As US thinking had recognized in August, Souvanna might have decided to give way and to accept a conference. In the end, perhaps because of the very French pressure applied to get him to do so, he did not.

The episode was more than another turn in the tortuous path of negotiation concerning Laos. As one looks back, it can be seen as the high point of an effort to set in motion a train of circumstances that might have brought about de Gaulle's vision of a neutralized Indochina area. Against this effort, the US had set its face firmly ever since President Kennedy's initial reaction in early September 1963, (Pg. _____ above). For Vietnam at least, it remained the firm and consistent American position that neutralization, as de Gaulle envisaged it, meant in effect American withdrawal, and a resulting local situation in which Hanoi and its minions were bound to come out on top. The United States had accepted a neutralized Laos in the terms of the 1962 Agreement. But did not believe that the formula could be applied effectively in the far more important Vietnam case. Tactically, there might have been something to be said for the convening of a wider conference through which communication directly with Hanoi might have been advanced. However, the "procedural" issue

of such a conference was made -- largely by the French themselves -- to tie directly to the substantive question of de Gaulle's neutralization proposals for the whole area. Since these seemed impracticable in the long term, and politically disastrous in South Vietnam in the short term, the American opposition to a conference was certainly consistent. Basically, it stemmed from the total resolve throughout this period, that North Vietnam should not achieve political control over South Vietnam, either by force or through any negotiation to which the US was a direct party. All the tactical decisions flowed from this central policy position.

To round out the picture of negotiating thoughts and efforts in the September period, one must mention the U Thant approach that followed his luncheon in Washington on August 7. So far as can be determined from the fragmentary American records, at some point in September U Thant reportedly made contact with Hanoi through a Russian member of the UN Secretariat, and North Vietnam indicated a willingness to meet privately with United States representatives. It is not clear whether this report was given by U Thant to Stevenson before November, but there are several indications in the tangled record that U Thant and Stevenson, at whatever point, were in full accord that the US would not be expected to respond during the campaign season. Thus, the serious exchange between U Thant and Stevenson came only after the election.*

The Campaign Takes Over

g. In every respect, the last week in September marked the transition into the intense period of the domestic political campaign of the United States. In every campaign, there is such a major step-up point. In 1964, of course, the emotional temperature had been building up all summer, in a year already tinged with emotions from the death of President Kennedy. Yet, the change in late September was dramatic, as the two major candidates took to the road for

*On this whole episode, I give only what U Thant reported to Americans concerning his dealings with Hanoi. It is puzzling that his account has been denied by Hanoi, and not confirmed from any other source.

their first serious visits and speeches.

Typically, and certainly in 1964, the whole national mood of the United States at such periods becomes far more intense and emotional. ~~In this case, it was for the six weeks till election day, November 4.~~ In the news media, the campaign is the top story day after day

and night after night. In a nation addicted to competition, this is the great national sport, and of course for the highest stakes. The result is that situations abroad, however critical, have to break through a high noise level if they are to get any attention at all. Domestic events, especially scandals, on the other hand become magnified out of all proportion. And the tone of discourse shifts, both in what the candidates say and in media comment: subtlety and contemplation wane, and great simplicities wax. Perhaps rightly, the country feels it must find and focus on whatever really deep differences may exist between the rival candidates and parties; let the rest, for the time being, go hang.

What hangs, of course, includes most of foreign affairs. What is carnival in the nation as a whole is, as a rule, almost a hibernation period in the foreign policy branches of the Administration in power. Little is heard from the State Department during a campaign, and that little must take account of the special mood of the season.

In 1964, the onset of the serious campaign was particularly dramatic. How it affected Vietnam can perhaps be told in terms of what happened to one State Department officer⁽⁻⁾ myself.

The story starts with a brief but relevant digression in space and

* For me, as for many others, I am sure the third week of October, in this very campaign, will always be remembered less for Khrushchev, Wilson, or the Chinese atomic test than for the personal tragedy of Walter Jenkins.

*Kennan argues that he never
formed a policy of containment
15-18*

time. On September 16th, I had gone to England to attend a conference at Oxford on "China and the Peace of Asia." There I delivered a policy speech later published. For that week, then, my mind was entirely on China and the broad picture, while Oxford and the Cotswolds were a wonderful relaxing influence, the calm before a too-visible storm to come.

Then, after two days at home, I was to set off on a long-planned trip to Japan and South Korea, including the delivery of a major public speech on September 29th at the annual meeting of ~~JISI~~ the Japanese Press Association, in Tokyo. For years prominent Americans had been invited to make this speech, so that it had become almost an annual report on Japanese-American relations. This time, my staff had done an imaginative draft looking to the major change already evident in Japan's status and hence in the spirit of the bilateral relationship and its relation to the rest of East Asia.

Unfortunately, just before I left Washington, the magazine Foreign Affairs appeared with a rather startling article by George F. Kennan, whose status as the original "Mr. X" behind the containment policy (adumbrated in another Foreign Affairs article in 1947) was known the world over. Kennan, who had just spent several months in Japan, wrote in effect that the dominant

* The conference proceedings were bound in a book, China and the Peace of Asia, (New York, Praeger, 1965), edited by Alastair Buchan, whose Institute of Security Studies had been the sponsor. Years later, the volume seems to me a remarkable compilation of different scholarly and practical views of China, on the eve of all that was to come in 1965. The conference also had one element that stands out in memory, the presence for the first time of two extremely able Japanese observers at such a gathering, the only East Asians present. It is amazing to reflect that almost all those present were American and British.

sentiment there wished to escape the entangling effect of the American alliance and to opt for Swiss-style neutrality. It was the kind of judgment one might have got from Japanese Socialist and intellectual circles at the time, but the point was that -- as Ambassador Reischauer at ~~one~~ ^{once} reported -- many important Japanese ~~were~~ reading into the article the conclusion that it was the US that wished to disengage from Japan. To put the thought the other ~~way~~ way around, and to express the American view through Kennan (who had left government in 1962?) seemed to them simply to add style and force to the message. Reischauer and my Washington staff at once concluded that, instead of breaking new ground, the speech would have to undo the misunderstanding by re-stating American attachment to the alliance and the Security Treaty in unmistakable terms.

The speech drafted for me in late August was thus re-written almost totally, on the plane to Seattle, then once more on the Tokyo leg, with the aid of a Reischauer re-draft flown to me from Tokyo to Seattle. Such are the virtues of darkness on a long ^(over)westward flight. In Tokyo, Reischauer again reviewed the text, and it was rushed to the translators in the nick of time.

I have often wished ^(I wish I could) ~~I could anticipate what news a particular speech will make, by means for example of a simple computer that would take a speech and spew forth the next day's headlines.~~ In this case, the speech made only a modest impact in Tokyo; aimed at the influential circle aware of Kennan's article, it must have seemed to the average reader more of the same. ~~THEY~~

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Quite otherwise was the effect in the American press. There I had expected little notice, alas characteristic then and since on major US-Japanese issues. But the speech contained a sleeper, in the form of a short paragraph

on Vietnam, saying simply that if Hanoi kept pressing the US "could" be forced to stronger action, although we wished no wider war.* The paragraph had been drafted from current speech materials of late August, including statements by the President and Secretary Rusk, and cleared without a murmur by two or three people at staff level. All of those involved, including myself, who was of course responsible, regarded it as a routine, almost passing, reference to the subject.

However, with this paragraph in the lead, the wire stories on September 29th hit the US just as President Johnson embarked on his first major campaign trip, to New England. After a succession of vast crowds, in a dramatic day (cite Wicker), he wound up the day in Manchester, New Hampshire, where he spoke spontaneously and with great feeling. The key passage was:

"Some of our people -- Mr. Nixon, Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Scranton, and Mr. Goldwater -- have all, at some time or other, suggested the possible wisdom of going north in Vietnam. Well, now before you start attacking someone and you launch a big offensive, you better give some consideration to how you are going to protect what you have. And when a Brigadier General can walk down the street of Saigon as they did the other day, and take over the police station, the radio station, and the government without firing a shot, I don't know how much offensive we are prepared to launch. [This, of course, was a reference to the Phat/Duc attempted coup of September 13-14, described earlier.] As far as I am concerned, I want to be very cautious and careful, and use it only as a last resort, when I start dropping bombs around that are likely to involve American boys in a war in Asia with 700 million Chinese.

So just for the moment I have not thought that we were ready for American boys to do the fighting for Asian boys. What I have been trying to do, with the situation that I found, was to get the boys in Vietnam to do their own fighting with our

*"Expansion of the war outside South Viet-Nam, while not a course we want or seek, could be forced upon us by the increased external pressures of the Communists, including a rising scale of infiltration." W. P. Bundy address before the Research Institute of Japan at Tokyo on Sept. 29, 1964 (The Department of State Bulletin, October 19, 1964, pp. 534-42).

advice and with our equipment. That is the course we are following. So we are not going north and drop bombs at this stage of the game, and we are not going south and run out and leave it for the communists to take over. We have lost 190 American lives, and to each one of those 190 families this is a major war. We lost that many in Texas on the Fourth of July in wrecks. But I often wake up in the night and think about how many I could lose if I made a misstep. When we retaliated in the Tonkin Gulf, we dropped bombs on their nests where they had their PT boats housed, and we dropped them within 35 miles of the Chinese border. I don't know what you would think if they started dropping them 35 miles from your border, but I think that that is something you have to take into consideration.

So we are not going north and we are not going south; we are going to continue to try to get them to save their own freedom with their own men, with our leadership and our officer direction, and such equipment as we can furnish them. We think that losing 190 lives in the period that we have been out there is bad, but it is not like 190,000 that we might lose the first month if we escalated that war. So we are trying somehow to evolve a way, as we have in some other places, where the North Vietnamese and the Chinese communists finally, after getting worn down, conclude that they will leave their neighbors alone, and if they do we will come home tomorrow." *

Since the President did not speak from a prepared text, the depth and balance of this passage -- as it reads in retrospect -- were largely ignored in favor of the single sentence about not sending "American boys to do the fighting for Asian boys." ** Almost without exception, particularly in the wholly pro-Johnson news media of the northeast, the speech did more than any other single utterance to give the impression -- which the full text does not warrant -- that the President was rejecting the idea of stronger action in Vietnam.

This being the impression, the news tickers reaching me in Tokyo almost necessarily concluded that my speech was in conflict with that of the President. One headline, reported in the State Department's cabled press

* Remarks in Manchester to the Members of the New Hampshire Weekly Newspaper Editors Association, September 28, 1964. (Public Papers of the President, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64, Vol. II, pp. 1160-69).

** To those with long memories, these words were all too reminiscent of what Franklin Roosevelt had said at the peak of the 1940 campaign: "I am not about to send your sons into foreign wars." I doubt if the similarity was a matter of coincidence, in view of LBJ's feeling toward Roosevelt and his handling of affairs in 1939-41.

summary said, in effect, "State Department Aide Contradicts LBJ." And so it went. (NYT Editorial, 9/30).

To make matters worse, on the morning before the speech I had held a meeting at the Embassy with the local American press. There the question of attacking North Vietnam had been raised in questions, and I had answered in general terms that infiltration was part of the problem, that bombing the infiltration routes could help, but that of course it raised serious wider issues and problems. I made no secret of what every Washington reporter had known for months, that of course every aspect of the possibility of attacking the North had been examined for planning purposes. All this had been said in private many times, and by me and others in public. (SDB, 9/7)

In short, I talked to the local Tokyo group of reporters as I had talked many times to sophisticated Washington reporters (Mistake One) and believed myself clearly "on background," so that neither I nor my exact words would be mentioned in stories (Mistake Two). (Comment on "background" custom.) Unfortunately, the rules did not hold, for Robert Trumbull of the Times (a good friend then and now) proceeded to report the strongest of my remarks verbatim, without the attached qualifiers, and the Times of September 30th ran his story, attributed to a high official visiting in Tokyo, almost next to a brief item on my speech. All in all, it seemed entirely possible to me -- as I went through the next week -- that my career in the State Department, and in the Johnson Administration, would be of record brevity.

As it turned out, this fear was unwarranted. I heard nothing while in Japan or Korea, and on my return, Secretary Rusk quickly expressed understanding and forgiveness, indeed without criticism of what I had said.

What the story highlights, even more now as I reflect on it, is the sharp line of "clear air turbulence" that divides a campaign from the rest of American life over a four-year cycle. Up to late September, what I said in

Tokyo might have gone almost unnoticed in the American press; newspapers and news magazines were running dope stories, right into early October, on plans for some kind of action against North Vietnam. (Citations.) But from last September onward the campaign took over the attention of all, and the whole of public dialogue on any issue was in campaign terms.

Particularly was this true of 1964, when emotions ran higher than in any other campaign within my 40-year political memory. The President was running not merely to win, but to show the American people and the world that the ideas of Senator Goldwater were dead and powerless. Already the Great Society program was germinating, and to pass it LBJ needed a great majority in the Congress -- which in the nature of American politics could only happen on his coat-tails.

I cannot judge what was said by the President in the campaign concerning Vietnam. Certainly he spoke from the heart.* His motives were clear, and his exaggeration of a peace posture arguably no greater than that of Wilson in 1916 or his idol, Franklin Roosevelt, in 1940. (Cite Economist, June 26, 1971) Perhaps he overlooked -- later -- how aggressive and dramatic events had rescued each of these predecessors from a grave problem of credibility. But at ~~at that time~~ the time how many serious leaders in Congress, or how many informed editors and writers, really supposed either that the Vietnam problem would go away, or that Lyndon Johnson would walk away from it? And was there not, as Theodore Sorenson noted in 1971, in fact a clear difference between what Johnson did and what Goldwater would have done? (Cite NYT 1971)

At any rate, the beginning of the serious campaign in late September -- at an entirely different level of talk and emotion than before -- rang down the curtain for sure on the policy gropings of August and early September.

* Wicker

The six weeks to the election contained dramatic events, abroad even more than at home. They were a period of only silent ~~xxxx~~ musing in terms of Vietnam policy.

APPENDIX

A third set of events in mid-September took place in utmost secrecy within the planning elements of the Administration itself. Following Tonkin Gulf, there had been an exchange of memoranda between Walt Rostow in the State Department Policy Planning Staff and the opposite-number civilian planners in the ISA office of Defense, under Harry Rowen. Rostow had laid out a general strategy for striking at the source of a "war of national liberation," and by controlled pressure bringing such a war to an end. It was an old thesis, ^(1.2) expressed in more systematic terms than in the past, and with obvious bearing on the Vietnam problem. In reply, Rowen had brought up a large number of difficulties and objections, concluding all too presciently that a program of pressure could only be undertaken where US interests were regarded as vital, where the US public accepted this, and where the other side was convinced ^(1.1) the US would persevere as long as necessary. Rowen did accept, at least for purposes of argument, that the first condition applied.

From this rather theoretical exchange (which I ~~am~~ do not recall seeing myself), came the idea, by Rowen, of a second systematic "war game" on the specific case of bombing North Vietnam. The first, in April, had been general and not fully satisfactory. Now a more specific scenario could be used, drawing on the 94-target plans presented by the JCS in late August.

The war game ^(idea) was approved by McNamara and the Joint Chiefs, and teams were picked to represent the US and South Vietnam (a single team) ^(and) North Vietnam, and ^(the unit had a secret to it) China ~~separately~~, since possible large-scale Chinese intervention was, of course a key question).

In the week ^{from Sept. 10 to 15,} of ~~September 8th to 11th~~ -- ^{just after} the very week that decisions on next steps ^{had been} were being made -- several of the top policy circle and almost all the key staffs were directly involved in this game, while others (including myself) attended the final report and review on it. In essence, those who controlled the game put a high evaluation on North Vietnamese capacities and will, and a low one of those of South Vietnam. As a result, while the carrying out of the bombing program produced neither Chinese major intervention nor drastic pressures for an early conference or diplomatic surrender, neither did it produce a Hanoi withdrawal. Blue (the US and South Vietnam) persisted, but so did Orange (North Vietnam), while Red (China), gave strong support, but stayed out with its own forces. * By the end of several moves back and forth, when the time ran out, the North Vietnamese and VC ^{still} stood in a strong position ^{still} within SVN, and the US was

* The careful reader may note that at this stage no major role as a possible actor was assigned to the Soviet Union; as we shall see, this judgment changed after the departure of Khrushchev in October.

was faced with the decision whether to send in major ground forces in support of a weak ^(South Vietnam) government and a shaken population.

At a distance of several years, the account of this may seem astounding. I wish I could recall or accurately state its impact at the time. On me it simply was not great, and I find that others felt the same way. Essentially, we must have thought the men who ran the game (civilians from outside government, not expert on the area but students of conflict situations and the "war game" technique) ^(L.H.) too harsh in their judgments of how the two Vietnamese would respond, trying in effect to make the game tough and realistic. In the event, of course, they were all too correct. At the time, the exercise -- sandwiched as it was in busy days of action decision -- seemed a bit theoretical, though its effect must generally have been rather cautionary. I suppose the effect may have been greatest among those who had the time to immerse themselves in it; yet I cannot recall that any of the relevant staff members ever invoked the outcome in later discussions. Perhaps this reflects one of the most basic elements in this whole story -- how much of planning and policy review came in the middle of days already full, and without the chance to stop and reflect. Part of this is inevitable pressure, part of it undoubtedly a human failure of choice and will, to let it be so. Certainly I was conscious of both even at the time.

Chapter 16. East Asia in the Fall of 1964

a. The campaign stilled thought within the Administration on the Vietnam problem, and contributed to public over-simplification of it. During October of 1964, the world-shaking events were elsewhere. Following a domestic scandal that briefly shook President Johnson's prospects for a truly decisive victory, there came in quick succession on October 15th and 16th the announcement of Nikita Khrushchev's removal from power in the Soviet Union, the defeat of the Conservative Party by Harold Wilson's Labor Party in England, and the first nuclear test by Communist China, which thus became the fifth nuclear power in the world.

In American political terms, the President's calm and statesmanlike response to these developments, notably in a nationwide broadcast on October 18th, restored his standing. From then on his victory by an overwhelming margin was assured.

In their bearing on the impending crisis in Vietnam and more widely in East Asia, the dramatic changes abroad were not in themselves crucial. The Chinese nuclear test had long been anticipated, the Soviet change was for many months uncertain in its impact on Soviet policy, and the British change of government meant, as often, little change in underlying policy at least as regards Asia. Yet the changes serve as convenient milestones for a stock-taking of East Asia on the eve, as it were, of the dramatic developments that were to unfold from 1965 onward. What was the situation there, and how had it come to appear in the broad thinking of Americans in and out of government?

b. Of the three dramatic events that became known between 8:00 in the evening of the 15th and the early afternoon of the 16th, Washington time, only one was totally unexpected. The British election outcome had

been forecast as likely for some time, and indeed the election became very close only the last days. No outstanding foreign issues were involved, although the change was to have great importance for NATO and American policy in Europe, specifically through the early demise of the idea of a multilateral nuclear force (MLF).

So far as American official feelings were concerned, Harold Wilson had made a generally good impression over the year and a half since the death of Hugh Gaitskell, and the change was greeted calmly and with every expectation that the close ties between Britain and the United States would continue. By October 26th, the new Foreign Secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker, had visited Washington for preliminary discussions looking toward a visit by Wilson in early December. On the most crucial East Asian matter in which Britain was involved, Wilson at once made clear his intent to maintain and if necessary strengthen British help to Malaysia against the Indonesian "confrontation;" there, British forces had been strengthened in September, and during October and November were further increased from _____ to _____.

As to the Chinese nuclear test, American intelligence had for a long time believed that the Chinese were very close to this point. Earlier, before the cut-off in Soviet aid of the summer of 1960 was definitely known, it had been supposed that China would have an initial nuclear capability much earlier, and a substantial one as early as the late 1960's. In 1962 and 1963, these estimates were revised, as the cut-off became evident and the general size of Chinese installations became known through satellite photography. Through the same sources, the location and state of preparation of the main Chinese test sites could be followed with high precision, and interpreted accurately in the light of American experience.

It was this intelligence information that lay behind Secretary Rusk's public statement of September 29, 1964, that a Chinese first nuclear test was imminent. For some time, American policy and intelligence officers had been quietly talking with key Asian and Western governments, with a view to putting the Chinese step, when it occurred, in proper perspective. Now, with the Secretary's public statement, this effort was intensified. Its purpose was not to minimize the Chinese accomplishment, which was of course a considerable success in the mobilization of scientific and technical skill and resources; a dozen Western countries, at least, might have done the same on a smaller scale by this time, but for the Chinese as an underdeveloped country, the accomplishment was undeniable. Rather, what the American effort sought to make clear -- privately in advance, publicly after the test -- was the the Chinese nuclear effort would be very limited for years to come, and that American nuclear capacity would be infinitely greater as far ahead as the eye could see. Both points were made by President Johnson in a formal statement of October 16th.* At the same time, the President went as far as he constitutionally could concerning American intentions. Reaffirming American commitments, he added that the Chinese test "would have no effect upon the readiness of the United States to respond to requests from Asian nations for help in dealing with Chinese Communist aggression." (Dept. of State Bulletin, 11/2, p. 612). The veiled reference^{was} to India, among others, where there was no American commitment but considerable fear of Chinese nuclear blackmail.

The major American concern was thus to limit the repercussions of the test in Asian areas where its effect on Chinese prestige could be

* Public Papers of the President, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964, Vol. II, p. 1357

greatest and least informed. A second reaction, in the President's broadcast statement of October 18th, was to stress the continued firmness of resistance to nuclear spread; it was important that other nations not get the view that the Chinese test removed inhibitions, or changed the long-standing American view that new nuclear nations were in general immensely dangerous to world peace. It was, of course a view that had been central for President Kennedy and deeply permeated American policies throughout the 1960's.

This second view entered into the American response to Peking's proposal, accompanying the test, for an immediate summit conference to ban the use of nuclear weapons. Along with other leading Western nations, the US rejected this suggestion as a propaganda "smokescreen" to divert attention from the fact that the Chinese test had been in the atmosphere, and thus contrary to the Test Ban Treaty of 1963 -- which of course the Chinese had not signed. (Rusk and Bundy in Dept. of State Bulletin, 11/2, pp. 616-617). After a brief flurry of comment, the Chinese proposal faded from the scene.

Despite all these quieting efforts, however, there could be no question that the Chinese test signalled an important and basic change in the power status of mainland China ~~xxx~~ in the post-war world. For the reasons stated, official Administration statements aimed to cut down over-emphasis. The change remained, and was perhaps noted in more balanced form in editorials abroad and at home. (Cites). China had not only acquired a new form of military capacity which, however small, would grow over time. It had shown the capacity to achieve this without more than initial Soviet help, and it had signalled its independence of "world opinion" as expressed in the Test Ban Treaty of 1963. Since all of this had been anticipated, its

immediate impact on American official thinking was not sharp or great. But in the gradual sense, over the many years it had been in process, the event of nuclear testing was a crucial part of the overall evaluation of China as a terribly important and formidable element in East Asia and in the world balance of power. We shall see in a moment how this evaluation had developed and proceeded since mid-1963.

The third event in the trilogy, Khrushchev's ousting, was totally unexpected. The circumstantial accounts at the time made clear that he himself had been the surprised victim of a secret convocation of his colleagues in the Presidium, but none could say what the issues were, or for some time assess with any confidence the implications. At the time, most experts looked to economic difficulties and other domestic issues, while taking note of statements by the new leaders attacking Khrushchev for his flamboyant style and for reviving the very personalism he himself had seen in his 1956 denunciation of Stalin. As with other Soviet changes of leadership, the general feeling was to wait and see. In his broadcast of October 18th, President Johnson was moderate and conciliatory, in the same tone as messages from the new leadership.

Such were the three main events of October, and the way they were seen at the time in the Johnson Administration. Putting aside the British change as of lesser importance, let us draw back to assess the picture in East Asia as a whole, starting with the roles of Communist China and the Soviet Union as great powers impinging on the area, then looking at the situation in Northeast Asia (Japan, Korea, and Taiwan), and finally at the condition of Southeast Asia. To frame and fill in such a series of pictures, adding up to a view of East Asia in late 1964, is important history in itself. It is also the essential backdrop for any discussion

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of American policy decisions in the following year.

China Waxes as Russia Wanes

c. In Chapter 7, we have examined how the US viewed China and Russia in the period from 1961 to mid-1963. Briefly, in 1961 the worldwide Soviet threat was a major factor in the decision to stand firm in Vietnam, while at the same time the Soviet Union was treated, in Laos dealings, as an outside great power that might at some point offer the promise of cooperation in establishing a neutral status in Southeast Asia. When Harriman taxed Khrushchev in July of 1963 with the Laos question and past Soviet undertakings, he got no response at all, and a general impression that the Soviet Union was more concerned, even frightened about China than ever, although not yet willing to talk about it. By this time, anyone could see that Sino-Soviet relations were at a very low ebb (possibly strained by the Cuba and Indian crises of the fall of 1962 -- spell this out in Chapter 7). In repeated American intelligence judgments of the period, the question was whether there would be an outright break in all relations; the best guess was that the split would hover just short of this point.

With the perceived drop in Soviet importance in East Asia, there had been a sharp rise in the American perception of China's role and degree of threat. In 1961 and 1962, when the mainland had been starving and pocked with unrest, no one could have imagined a sharp Chinese threat to Southeast Asia; the intelligence estimates of the period were that Chinese intervention would be most reluctant even if the US engaged itself with major forces. By the end of 1962, this view had been much changed, not only in America but in South and East Asia generally, by the Chinese success in battle against India. Literally with a bang, China re-emerged as a major and forceful power in the East Asian scene.

*but its continued existence
was the result of Chinese intervention¹⁶⁷
in late 1950*

This was the picture as of the spring of 1963. From that point on, almost every development tended to build up China's position, while Chinese policy seemed to be moving into a more military and ideologically oriented phase. In the course of the bitter exchanges that began in the spring of 1963, China in effect carved out a position, in the Communist world, as the proponent of aggressive tactics and exploitation, by revolutionary methods and by force, of the weaknesses of the non-Communist world. The Soviet Union's milder line was pilloried as weak and cowardly.

Moreover, China's prestige grew to the point where the more militant line could be vigorously presented at Communist gatherings. In East Asia particularly, China began to displace Soviet influence in North Korea, which had owed almost everything to the USSR from its founding¹⁶⁸ 1945. Likewise in North Vietnam, where by the spring of 1964 the apparently favored group in the leadership took the Chinese line, though Ho himself stayed more aloof. Among the Communist parties of the area, China completely ousted Soviet influence in the PKI of Indonesia, the largest and most promising of any Communist party not yet in power, while managing at the same time to gain strong influence on Sukarno himself and on many of his top civilians, by many favors including encouragement (perhaps instigation) of confrontation¹⁶⁹ with Malaya. (Jones.)

With these gains in the Communist world went recovery at home. The years 1963 and 1964 saw China come back strongly from the near-famine and despair of the 1961-62 period, fill in the deep trough left by the Great Leap Forward of 1958 and its aftermath, and start to show once again the kind of growth rates that had so impressed East Asia and the world from 1954 to 1957. By no means was China an economic giant, nor did the recovery

generate resources for more than a very modest external program, or for real improvement in China's increasingly obsolescent military posture by comparison at least with the forces of advanced nations. But China was back on its feet, its people content, its leadership apparently secure and united to a degree unique in the history of Communist nations or indeed almost any others.

From this base, China began in 1963 and 1964 to strengthen its position greatly in four areas. The first of these was in South Asia. Pakistani resentment at the policy of the US and USSR in extending continued military aid to India, during but especially after the Indo-Chinese conflict, had by (late 1963) created a situation ripe for Chinese intervention. From official visits, the relationship between China and Pakistan expanded to economic ties and military aid, all pushed on the Pakistani side by the militant and anti-Western Z. A. Bhutto, who became foreign minister in _____, and steered his country much closer to Sukarno as well as to the Chinese. The United States continued to be the principal supplier of military equipment to Pakistan, and in fact made great efforts to avoid an arms race and to confine its new military aid to India to units and areas relevant to the Chinese threat and not affecting the balance between India and Pakistan. * Moreover, the Western aid consortium, led by the World Bank and with the US the leading contributor, was extending vast economic aid, which at this time was making Pakistan apparently a model demonstration of progress. Nonetheless, the rooted Pakistani fear of India was such

* Cite Bowles, and rejection of his pleas, in late 1963 and early 1964 both.

that, with the Soviet Union now also giving big help to India, the Pakistani turned to China -- which promptly moved in hard. It was a classic great-power maneuver, since President Ayub of Pakistan was no ideological friend of China or any other Communist nation. Moreover, although part of the motive could have been found in the traditional Chinese policy of dividing external enemies, any fear of India seemed after 1962 perhaps less a factor than the apparent Chinese desire to fish in troubled waters and promote trouble that might in the end lead to an expansion of China's own influence. In short, China's policy in Pakistan seemed as much "offensive" as "defensive" by late 1964.

Second, the Chinese began to work hard within the Afro-Asian grouping of nations. This grouping had been formed originally around the landmark Bandung meeting of April 18-24, 1955, in which Chou En-lai had been a brilliant and appealing participant. After 1957, the Chinese had ceased to play much role, but in 1963 and 1964 they came back into action, working with their Asian friends (no longer, of course, India) and also with African countries.

Africa was the third area of special effort. (Details, starting perhaps with Chou visit of June-July 1964.)

Finally, the Chinese in this period became much more active in their southern neighborhood, Southeast Asia. Above all, Chinese ties with Indonesia became closer and closer. Part of this was with the PKI, which was itself close to Sukarno, but a great deal more was with non-Communist Indonesian leaders both civilian and military. When Indonesia embarked on confrontation with Malaysia, in the fall of 1963, the Soviet Union gave only formal support, but the Chinese pitched in fully both on the propaganda front and with material help. Concurrently, Chinese economic aid gradually

replaced the vast Soviet outpourings of the early 1960's; although comparatively small in total, it was focussed on Sukarno's favorite prestige projects, such as stadiums, etc.

Moreover, within the Indochina area itself, the Chinese actively and with some success courted Sihanouk in Cambodia from late 1963 onward. In this they were of course aided by Sihanouk's conviction, from mid-1963 on, that Hanoi would end up in control of a united Communist Vietnam, and perhaps to some extent by the border incidents in which he was caught, as he well knew, in the middle between the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, on the one hand, and the South Vietnamese and Americans on the other. All through the spring and summer of 1964, as Sihanouk went back and forth on UN devices, he must have been weighing whether China could help him. Finally, in the fall, a full-dress visit to Peking appeared to nail down a policy of cultivating the Chinese on the theory that they might protect him against North Vietnam. From Peking's standpoint, it was a case of having a useful position of influence, without attempting more for the time being. Sihanouk, like Sukarno, became a strident talker about "neo-colonialism" by the West, and an ardent backer of China's general line in the Afro-Asian grouping. At the same time, he sought to keep his relations with Hanoi on an even keel, so that Phnom Penh was to become the site of a meeting of Communist parties throughout Indochina in February of 1965. By late 1964, in a word, Sihanouk had bent very far with a prevailing wind that he obviously saw as coming from the East.

In these four areas -- South Asia, the Afro-Asian grouping, Africa, and Southeast Asia -- China was thus steadily more active and successful in the 1963-64 period. One must not over-emphasize either the uniformity of

Chinese policy or its degree of success as of the end of 1964. China was playing different games in different places, from great power politics in Pakistan through an appeal to color in the Afro-Asian grouping (to exclude the Soviet Union as not validly Asian, for example) over to a more strictly ideological approach with the PKI in Indonesia. In impact, China had not in any sense become a model for the developing world it sought to influence: the debacle of the Great Leap was too fresh in mind for that. (See Hilsman, 12/13/64, Dept. of State Bulletin.) What it was doing, case by case and weakness by weakness, was to probe and thrust for greater influence in Asia and Africa. It was an active and opportunistic policy, which by the fall of 1964 had achieved quite a lot and gave promise of achieving a great deal more.

Such were the observable facts about Chinese policy and action during this period. Within the US government, they registered in a slowly rising level of concern, visible clearly in the speeches of senior policy makers, less easy to trace in the internal intelligence judgments of the period. Indeed, all through this period, and afterward through 1965, the top policy men -- Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Secretary Rusk, and Assistant Secretaries Hilsman and myself -- spoke rather more bluntly than the private papers of the intelligence agencies and China watchers. The general consensus in both groups moved in a tougher direction, but more so among the policy makers.

President Kennedy, in particular, had long held strong personal views on China. Not by coincidence I am sure, these surfaced most strongly in the summer of 1963, just as the Test Ban Treaty had been concluded. On August 1, he was asked at a press conference how he assessed the power and threat of Communist China. The response was:

"Well, we assess its power at 700 million people, increasing at 14 million or 15 million a year, surrounded by countries which are, in every case but one, much smaller, which are faced with very difficult geographic and social problems, which do not have a strong national history. So that we find a great, powerful force in China, organized and directed by the government along Stalinist lines, surrounded by weaker countries. So this we regard as a menacing situation.

In addition, as I said, that government is not only Stalinist, in its internal actions, but also has called for war, international war, in order to advance the final success of the Communist cause. We regard that as a menacing factor. And then you introduce into that mix, nuclear weapons. As you say, it may take some years, maybe a decade, before they become a full-fledged nuclear power, but we are going to be around in the 1970's, and we would like to take some steps now which would lessen that prospect that a future President might have to deal with.

I would regard that combination, if it is still in existence in the 1970's, of weak countries around it, 700 million people, a Stalinist internal regime, and nuclear powers, and a government determined on war as a means of bringing about its ultimate success, as potentially a more dangerous situation than any we faced since the end of the Second World War, because the Russians pursued in most cases their ambitions with some caution. Even in the case of the most overt aggression, which was the North Korean invasion of South Korea, other forces were used and not the Russians." *

This, of course, dealt with the long-term threat. But only a month later, in a statement already quoted as part of the story of the Dien crisis, he spoke in a more immediate vein of his belief in the "domino theory," resting his answer above all on the way that China loomed large and menacing in relation to the countries of Southeast Asia.

The President's words on these informal and spontaneous occasions were never repeated so strongly in any set speeches, and indeed he never spoke formally at any length on Chinese policy or on the basic concepts

* Public Papers of the President, John F. Kennedy, 1963, p. 616

guiding American policy in East Asia and the Pacific. Secretary Rusk likewise usually spoke briefly and sternly, reflecting basic views more reminiscent of the formulae of the 1950's than the thoughts of President Kennedy. Both men had personal and well-developed views, combining in their assessment of Chinese purposes elements of great power politics and sheer mass with those of ideology.

The most thoughtful and sophisticated statement of the consensus below these top individuals came in the December 1963 speech of Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman. By his account, this was not cleared with Secretary Rusk; though no part of it is in contradiction to the Secretary's frequent remarks, the tone is significantly different. (Cite) Above all, there were two aspects that caused most comment at the time. First, the speech by clear implication accepted that Communist rule of the mainland would continue for the indefinite future -- an idea generally shared for a long time in and out of government, but never stated in so many words. Second, the speech spoke of leaving the door open "to the possibility of change" and to the ending of China's isolation from the "community of man."

Beyond these two aspects, which led many liberals to praise the speech highly (footnote to Hilsman and Galbraith), the speech went further than any other of the period to spell out the basic US policy. Its view of Chinese policy was not gentle. Mainland China was seen as "the torchbearer of a rigid totalitarian ideology that threatens all its neighbors", as sharing with the Soviet Union "the goal of communizing the world," but -- in contrast to the greater reasonableness of the Soviet Union -- as "wedded to a fundamentalist form of communism which emphasizes violent revolution, even if it threatens the physical ruin of the civilized world." *

* "US Policy Toward Communist China," Dept. of State Bulletin, *JAN. 6, 1964*
 pp. 11-17, *Address before Commonwealth Club of San Francisco,*
December 13, 1963.

Moreover, in contrast to the strength of most of the Soviet periphery, Europe in particular, Communist China's neighbors offered "a wider range of opportunities for aggression and subversion . . . , which renders it even more important that in dealing with the Peiping regime we not permit that regime to underestimate free-world firmness and determination."

Summing up, Hilsman omitted the word "containment" (which indeed does not occur in other speeches from government sources), but defined the basic concept in terms that must have seemed to any reader to describe the policy that had gone under that name with the USSR. He said:

"We believe that policies of strength and firmness, accompanied by a constant readiness to negotiate--policies long and effectively pursued with the Soviet Union--will best promote the changes which must take place on the China mainland before we can hope to achieve long-sought conditions of peace, security, and progress in this half of the globe."

Thus, the view stated by Hilsman amounted to a containment policy, in the fact of a generally thrusting picture of Chinese behavior and intentions. This underlying view doubtless entered into the categorical rejection of French ideas of neutralization in Southeast Asia, already discussed. It was explicit in the American discomfort at the French recognition of Peking in January of 1964: the formal State Department comment, rare among close allies, was that the United States "regrets France's decision. We have repeatedly expressed to the Government of France the reasons why we consider that this would be an unfortunate step, particularly at a time when the Chinese Communists are actively promoting aggression and subversion in Southeast Asia and elsewhere." (Statement of 1/27/64, American Foreign Policy Documents, p. 872.) Quite possibly, the American attitude on this occasion was seen in Peking as withdrawing whatever olive branch had been contained in Hilsman's "open door" reference of the previous month; at any rate, neither Peking nor Washington moved toward any change in communication

or contact during 1963 or 1964, although the Warsaw talks continued at roughly (3 month) intervals. Apart from specific matters such as the release of Americans held in China, the constant Chinese theme of this whole period was that no improvement in relations was possible unless the US abandoned Taiwan and the Nationalist Chinese government there. (Cite to Rusk, 11/11/64, Dept. of State Bulletin, Nov. 30, 1964, pp. 771-72.)

When I became Assistant Secretary in March of 1964, there was no conscious change in policy or assessment concerning China. Vietnam was treated overwhelmingly as a North Vietnamese affair, and the "confrontation" against Malaysia as an Indonesian one. Yet the larger beneficiary in both cases, if success were achieved, was increasingly seen during the year as Communist China. Neither in 1964 nor later, so far as I could tell, did the long-term threat of China weigh on President Johnson's mind as vividly as it had on that of President Kennedy. Rather he inherited and accepted the picture of a militant China and the policy of working to contain China, by helping the nations around the periphery to defend themselves and to make progress. It was in this last area -- "ignorance, poverty and disease" as he was to label it over and over -- that LBJ's personal imprint and concern were most evident, in the years after 1964. In that first year, the emphasis was on defense in East Asia. Then and always, LBJ was deeply concerned about China; neither in private record or public word will one find traces of extreme ideological repulsion or of the rejected-missionary attitudes of so many Americans in the 1950's.

No question, however, that the Administration judgment of China did tend to harden somewhat during 1964. Where it stood by the fall is made entirely clear, so far as words could do so, in the two major speeches I delivered in September, at Oxford and then in Tokyo. *

* The full Oxford speech will be found in Alastair Buchan (ed.) China and the Peace of Asia (New York, Praeger, 1965). The full Tokyo speech is in AFP Docs, 1964, pp. 224-244 and DSB, 10/19/64, pp. 534-542.)

As I recounted at the end of the last chapter, the Tokyo speech was revised at the last moment to emphasize American adherence to the Security Treaty with Japan. This may have made it a shade more firm in tone than it would otherwise have been, but only a shade. What it said on American policy and the American view of China was as close as one could come to accuracy and scope in defining the government view. It said:

" . . . A central task of our foreign policy is, thus, to cope with the Communist threat--particularly that of Communist China--while at the same time working in positive terms to promote the economic, social, and political progress of the free nations.

Communist China's foreign policy is fashioned by men whose whole life has been one of struggle, who are thoroughly wedded to a fundamentalist concept of communism, who have grown rigid and intransigent even in the face of overwhelming proof that the 19th-century doctrines of Karl Marx are hopelessly inadequate to meet the 20th-century problems of China. Monumentally convinced of the correctness of their position, they view all who disagree with them, including even the Russians, as old and bad and decadent. Neutralists are tolerated only to the extent that they are moving in the direction desired by Peiping.

I do not claim to know what their precise goals are. Are these goals to be defined in territorial terms, and, if so, what territories? Or could their goals be better described in terms of their quest for power and status and of gaining control and influence over other nations? Or are their goals directed more at exploiting the divisions and the difficulties of the countries of the free world, especially those in bordering areas? I suspect that all these and other elements are involved. But in any event the record of Communist China's behavior in recent years--against the offshore islands, Tibet, and India--should leave us in no doubt of her militant and expansionist outlook.

More recently we have evidence in the continuing statements of Chinese Communist leaders, expressed most forcefully in the course of their ideological dispute with the Soviet Union. They say (as in their June 14, 1964, letter to the Soviet Communist Party) that 'two-thirds of the world's population need to make revolution.' They add that the revolution must be violent: 'Violent revolution is a universal law of proletarian revolution. To realize the transition to socialism the proletariat must wage armed struggle, smash the old state machine, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.'

Now it may be argued that the leaders of Communist China do not really mean all that they say, but I think it is a good rule of thumb to believe most of what dictators say about their intentions.

Finally, we should note that the severest indictments of Chinese Communist bellicosity come from the Soviet Union itself, and, because of the close relationship that until recently marked Moscow-Peiping affairs, the Soviet Union may be in a good position to judge what Communist China is up to.

To say that Communist China is fundamentally militant is not inconsistent with the view that she may be tactically cautious when confronted with major force. Unquestionably our United States strategic and conventional capabilities, supplementing the efforts of free Asian nations, have made Communist China reluctant to embark on the older forms of naked aggression. Instead they prefer what Premier Khrushchev has called 'wars of national liberation'--support to guerrillas, training of saboteurs, and the creation of Communist-dominated 'national fronts.' Fortunately Japan and other countries with internal stability and strength are not susceptible to this type of aggression.

→ I do not say that this will always be the picture of the policy of the Asian Communist nations. They confront tremendous internal problems. Like Communist countries everywhere they have not yet found the answer to the basic problem of agricultural production, much less of carrying out a true industrial or scientific revolution along the lines on which you in Japan have led the way. If their leaders were reasonable, or even pragmatic, the Communist nations of Asia should recognize that they cannot afford to embark on outside adventures that draw upon resources so urgently needed at home.

Thus we do not rule out the possibility that the passage of time will bring about desirable changes in the outlook of Communist China, North Korea, and North Viet-Nam. But clearly this cannot come about unless Communist expansionism is deterred and completely frustrated and unless, too, the conduct of all our relationships with Communist China gives her no encouragement that a continued militant course can be accepted.

So long as Peiping, as well as Hanoi and Pyongyang, continue on their present course, I see no basic change in United States policy toward mainland China. It is inconceivable to me that, at a time when Communist China is stridently proclaiming a militant revolutionary thesis and bearing out its threats with actions that undermine the security of nations both in Asia

and Africa and even in the Americas, we should relax our guard. It remains the first requirement of our policy to help maintain adequate free-world military strength in order to deter aggression or, where aggression or threats to the peace occur, to be able to cope with such threats effectively. Without such capability to keep the peace, there can be no peace. Nor can there be any real progress in improving the well-being and satisfying the aspirations of the people in Asia.*

From this point, the speech went on to discuss economic and social progress (the original intended highlight before the last-minute changes), regional cooperation, the importance of nationalism, and ultimate purposes of peace. The sum total was a more rounded and definitive speech than, to my great regret, I was to make in formal style for a long time to come. Harsh and unshaded as I find some of the wording in hindsight, the speech "tells it like it was." Perhaps there is some room for reflection in the fact that in such a speech -- released fully in Washington -- the only item the American press found noteworthy was the sentence quoted in the last chapter concerning Vietnam. Of such is the problem of communicating through the written and spoken word on tough foreign policy questions in the present era. Or perhaps it was that my words were taken for granted by the informed press, as the reflection of a policy and an attitude they had come to accept without question. Anyway, what I said was neither news nor the stuff of comment, at the time.

So much for the views of American policy-makers concerning China in 1963 and 1964. For students of the workings of government, no one of the speeches I have quoted was drawn from any single or agreed internal statement of policy on East Asia, such as the Eisenhower government had worked

Dept. of State Bulletin, Oct. 19, 1964, pp. 535-36.

out at intervals in the 1950's or the Truman Administration had in NSC 68, for the military expression of the containment policy toward the USSR in 1950. (Cite Acheson.) As the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations abandoned this practice (see Chapter _____ above), one result was to make major speeches even more important than in the past as a vehicle for codifying what was being done and thought. Such was the case at least with the speeches by Hilsman and myself; both were our own, but also reflected the contributions of many in the Far Eastern Bureau and in the intelligence sections of the Department. These men by this time included few directly associated with China thinking in the 1950's and indeed some at senior levels, who had been exiled from Asian assignments during that period. Among those present, my broad recollection is that line officers with long experience in Asia tended to be somewhat harsher in their judgment of China than younger men whose focus had been purely Chinese.

The most discernible differences were that the younger men tended to discount Chinese rhetoric more heavily and to see a higher degree of defensive motives in Chinese behavior.*

But there were no sharp gulfs in any civilian circles concerned with policy or intelligence toward China. Perhaps, as we shall see in the next chapter, the prevailing judgment in military circles was harsher,

* This last point bears particularly on the Chinese conflict with India. As I have said earlier, this event affected me strongly, perhaps because I had a large action responsibility for aid to India at the time. Even today, I find it hard to accept that either evasive diplomacy or troop movements on the part of India really warranted the Chinese military offensive. To me it remains the beginning of a tough forward policy by China in South Asia, defensive in the sense that it is protecting Peking's policy of totally Sinicising Tibet, but over the decade of the 1960's going way beyond defensive needs or traditional Chinese dividing of external enemies.

and by the same token one finds in the guarded language of intelligence estimates a more reserved picture, conceding Chinese growing militancy and ideological assertiveness, but stressing also their tactical caution. The sum and substance was that, while the American government was not alarmed about China to the extent of seeing grave possibilities of military attack, it did see in the total pattern of Chinese behavior and expressed ideology a very great cause for concern, that had come to focus most specifically on Southeast Asia. This fundamental judgment underlay all the policy decisions that were to come during 1965. Its validity or degree of error, remains one of the crucial verdicts history must render in assessing those decisions.

Against this picture of China in East Asia, that of the Soviet Union was considerably milder. Not that, as some have suggested, (find cites or drop) American policy in mid-1963 decided that co-existence with the USSR had now been achieved, and turned to deal with the other great Communist power in China. The decisions of 1963 and 1964 in Vietnam, starting with the change of policy toward Diem, were hardly of a sort to "deal with" North Vietnam, let alone Communist China. They and other American actions in Asia were what in football would be called a scrambling defense, at best. Nor was there a direct overall relationship between Chinese rise and Soviet fall in Asia. Some of the Chinese gains, for example in their influence with Sukarno and the PKI in Indonesia, was indeed at the expense of Soviet hopes and a humiliating outcome for Soviet efforts. But a good part of Soviet frustration in Asia came from non-Chinese factors, such as Hanoi's refusal to permit the 1962 Accords to work in Laos. The net of it all was that what Khrushchev had undertaken in 1960-61 as a limited effort to make hay in Southeast Asia, leading off with Indonesia and Laos, had by 1963 produced little but heartache and insult. It may have seemed to Moscow the last straw when, as the story plausibly reached Washington, the Soviet top troubleshooter, Anastas Mikoyan (Sp47), was greeted very coldly in Djakarta in June of 1964, while Aidit, the head of the PKI, ostentatiously went to sleep on the platform.

Meanwhile, the Soviets were doing a lot more in India, with the genuine effort to provide military and economic help appearing to have subordinated completely any underlying intent to take political or subversive advantage. In a very rough way, the US and USSR were for once acting in parallel to strengthen a major nation.

Finally, as already noted, the level of vituperation between the USSR and China had hit a high point in 1963 and sustained it through 1964. Beginning in January 1964, the first reports had been received of possible military trouble on the Siberian frontiers. (Check). How all this registered in Washington can be simply summed up in one more short passage from my Tokyo speech of September 29, 1964:

"We recognize the profound implications of the Sino-Soviet rift and the possibility that it may lead to greater tension between the USSR and Communist China in the northern regions. But we doubt that the USSR has yet abandoned her Communist expansionist aims, and certainly not to the point where in the foreseeable future she could be relied upon to play a constructive role in assisting other nations to defend themselves against Communist China. There may be a long-term hope in this direction, but let us recognize always that the differences between the USSR and Communist China are still concerned primarily not with their basic objectives but rather with the degree of violence to be employed to achieve those objectives.' And let us recognize too that, to the extent that Soviet policy has changed or may change in the future, this will be in large part due to the fact that we, in partnership with other free-world nations, have maintained a military posture adequate to deter and to defeat any aggressive action." *

When Khrushchev fell, parts of this assessment became at once uncertain. Khrushchev had come to symbolize extreme Sino-Soviet friction on the one hand, and on the other a general reduction in Soviet interest and influence in Southeast Asia. Had these positions been major causes of his removal?

No American could tell, nor was there any real evidence by which to judge Brezhnev and Kosygin. With Khrushchev many Americans had come to have a real feeling for his attitudes: crude as he might be, you knew where you stood, and much about his underlying views. Now the personalities

at the top were almost an unknown quantity. The most that the first intelligence reports could say was that the new top men were less anti-Stalin than Khrushchev and might for this reason reduce the heat in the Sino-Soviet relationship. This judgment, to jump ahead for a moment, appeared to be confirmed when Chou En-lai came to the Soviet anniversary celebration of November 7th, and stayed for five days of talks. However, the only concrete result was an announced Soviet decision to postpone a December meeting of Communist leaders which had clearly been designed to pillory the Chinese.

By mid-November, one could say only that the atmosphere was less strained, and the level of personal invective reduced sharply. Ideological differences did not seem to have been resolved. A period of slow testing and experiment seemed in prospect, but with little chance that the two Communist giants would bury their deep-seated antagonisms and rivalries.

The Risen Sun

d. October of 1964 is, by coincidence, a peculiarly good time to look at Japan. The month contained both a change of Prime Ministers and the event that more than any other came rapidly to symbolize Japan's re-emergence into power and respectability -- the Tokyo Olympic Games.

From _____ 1960 to October of 1964, Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda had brought Japan quietly along, governing with what Japanese call a "low posture," stressing consensus at home, concentration on economic growth, and a restrained policy abroad. From the grave stresses of the spring of 1960, which had threatened internal Japanese stability even more than Japanese-American relations, political life had moved a long way. In voting percentages, the left gained slowly, election by election, so that it seemed safe to predict that the conservative Liberal Democratic Party would be defeated by the late 1960's (Cite Reischauer prediction in late 1962 in notebook). On the other hand, the ideas and outlook of the same "left" seemed to be moving perceptibly toward the center. Labor antagonisms toward industry, socialist and Marxist views in any strident form, found themselves dealing with the simple fact that the "system" was working. Economics were slowly influencing politics, and economics in Japan were doing very well indeed. After a lull in 1962, when the spectacular 10% growth rate of the previous five years dropped to _____, the upward march resumed in 1963 and 1964.

Then came the Olympic Games. Faced with the challenge of playing host to the world, the Japanese suddenly demonstrated their capacity for imaginative and sustained team effort toward a defined goal. By the end of 1963, a Tokyo that had always been a confused jumble of streets -- with many Japanese quietly ready to blame the Americans for not having re-shaped

the city during the Occupation -- seemed likely to be an ugly and frustrating site for the games. The main Olympic buildings were well along, and in the new stream of Japanese architecture. But the problem of transportation seemed likely to spoil the whole show. Then the Japanese Minister of ~~Internal Affairs~~ Transportation, Kono, a man with personal ambitions to go to the top which he died too soon to realize, conceived in secrecy the plans for building a whole new series of raised highways above the main choking arteries of Tokyo. Almost overnight, the necessary ordinances were passed to permit condemnation of land, three-shift construction crews went to work, and within _____ months the new roads were up. As a result, the Olympics went smoothly, with the new intercontinental satellite networks making possible their broadcasting in America and Europe within hours after the events. (Cite Guillain for all this.)

It was, in truth, a turning point visible to the most sober observer. Without a trace of pre-war stiffness and arrogance, Japan had shown itself a nation of both culture and capacity. It was said that, for the closing ceremonies of the games, with the sun setting and darkness descending on the athletes of many nations mingling all together in a confused parade, _____% of Japanese were watching at their television sets. To them, the sun of their country had surely risen again. Indeed, many watchers abroad can still recall that moving scene: it seemed a good moment for the world as a whole, and the better for being in Tokyo.

In the more serious business of the world, Japan had come rapidly to assume world stature. In _____, she had been admitted to membership in the OECD, and in _____ to the DAC, the club of advanced countries in position to give economic aid to the developing world. Japanese GNP had

* Robert Guillain, "The Japanese Challenge" (J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia and New York, 1970)

by 1964 risen to a respectable _____, (ranking alongside European countries), although any Japanese would quickly point out that with a population of _____ this meant a per capita GNP of only _____, as against _____ in the US and _____ in Britain. Japan's growth rate had both confounded the projections of the turn of the decade. *

And for helped any country at a slow its income level.

When it came to foreign policy, however, Japan was still turned inward. Now a world power in economic terms, she was as yet hardly a significant force in the East Asian region. Reparations had paved the way for a slow growth of Japanese trade in Southeast Asia, and Japan had developed a thriving commerce with Taiwan. (Olsen.)

Moreover, and perhaps most important to Japanese themselves, trade between China and Japan had resumed in late 1962, after a four-year break brought on by Peking during its Great Leap period (check). By 1964, the policy had been defined by Ikeda as the separation of economics from politics in dealings with the major Communist nations, and at the same time acting in consonance with the practices of other free world countries. (1964 US-J Communique, Notebook). Japanese of all political persuasions backed this policy, which conformed to a strong Japanese desire to improve ties that ran so deep in history, and for whose rupture many Japanese continued to feel acute guilt. In the fall of 1964, there had begun a new element, the exchange of journalists between the two countries.

These Japanese moves toward China had been the proof of Japan's growing independence. At no time had the United States interposed any

* Was it not by 1964 equal to what the goals report thought it would be by 1970?)

objection, although the Japanese leaders, especially in the right wing of the LDP, were undoubtedly highly sensitive to American reactions, and may have argued that the United States would object if Japan tried to go further, or let political factors join economic.

All the Japanese policies of 1961-64 had borne the stamp of Prime Minister Ikeda. As he fell mortally ill in the late summer of 1964, the LDP had its usual quiet process of selecting a new leader from the various factions of the party. For reasons far more of personality than policy, the choice fell on Eisaku Sato. Since he was the brother of Nobosuke Kishi, whose tenure as Prime Minister had been "high posture" and assertive in contrast to Ikeda, one might have read into that fact a change in mood, and the beginning of a more downright style of leadership. As of October, however, and for a long time thereafter, Sato felt his way cautiously and the change was in itself not notable at the time.

In all this process of growth and evolution since 1961, the United States had played its hand quietly. Ambassador Reischauer had done an extraordinary job both in his official dealings and in his frequent speeches and appearance speaking flawless Japanese and making full use of his prestige as a scholar. In 1961 and 1962, the Japanese even came to have a nickname for his forays into the leftist university and intellectual world: they became "the Resichauer offensive." So effective was the Ambassador in quietly expressing a point of view toward Asia with which thoughtful Japanese could sympathize and agree, that the left in the end struck back through the crude means of mass demonstrations and violence on campuses where he was scheduled to speak. By 1964, this phase had come to an end, but the message continued to sink in through other channels. The Ambassador came to

symbolize a trusting and deeply friendly American attitude toward Japan, treating her no longer as a "12-year old" (MacArthur's phrase), or even as a "nephew" (Ikeda's) but more and more as a true partner. When, in the spring of 1964, a Japanese fanatic stabbed Reischauer in the lobby of the American Embassy, the outpouring of shame and sympathy was tremendous.

> (Cite Keyes Beech.) By the fall, Reischauer had made a miraculous recovery from the stabbing and transfusion-induced serious hepatitis, and was back on the job.

In American dealings with Japan, the stress right through 1964 was overwhelmingly on economic matters. The cabinet-level joint meetings of the fall of 1961 and 1962, and of January 1964 -- to which, in November of 1963 Rusk and others had been flying when President Kennedy was assassinated -- contained almost no serious political discussion, or broad talk concerning Asia, even in the surrounding informal sessions. Likewise, the business at both ends was mostly economic -- fish and airlines, as I recall, in my own first months of State Department service.

More broadly, the underlying importance of Japan was clear throughout the American government. Even though the United States had not yet taken to consulting with Japan on most Asian matters, as was later to be the case, any assessment of Asia or of American policy there started with how Japan was acting or would react. Most definitely -- as explicit papers of the period show over and over -- the United States did not look to Japan assuming any new or additional military role, or to any enlargement, at this point, even of Japan's small defense forces for the defense of Japanese territory itself. Apart from any question of military strength, Japan was seen in essence as the most potentially powerful nation in East Asia, and the nation whose future orientation and attitudes weighed as heavily for

the peace of Asia as Germany's for that of Europe. By the fall of 1964, Japan's re-emergence had registered clearly, and with it the sense that the coming years would bring a test of what kind of country the new Japan would decide to be in the world. In any looking back on the years since 1945, Japan seemed a bright success for American policy, but the transition of the 1960's came so rapidly there was no time for self-congratulation. Of Course, Japan was not transformed within, nor perhaps would the wisest Americans ever have wished it so. But it seemed obvious that democracy and free institutions, both political and economic, had put down deeper roots than would have seemed possible in 1945. Above all, this was a highly responsible nation, taking care of its own affairs first and foremost, but perhaps ready to assume large (larger ?) constructive responsibilities in the economic growth of East Asia.

Normalization between Japan and Korea

e. In this same fall of 1964, the Japanese were wrestling with one acute diplomatic problem in which the United States was a close observer. This was the question of normalizing relations with South Korea, the country that Japanese themselves had called "a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan." (Cite.) Ever since the mid-Fifties, there had been efforts to bring the two nations together, but these had foundered every time -- first on the rock of Syngman Rhee's resistance as long as he was President of Korea, and then from lack of a will in both governments to overcome popular objections. On the Korean side, these stemmed, of course, from the forty years of harsh Japanese occupation; Koreans put their feelings, and future worries, into the standard query: were the Japanese "sincere"? The Japanese, for their part, tended to look upon the Koreans much as Britons looked at Irish in the 19th and 20th centuries, a disorderly lot, not to be

trusted, and all the more disliked because of some sense of guilt for the past.

Yet there were better feelings on both sides, and by 1964 these had a chance to work. In the spring, an agreement had seemed near, only to be broken apart by Korean outbreaks, directed in large part at the Korean negotiator, Kim Chong-p'il, who was reported (plausibly in light of his domestic reputation in Korea) to be feathering his personal nest from Japanese reparations to come. By October, President Park on the Korean side had prepared for a new and determined effort by appointing a young, energetic, and expendable Foreign Minister, Lee Ton Wong. His counterpart in the coming negotiations was to be the new Japanese Foreign Minister, Etsatsuburo Shiina. It was a hopeful setting, and in my own visit to Japan and Korea of September and early October, it fell to me to play in public and private, to the full, the role of quiet encouragement that Berger in Seoul and Reischauer in Tokyo had developed over the years. This time, though, it seemed to be the real thing, which could either break apart again, and thus gravely weaken the emerging structure of a coherent Northeast Asia, or by coming off mark a big forward step in the area and in the confidence and assurance of both nations.

Over the next year, it did in fact come off, because both governments really put their minds and best efforts to it and gave it top priority. But as of October 1964 it was, in any balance sheet of how East Asia stood, both a hope and a worry.

Progress in Korea and the Republic of China

f. By the fall of 1964, Park Chung Hee had been in control of South Korea for nearly three and a half years, first as Chairman of a military group, since November 196³4 as an elected civilian President. His regime had had its ups and downs, including some big mistakes concerning both the economy and the transition to democratic political procedures. But somehow, by what Americans in their West call "main strength and awkwardness," Park had pulled his country out of the dark rut of 1959 to early 1961, and set his people on the road to something better.

We left the Korean story in the summer of 1962, with the initial stages of recovery accomplished, a recast American aid program, and the Park regime pledged to produce a Constitution and to permit renewed political activity in January of 1963, with elections to come sometime in the spring.

The process through which Korea passed in the next two years became for many American professionals, in a detailed and specific sense, and for many senior Americans in a more intangible way, a touchstone and partial model for later hopes and plans in South Vietnam. Thus, it is perhaps worth describing in some detail.

The Constitution was written in the summer of 1962 by a team of military men, civilian lawyers, and professors. Drawing on the experience of many countries, the provisions for a strong President might have been styled French, those limiting the power of the legislature to delay or obstruct bore traces of both France and Germany, while the Constitution followed the model of Greece and many other countries in excluding from political life parties "contrary to the basic democratic order," which of course meant the Communist and related leftist parties. (In fact, so far

as I could see there was little significant sentiment in these directions anyway at the time.) Most striking of all were the provisions, invented by the Koreans themselves, for very strict standards governing the formation of any political party, and for very tight disciplinary requirements: the aim was to prevent the multiple political parties that had plagued Korea since World War II, and to limit the ~~results of the~~ factionalism to which Koreans seemed especially prone.

In the fall of 1962, the Constitution was submitted to a country-wide referendum, which overwhelmingly approved it. The electoral and political party laws, already described, followed quickly, and on the first of January political activity was resumed as promised. At once, there surfaced the government party, called the Democratic Republican Party, and organized over the preceding months by Park's closest lieutenant, ~~and known~~ the brilliant but devious Kim Chong-p'il. Initially, the highly centralized structure of this party seemed to foreshadow a Kuomintang-type system of government, but the antagonism to Kim of several senior military officers and civilians produced a revolt that in March drove Kim into exile and in the end meant that the DRP became much more similar to a major Western political party than to the model of the Kuomintang, which of course had in its turn been modeled originally after the Communist Party of Russia.

As this internal government crisis was simmering, and with non-government ~~party~~ civilians divided and unable to form a single opposition party, Park in March suddenly announced that Korea was not ready for elections and that the military government would remain in office for four more years. Rejecting American advice to delay, Park proposed a referendum to approve this procedure.

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The resulting political crisis brought forth every possible aspect of an American political role in a developing country supported by American aid. An ideal combination of toughness and sympathy, Ambassador Berger may also have been helped by his short and stocky build, so that unlike most Americans, he could really look a Korean in the eye. In March, with full support from Washington, Berger took the public position that the Koreans must face up to their own problem, but behind the scenes passed the word that the United States was strongly opposed to Park's proposal. All the arguments of the preceding year were renewed -- that the military government was too narrow to maintain the necessary popular support, that the military themselves were fragmented, that corruption was returning and inflation worsening -- all of these were used to the full to point to the conclusion that the extension of military government could only be ~~mean~~ upheaval, division, and probably bloodshed. The case for going ahead with the election was not presented on moral grounds, or with the ~~promise~~ *claim* that an election would necessarily bring stability. But at least it had the merit that the people would have expressed some sort of choice, and for this reason Berger made clear that the American Government would support and work with whoever was chosen.

After
It ~~took~~ six weeks of careful and arduous effort by Berger, and of meetings between Park and various civilian leaders, ~~and~~ in April it looked as though the whole effort had failed. Park notified the American Embassy that within 24 hours he would announce the date of his referendum. In response, Berger employed the ultimate American sanction, telling Park's intermediaries that American support had been predicated on the previous pledges to hold elections and restore civilian government, and that if these pledges were not fulfilled the United States would be forced

to re-examine its attitude toward the Park Government.

It was a very close run thing indeed, and one can only speculate whether the US re-examination in a showdown would have meant stopping support to a continued military government. Fortunately, Berger's judgment was vindicated, Park backed down, and a few days later publicly announced that the elections would proceed in the fall. It was perhaps a crucial turning point in the whole Korean story of the 1960's, and it was not without reason ^{that} Berger for many years enjoyed extraordinary prestige among responsible Koreans.

That his position was balanced was made clear when Park decided to run after all, and civilian leaders tried to get Berger to prevent him. This the Ambassador flatly rejected, depending on the American precedent of the right of a military man to shed his uniform and run for office, and refusing steadfastly to become involved in any way either in the supervision of elections or in support of any nature of either side.

When the elections were held in November, Park won by the narrowest of margins. His success owed little to his own prestige, or to a record of accomplishment that appeared up to then quite mixed. Rather, the election was lost by the opposition groups, which displayed almost incredible fecklessness and divisions, failing to unite behind any single candidate and offering the Korean electorate the unappetizing prospect of a return to the idealistic but disastrous Chang/Myon regime of 1960-61.

Beginning in early 1964, conditions in Korea began to improve very markedly. The demonstrations against Kim Chong-p'il and his handling of the normalization negotiations with Japan produced a difficult situation in the spring of 1964, and Kim was again exiled, but the same Park government

summoned the courage to face its economic problems, devaluing the currency and introducing a fairly austere stabilization program. The resulting price stability, the first Korea had known since 1945, turned out to be the beginning of a Korean boom that was to last through the 1960's.

Thus, by the fall of 1964 South Korea represented many things to American policy in East Asia. For once, the Korean people seemed to be showing some capacity to work together and to accept the necessary authority and discipline; how great a change this was can be measured by looking at American intelligence estimates of the late 1950's, which had described the Koreans as hopelessly factional and unlikely to move away from the edge of chaos as far ahead as the eye could see. Now, on the political and economic fronts alike, there was visible progress and the promise of more to come. ~~And~~ And this had come about primarily through men trained in the military services, where American methods and American influence had been pervasive since the Korean War years. Thus, American military men could and did feel that it was possible to train Asian leaders not ^{only} ~~necessarily~~ to defend themselves but ^{also} to adopt in important ways the techniques and values that Americans taught and showed by example.

This last point must not be exaggerated, for at no time in his whole career did Park and his colleagues lean for advice on American military men, or indeed on American civilians in respect to their political methods and basic technique of rule. On the contrary, as we have seen, there were disagreements of the most vehement sort. But the fact that the Americans turned out to be right on central points, and that American methods of administration and discipline were essentially adopted and followed, represented some sort of high point in the relation of the United States to a re-developing Asian nation. To many Americans, the Korean experience by

late 1964 -- particularly after the intense discouragement and "rat-hole" feelings of the early 1960's -- had come to be a substantial proof that American assistance and advice could help greatly in the constructive transformation of a developing Asian society. Given enough patience, and of course enough material support, but above all enough time for methods and ideas to sink in, and "it could be done."

This feeling was a major part of what Korea meant to American policy in East Asia, but of course there remained the most basic strategic calculations behind the American role there. The preservation of an independent South Korea had necessarily become deeply symbolic of the very principle of collective security, still represented by United Nations resolutions, and by the United Nations status of the American military command in Korea. Moreover, South Korea was inevitably compared at all times to North Korea, as the non-Communist versus Communist model of development, and in this critical respect the South had lagged well behind through 1964. Gray and harsh as the Communist regime in Pyongyang might be, the statistical record of accomplishment -- which was about all anyone in the West could learn at this period -- seemed to show that the North was doing substantially better than the South. Only in 1964 did it begin to seem possible that the South might achieve a balance in economic progress, and might perhaps even draw ahead in time.

Such was the manifold significance of South Korea, for itself and for American thinking about East Asia in the fall of 1964. More than in any other situation, the United States had felt itself responsible for the reconstruction and recovery of Korea, as it had been the principal actor in the defense of the South against the aggression of the North. For a long time, the effort had seemed hopeless, even to the point where it cast

a shadow over the value and worth of the Korean War itself. Now it seemed that that war might not only have prevented the worst, but that in time a new and better non-Communist Korean society could emerge. As of 1964, the gains were still shaky, ^(the gains were still shaky and might be) their preservation bulked large as an American ~~take in East Asia~~ stake in East Asia.

The Republic of China, on Taiwan, stood in some respects on a basis similar to South Korea, in American thinking in the fall of 1964. Viewed as a separate national entity, controlling the territory of Taiwan and the Pescadores, and by its own choice the Offshore Islands of Quemoy and Matsu, Nationalist China had a treaty commitment with the United States and had over the years been heavily dependent on American military and economic assistance - although, unlike Korea, no significant American military forces were stationed there.

From this standpoint, Taiwan by this time had come to seem a striking demonstration primarily of Chinese capacity, but secondarily of American capacity to provide effective aid to a developing society. In economic terms, industrial production more than tripled from 1953 to 1963, and agricultural production was up about 60%. The GNP of Taiwan doubled over this decade, and per capita income was rising at an annual rate of nearly 4%, to a level very much higher than that of the Mainland, and high by the standards of other East Asian developing countries.

In its own small way, then, Taiwan ~~had~~ seemed to be producing an economic miracle. Moreover, the economy had been soundly and in some respects brilliantly administered by a team of leaders which had focussed genuinely on the welfare of the people, and developed to a peak the innovative JCRR *pullout* structure in the countryside -- which, as so many historians have remarked, might have made ~~all the difference~~ all the difference to China's survival if it had been applied prior to the civil war on the Mainland. (Cite Tuckman et al). Because of this successful performance and demonstrated concern, the domination of the government by Mainlander Chinese elements, with little representation for the Taiwanese natives, had come to be much less abrasive than

had been forecast at the beginning of the decade. The Taiwanese played a large part in the rapid growth of light industry, and shared fully in the development of the countryside. Rigorous as it might be, Chiang Kai-shek's government corresponded to many historic Chinese norms, and was generally accepted as of 1964.

In terms of American policy, Taiwanese success meant that, in 1964, the American Government had decided to bring its economic assistance to Taiwan to a close in July of 1965. This was not, of course, intended to cut Taiwan off from external aid, but rather to transfer the burdens and now the opportunities of such assistance to the World Bank and to private investment. In the worldwide American aid program, this was the first case where the United States applied the principle of stopping grant and concessional aid, ~~unilaterally from the United States~~, when it appeared that the receiving country was really standing on its own feet and able to fend for itself. For the Chinese, the decision had aroused mixed feelings of pride and concern; though a few might complain that this should be the reward of success, there seemed to be a stronger feeling that Nationalist China must indeed stand on its own feet if it was to endure or to amount to anything.

In political and economic terms, therefore, Nationalist China and its 12 million people, as of 1964, had come a very great distance indeed since the dark days of June 1950, in which the US had so dramatically reversed its policy and interposed the 7th Fleet to prevent a rekindled Chinese civil war from merging into the just-erupted war in Korea. In 14 years, Chiang's government had remolded itself in fundamental respects, and had shown a capacity to govern and to improve the lot of its people. It stood in stark contrast to the ~~wretched~~ wretched record of its last years on

the Mainland. While few Americans paid much heed to what was going on in Taiwan, those Americans concerned with its affairs had some reason to feel proud of what had been accomplished.

But, of course, there was a second political aspect to the status of the Nationalist Chinese Government on Taiwan. It claimed still to be the sole government of China, and the urge to return to the Mainland still burned high with Chiang himself, and ~~with many of his top leaders~~. Increasing numbers of ^(his top leaders) ~~these~~ seemed quietly to accept a Taiwan sufficient unto itself, influencing the Mainland and the Chinese diaspora by example rather than by return to power on the Mainland, but Chiang's hold was such that all gave lip service to the ideal of return to the Mainland, and the Nationalist Chinese armed forces were maintained at levels above what the US would support, on the basis of their spearheading an eventual invasion.

The question of return to the Mainland had gone through a crisis in 1962, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. Admiral Kirk, whose naval expertise had helped him persuade the Chinese of the folly of amphibious operations, had been succeeded as American Ambassador by another admiral Jerauld Wright, who carried on the same quiet treatment. Doubtless, in the overall picture the recovery of the Mainland, from the near famine and economic disruption of 1961-62, played a far greater role in discouraging Chiang's hopes than ~~quiet~~ American naval advice. But in the process it registered loud and clear that as a practical matter the United States would have no part of any effort by Chiang to get back on the Mainland. At no time in the 1960's, indeed, did the intelligence readings of the Mainland suggest that he would ever have had the slightest possibility of support there.

Yet, as the idea of going back by the direct use of force had

waned, Chiang was bound to watch closely the American involvement in South Vietnam, and to wonder whether this might not provide a favorable occasion at some point for a serious effort by his forces.

Indeed, in his discussions with senior Americans, Chiang was quite blunt about his hopes. As early as the spring of 1964, discussing grand strategy with Secretary Rusk in Taipei, Chiang bluntly stated ~~that~~ that it was for Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese and for Chinese to fight Chinese. On other occasions, throughout the ~~pxi~~ period of the mid-1960's, he advanced ideas calling for American support for a Nationalist Chinese invasion, assuming that the situation had reached the point where the Communist Chinese had engaged themselves directly in Vietnam.

As of late 1964, such ideas had been confined to lower level discussions and to the clear hint implicit in ~~xax~~ the formula that Chiang used with Rusk. They had received no encouragement whatever from any American. On the contrary, the set of Chiang's thinking had, as early as the fall of 1964, gone far to convince Rusk and others like myself, not only that Chiang did not want Chinese forces to be used to any extent in Vietnam, but that his unlikely hope of reviving the Chinese civil war in conjunction with a Vietnam conflict must at all costs be resisted and prevented from realization.

A Darkening Southeast Asia

(This section would take up the steady increase in Indonesian confrontation activities, the UN Resolution of September 1964, and the leftist trend in Indonesian politics throughout 1964, culminating in the defeat and elimination of Adam Malik's effort with the "Sukarnoism" movement. This would be depicted as the major other important situation in SEA, which had become more and more worrisome by the fall of 1964, with no sign that the US still had any influence or hope of reversing the trends

there.

Closer to Vietnam and Laos, the two principal countries for discussion are Thailand and Cambodia. Thailand with Thanom doing all right, but with a very small guerrilla situation in the northeast and other grounds for worry. Cambodia in the fall of 1964 moving to reassure with Peking, and behaving in a more and more anti-American way.

Then briefly of the Philippines, totally absorbed in their internal problems and transfixed by Indonesia's growing prestige.

In summary, a picture of the area as being significantly more shaky than at any time since 1960. The growing influence of a leftist Indonesia, combined with the powerful communist position through Hanoi in Vietnam and Laos, ~~the~~ it created a situation in which the weaknesses invited the application of pressure and the use of subversive assets by China. Meanwhile, as noted earlier, the Chinese appeared to be more united and more thrusting than at any time before. This was the confluence of forces with which American policy had to wrestle in the coming months.)

G. mit

SECOND APPENDIX

This JCS paper was already available by August 31st, when Rusk and McNamara met with a small group. It was at the height of the political crisis, and the focus of the meeting was on that almost exclusively. However, I find in my files a hand-typed memo of reflection (shown to no one, as far as I know, and probably typed at home on Sunday the 30th), which I did to clear my mind and which shows the mood brought on by the political crisis. It is the first paper in my own file that faces the possibility of South Vietnam going under whatever we did. If this happened, the memo argued that the problem would then be to fortify other countries in SEA, notably Thailand, and that our chances of doing this would be "much stronger" if we were "to go down with our guns firing."

More to the immediate point, the memo argued that the political situation was now so weakened that the odds had become "very great" that without some major new element the situation could simply come apart some time between then and November. To ward this off, and provided some semblance of cohesion could be restored in Saigon, the memo mentioned trying some 34-A actions and a DESOTO patrol, in a "defensible but challenging mode," to which ^{*if attached*} the US might then respond at a level a notch about that of August, for example against Hanoi oil storage.

I do not believe these ideas came at the August 31 meeting. Probably, however, they were shared with McNaughton.

(All to be checked against 64-123A.)